

Port Adelaide Bicycle User Group (the 'PortBUG').



"The Port BUG"

Bicycle User Groups in 2018 - Some Ideas for Their Formation & Future...

The PortBUG has been around – off and on - for around 30 years. It is an unincorporated group and has always simply been a coalition of volunteer 'activists'. We have approached the task of Bicycle Advocacy in a step-by-step and evolutionary manner, basically figuring it out as we've gone forward. We feel we've had some significant success but there are a great many challenges that are coming down the track or that we're yet to address! Below we outline some of the things we have learned about forming and running a BUG *and* some of the questions we're asking about the future.

The Future first... Post Election, New Government & 2018 Budget Fallout - Where to from here? In 2018 we seem to be at a critical point in the development of Active Transport across Adelaide and South Australia.

1.1. State Bicycle Fund Slashed! The development of Adelaide's metro area bikeways and Active Transport Network has relied on an annual minimal drip-feed of funding. It's an enormous credit to DPTI, the more active 'bike friendly' Councils and interested community groups that any progress has been made at all! South Australia already has just about the lowest annual investment in bicycle infrastructure of any of the states.

So it was with great alarm that we read in the 2018 State Budget (on page 120 of the 'Budget Measures' Papers) of a *major reduction* in the State Bicycle Fund. The SBF is an already very modest pool of funds that DPTI draws on each year to support Councils in building new bicycle facilities and maintaining existing ones. The usual arrangement is that Councils apply for grants to assist with around 50% of the cost of projects – it's often known as 'matched' funding.

The sentence in question outlines funding reductions through:

'rationalisation of lower priority services, including a reduction in... grants provided to local councils for cycling paths'.

It's always been quite difficult to know exactly how much money is in the SBF year-to-year. Historically we understood it to be around \$2.1M, although we've recently been told that it has fallen to around \$750,000 in 2017-18!

Whatever the previous number, we are now told that the SBF may have been reduced as low as \$300,000 (or even less) for the 2018-19 f/year. This is an unprecedented cut of more than 50% and appears to be tokenism at its worst.

Question - *how far \$300,000 is going to maintain and develop bike networks when shared out to Council projects across the City and across SA?*

Answer – *essentially, nowhere!*

Over 2016-17 the Port Adelaide Council alone relied on a grant of \$164,000 to continue the implementation of its Bike Plan! PA/E and all of the other 68 councils depend heavily on the SBF in implementing their bike plans and maintaining their active transport networks. Clearly this massive reduction will have a direct and immediate impact on their capacity to continue this! Across the Adelaide Metro Area it seems very likely to be a major set-back for the development of the city's Bicycle Network and Active Transport infrastructure (both bikeways and footpaths) and it will have a direct impact on the success with which BUGs might support Council bike plans!

1.2. What Will It Mean? The wording of the Budget Papers strongly suggests that the current Government has *little interest in, regard for or understanding of* community bicycle use or Active Transport. The question is – what can we do to improve this situation?

- **How might we best mobilise and combine our energies to see funding restored and increased?**
- **How do we capitalise on bicycle advocacy and activism across Councils and across the city and SA?**
- **What are the key strategies we might use to mobilise community interest in the issue?**
- **What are the major barriers we face and what to do about them?**
- **What goals should we focus on as BUGs to maximise successes?**
- **How do we go forward in the current environment?**

1.3. Some Principles for Going Forward... It seems obvious that those representing community bicycle use across South Australia will need to:

Port Adelaide Bicycle User Group (the 'PortBUG').

- Get together and find a combined voice, including *major voices and allies* from *outside* the 'bicycle community'
- Develop an agreed, shared and evidence-based rationale for restored *and increased* funding with strong, evidence-based and well-referenced arguments
- Produce concrete evidence of a 'back-log' of unmet infrastructure needs (much as the RAA and the Freight Council have developed a 'back log' of country road repairs, maintenance and upgrade issues)
- Think in terms of Active Transport and the needs of the 'community as a whole' rather than just 'cyclists'...

1.4. Bicycle & Active Transport Coalitions? PortBUG believes that it's very important that local BUGs are also *seen as part of something much bigger*. In fact we'd like this sense of being part of a larger movement to rub off on Councils! Ways this could be achieved might include:

- *sharing and ensuring some consistency* in key messages *across* individual BUGs. This may well reinforce targeted outcomes (eg; a focus on continuity, connectivity, functionality, security, '8-80' accessibility etc).
- cooperation and shared goals *across Council boundaries* to ensure continuity of infrastructure, particularly where specific bike routes cross several council areas!
- *community coalitions* may well be useful in reinforcing messages, influencing priorities and harnessing and pooling ideas, energies, insights and experiences (eg; examples in Adelaide might include a 'West Adelaide Active Transport Coalition', 'Friends of the Outer Harbor Greenway' etc).

2. Starting a BUG. A few practical ideas which we hope may help get things rolling!

2.1. Don't get overwhelmed! Adelaide has been working on its 'car dependence' for a long time. The resulting imbalances in planning and investment – even on a localized scale - can feel overwhelming. We suggest just 'think positive', choose your goals and proceed step-by-step. Maybe start with something 'iconic' that will have a lasting & 'formative' impact on community and Council understanding...

2.2. Try to be Clear About Your BUG's Style & Role: PortBUG has developed our style of working in a relatively conservative but quite challenged and rapidly changing community - one that is under considerable 'stress' from the impacts of industry and historically quite neglected in terms of attention to urban design and Government investment. We've elected to take quite an organised and 'formal' approach that strongly identifies us as an organisation and voice in the community. We've relied very much on conventional media and our website blog (we have only recently discovered facebook and our Twitter account is (unfortunately) *very* under-utilised!)

Other BUGs may well find a very different course more useful. We are very envious of the high level of community involvement and both practical and on-line participation evident in and around Croydon and at the WestsideBUG's facebook page - and we're working hard to try to emulate this level of community engagement ourselves!

Because we've found ourselves in a relatively conservative and embattled context the PortBUG has actively sought to avoid confrontation with Council and others in the community, even when our viewpoints and agendas seem markedly different. While we do try to state what we're after and what we believe in strongly and clearly. We avoid any discussion which might 'personalise' issues – we try to let the facts speak for themselves.

We believe in Active Transport and try to communicate this – that it's an idea 'whose time has come' and that it can be a real solution for many challenges that PA/E is facing! We seek to act as a 'community partner' for state and local government and for Councillors. In a very real sense we try to give them '*community permission*' to grasp new opportunities and innovate where necessary. Supporting Active Transport often requires that Government and Councils think and invest 'outside the square' – always a bit of a risk. We try to make this process easier for them!

2.3 Get together and make a list! That is, a list of *everything* that you can see that needs to be done. The '*workshop process*' inherent in getting together to do this is just as important as getting it all down on paper – it's important to confer with others and share points of view and experiences. This is how you can work out your priorities, start to identify solutions and figure out how to share tasks - who is best placed to do what.

2.4. Go out and take photos! Taking pictures gives you a chance to look more closely at your cycling environment. You start to notice things that you miss when you are just focused on staying upright. Take pictures of others using the roads and pathways. Think about illustrating the situations & infrastructure that concern you. Pictures really *are* worth a thousand words!

Port Adelaide Bicycle User Group (the 'PortBUG').

2.5. Share your experiences! It's a confirming, encouraging and enriching process and everyone has something worth contributing. A blog or facebook group works well. As do regular get-togethers or meetings, preferably over a drink or a meal. Local restaurants and cafes love their BUGs!

2.6. Check things out thoroughly! Does your local Council have a bike plan or has it ever considered one?

- Has the bike plan been implemented (at all)?
- Is there someone specifically responsible for bike matters or for reporting on implementation and are annual reports available (check Council minutes)?
- Are there potential 'allies' on Council you could meet and develop relationships with?
- Have you met with the CEO and the Mayor?
- Think about the role of bicycle use in your community - not just your own experiences but how it might assist others as well.
- If your BUG is in a workplace or school, go and talk to your boss or the Principal about things like bike parking, lockers, bike shelter and security, adequate lighting and access etc.
- Focus on the OH&S stuff and your welfare and happiness as an employee – that usually gets people interested!
- Make sure you tell people how riding to work or to school makes you feel much more alert and productive!

Most importantly, *understand the context of your Council, the area it is responsible for!* Port Adelaide/Enfield covers some of Adelaide's major industrial areas with rapidly increasing heavy freight traffic – mainly on DPTI roads. It also has a number of 'main streets' with communities centred around them, some very large shopping centres and retail strips and many main roads with minimal cycling facilities.

Although there has been a great deal of 'gentrification' and new housing development across PA/E, there are also many areas of the Council area that appear run down and neglected, where residents remain quite disadvantaged, particularly in terms of ready access to *public transport and secure active transport provisions*. So the Council is also dealing with significant issues of transport equity and access, particularly for children, the unemployed, older folk and those with disabilities. Residents of Port Adelaide are also disadvantaged in terms of environmental and activity-related health outcomes so the Council is also dealing with transport access as a factor in health issue. All of these matters have been highlighted by the PortBUG in our advocacy activities!

2.7. Be informed! Nothing influences decision makers like a few facts. And you'll sound like an expert too! BISA and other cycling organisations have *lots* of good 'big picture' information on their web sites and news feeds. It's not rocket science – just sensible and factual information about the benefits of bicycles and bike use, what cycling provisions work best, what cyclists need, why 'bicycle is best' and so on. Check out the PortBUG and BISA resource pages!

2.8. Consider your BUG structures and processes: At Port BUG we...

- have a **Convenor** (a leadership and chairing role)
- have a **Secretary** (for record keeping and to assist liaison and communications)
- **meet regularly** – once per month *at least*
- **allocate actions** following from our meetings and where necessary specific tasks or 'portfolios'
- provide opportunities for people to **sign up** to follow our **BUG Blog** &/or our facebook group – the **Port Adelaide Bicycle Forum**.

Our minutes record issues, discussion and decisions as well as an Action Summary which is reviewed and reported on at subsequent meetings. We circulate minutes via email & our BUG Committee members have an internal e-mail list we use to communicate on a regular basis. We also have a Google Docs site where we store minutes and other key documents.

We've found that the core discussion, strategizing and action processes of the BUG are undertaken by a relatively small group who have the time, energy and motivation required for more active participation. As long as there are connections to the broader community, we feel that it's quite viable for a BUG to have a 'core' membership as small as 2-3 people!

3. Getting a BUG Together – Some Key Issues: How can we:

- figure out where to start and what to start with?
- identify and promote infrastructure needs and Bike Plan priorities?
- best identify opportunities for ongoing network development, continuity and connectivity?
- best argue for continued annual implementation and funding of the Bike Plan?

Port Adelaide Bicycle User Group (the 'PortBUG').

- provide Council officers with 'permission' to innovate & respond to community needs?
- engage with the community we live in?

PortBUG have found the following approaches effective in working with our own Council:

- 3.1. Try to have clearly articulated goals:** It's important to have realistic, practical and easily understood BUG goals – both long-term and shorter-term (or annual goals) - and to express them as practical outcomes for bicycle users. It's also important to revise and update *BUG* goals on an annual basis.
- 3.2. Ensure you are working to a Council Bike Plan:** It is *essential* that every Council have a Local Area Bike Plan (or maybe an 'active transport' or 'integrated transport' plan' of some sort). Without such a plan or agenda it's hard to see how agreement can be reached on agreed aims and objectives, annual investment targets, functional outcomes for the community or accountabilities. The Council Plan should include goals developed through consultation with the community! **A Bike/Active Transport Plan is the Council's 'first step'!**
- 3.3. Communicate in Writing:** Write letters and emails to Council and Councillors to raise issues, identify priorities & provide support for the Bike Plan. Keep good records!
- 3.4. Ask council to allocate a dedicated 'Bicycle Officer':** This will provide both the BUG and the broader community with an identified liaison person, and will also provide someone who can maintain and promote focus on the Bike Plan's implementation within Council itself.
- 3.5. Organise a regular program of liaison meetings:** That is, meetings with Council staff, Councillors, DPTI officers and with contractors associated with key planning exercises or projects.
- 3.6. Collaborate in the Council budget process:** Schedule budget/program planning meetings with the Bicycle Transport Officer (or your Council contact) and/or with Councillors throughout the annual 'bike budget' planning processes (usually starting in about July or August and carrying through to January the following year).
- 3.7. Conduct regular 'Saddle Surveys':** Survey rides are very important, often with Council officers or members of the community. Such rides help share and develop ideas for new routes or improvement of existing ones. They help refine and articulate goals, harness 'local knowledge' & document *unmet needs*.

Other Possibilities: BUGs may also focus on buddy ride programs, community rides, and 'community care' and 'friends of...' programs, where small community groups (often of local residents) undertake to care for, rehabilitate and otherwise improve key sections of bike routes.

4. Engage with the community. Consider what the following might offer for community engagement...

- a BUG website that outlines goals, activities and achievements
- a Facebook Group or Page to provide news updates and opportunities for engagement and comment
- regular BUG meetings
- public planning sessions, survey rides and similar activities.

All of these have helped us to communicate with **councillors, council staff** and **government** – as well as the **community** we live in. We've sought to provide a clear message that we are serious about working constructively and progressively towards an outcome, we can't easily be dismissed and we're not going away!

It's PortBUG's view that Councils *do* need to:

- be aware of organised community representation
- see and hear evidence that those interested in bicycle use and active transport in the community have made the effort to 'get organised'
- understand need to respond to the broad-based ground-swell of interest in Active Transport.

Port Adelaide Bicycle User Group (the 'PortBUG').

This is what 'engagement' means to us and we've found these measures assist with the process.

5. Try to Ensure Active Transport is Considered a 'Bottom-Line Outcome': Bicycle use is Active Transport. While bicycles are vehicles they are also *fundamentally different* from motor vehicles. Rather than use fossil fuels they rely on 'human fuel'. Bike riders use their *own* muscles and bodies and movement, guided by high levels of mental effort, an inherently positive attitude and experience-based judgment in ways that are very different from driving a car.

Bicycle users *do* have specific needs, especially in 'mixed traffic' environments in which they are most definitely the 'vulnerable road users'. Bicycle use (and Active Transport generally) also provide a unique range of benefits to the community which are *not* provided by motorised transport!

Active Transport is ostensibly an integral component in South Australia's transport system but its *implementation* of Active Transport goals are currently 'short changed' for a variety of reasons – mainly it seems due to a lack of understanding of how central and important it is to human health, sustainability, resilience and development *and* the need to invest in infrastructure provisions to *enable* increased Active Transport in the community! We believe that *investment* in Active Transport should be a 'bottom-line measure' of how *connected* transport planning is to the needs and interests of the community!

6. Provide opportunities for participation in bike planning: Active Transport is predominantly about moving humans – not a ton or so of steel and technology as well! Bike use and walking neither need nor deserve the level of control and direct management that car use requires. Most importantly, it's people walking and cycling in their local communities who understand *their own needs* best, as do those dependent on wheel chairs or mobility devices! Planning both local *and* city-wide Active Transport networks *must* involve those who will use them. These are the people who:

- know what the major cycling and walking destinations are
- are most familiar with where new facilities should be and...
- know what the opportunities for new infrastructure are.

No bicycle planning should occur without inclusion of bicycle users - the role of the BUG is to provide a voice for cycling!