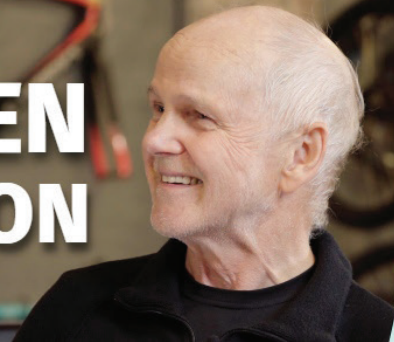


**influencers!**

Changing Minds Changing Worlds

**WARREN  
SALOMON**



## Transcript for *influencers!* Season 1 Episode 4: Warren Salomon

**Phil Latz:** Welcome to influencers! Everyone that we speak to is making a difference in the worlds of cycling and micro-mobility. Some are unsung heroes, others are very well-known. Today's guest is in the unsung heroes category. Warren Solomon has a lifetime of achievements across a wide range of areas.

**Phil:** Well, Warren, thank you very much for joining me on the influencers! Let's start at the beginning, as they say. I believe you grew up in Brisbane.

**Warren Salomon:** That's right.

**Phil:** Tell us when you first discovered the bicycle.

**Warren:** I think my first bike was I think I got a Christmas present when I was about 11, it was a 24-inch Malvern Star, a green Malvern Star, I should say, because green was my favorite color. I was very privileged to grow up on the outskirts of Brisbane, this was a suburb, but it was more like a little country town. The bike was just this fantastic sense of freedom.

**Phil:** Now, most Australians of your age, maybe not most, but certainly a lot, grew up on a Malvern Star, that wasn't uncommon, but a lot of them stopped when they turned 16 and got their driver's license,-

**Warren:** Yes, that's true.

**Phil:** -but you kept going.

**Warren:** Well, I'm a bit of an aberration in that regard because I've only ever owned one car in my life. The beauty of the bicycle is that you're exposed to the elements, you are out there. All right, if it rains, you really are exposed to the elements big time, but you do get to see things and you do get to see more. I realized actually, particularly early days of bike touring, you are in touch with the land and the formations of the earth.

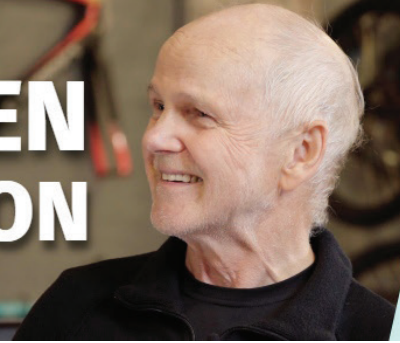
One of the things that attracted me to Sydney when I moved to Sydney in 1975 was the inner city and how I could live-- Because, in Brisbane, it's a big spread-out suburban city.

There's no inner city in Brisbane, it's just all suburbia really, and so the distances are long. Canberra's a bit like that too. Here I am in Sydney, in the center of Sydney, in Chippendale is where I first lived. When I started the work with the printing business, probably, I could have

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walked there, but I could cycle much easier and quicker. I'm not one for status or anything like that. Most people would say it's--

**Phil:** Aren't you?

**Warren:** [laughs] No.

**Phil:** Oh, I'm just going to have to pick myself up off the floor.

**Warren:** [laughs] You don't need this big object to say who I am. I suddenly realized that you could live like this, and it was a much better way to live like this. I still think it's that way. It's very much a lifestyle choice. It's pity, in a way, that people can't make those choices, or feel that they can't make those choices, because I made some conscious choices in my life, particularly the one about living close to where I work, but a lot of time people feel they can't make those choices, and so that's difficult. I really feel sorry for young people today with the house prices because that's a really determining factor.

**Phil:** I want to focus on a few huge achievements in your life because you really have achieved some pretty amazing milestones. The first one I want to talk about is that you founded, what I believe, is the first-ever national non-racing cycling magazine in Australia.

**Warren:** There was no magazine around to really dealing with non-competitive cycling at all. There was national cycling which was the racing cycling, the forerunner of your magazine, of *Bicycling Australia*. I thought, "Well, it would really be good to help promote this and get it going." That's how we got *Freewheeling* started. *Freewheeling*, we printed it in-- or I printed it the end of 1977, and its first issue came out December/January 1977/'78. A number of people that were, then, involved in the bicycle scene contributed articles, and it went on sale.

Then, from then on, I published the magazine. The magazine developed, as your magazine would've because the market started to develop. I am proud in a way that a lot of the things that happened during the 10 years that I published *Freewheeling* chronicled a lot of the important changes that were happening. For example, the first ever bike plan in Australia which was the Geelong Bike Plan in 1979, that was chronicled in, I think, Issue 8 of the magazine.

Also, the start of mountain biking. The very first-ever Australian national championships of mountain biking happened in Sofala, I think in 1984, or something like that. I can't remember the date entirely. Then, also, the arrival of index gears, would you believe? We all take things like that for granted these days, but a very good racing bike in those days wouldn't have had index gears.

I like to tell the story that when I started the magazine, the best bike that was in the catalog of

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one of my advertisers was this absolutely revolting purple bike. The bike was okay, but the color purple, and it had steel rims. That was the top of the market in those days. Now, today, and we're surrounded by amazing carbon fiber. You couldn't buy carbon fiber-- In the 10 years, I sold the magazine to a publisher, publishing company in 1989. At that stage, carbon was just starting to look like it might be affordable. Before then, for love or money, maybe even the top racer, it still was a big expense. Now, it's all production stuff, and index gears, electric gears, e-bikes for example. I didn't really see the start of that, but that was what was happening. I feel privileged, in a way, to have been through that period.

**Phil:** Another thing that I didn't realize, that you were actually the co-founder of quite a pioneering bicycle shop as well that was quite different to the shops of its day.

**Warren:** That's right, Inner City Cycles. That was another thing, I had a friend of mine, Dave McLean, he runs a nice little second-hand bookshop- he's retired- up in Newcastle. Dave was running a small bike shop. More of a repair shop, the kind of thing you get now, but you didn't get then in a garage in Annandale, we were great mates. He said he was looking at maybe expanding the business. I said, "Well, yes, why don't we start a bike shop together?" There was nothing in Glebe. Glebe was really very much the Inner West in those days, there was a lot of alternative stuff happening then.

We thought, "Well, that's certainly where it'd be a good market, but let's--" With my interest in touring and that, I thought, "Well, let's make it a specialist touring shop as well as-- We're not going to be catering for road races. We're more going to be catering for the recreation, purely recreational market." Because at that time in Sydney, there were a lot of bike shops out in the suburbs that were established by named bike racers. They used to say when a bike racer retires from cycling, they set up a bike shop. It's a bit to get a cheap source for their habit. We thought, "Well, let's do that." That was just before 1980, I did that for 2 years.

The reason I got out of it was simply because I was still doing Freewheeling at that stage. I had sold the printing business. The room upstairs was my share of the rent apart from the bike shop. Two days a week I would work with others up there, part-time staff, volunteers to put Freewheeling together. I wouldn't say running two business at the one time tore me apart, but it almost did, I felt. There was a part where I thought, "Oh, I'm not really feeling very good. There's just-- Life is not-- I'm not happy." I realized that I had to make a choice. The choice I made was to do the magazine full-time because the bike shop would continue, and it has continued, it's still there.

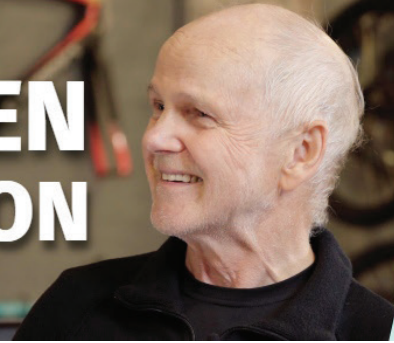
**Phil:** You're a great starter of things,-

**Warren:** Oh, yes.

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**Phil:** -which, to your credit, are still going to this day in most cases, and bigger and stronger than ever.

**Warren:** Yes, that's good. Yes, yes.

**Phil:** Let's roll on to the third, if you like, which I would consider a major achievement. You've already touched on it briefly, which was The Bicycle Institute, later to become Bicycle New South Wales. I know you've had a couple of episodes of deep involvement in that.

**Warren:** I've been in and out of that organization a lot. I've joked to someone that I fill just about every position in the organization. I've been on the board many times. In 1993, I became their chief executive. Just to finish that little thread, I had to make the decision about what I needed to put my energy in. If I left the magazine at that stage, it probably would've folded, so I had to do it, and I had to professionalize it because basically, I'm a great believer in, "If you're going to do something and it's going to work properly, you've got to pay people to do things because you can't do it on your own, and if you want to do it more than just do it on your own, you've got to pay people to do it, and you've got to reward them not just financially, but you also got to support them for what they do for the business."

Then, I got an office in the cheaper part of the city and ran the magazine from there. Along the way, I started another thing, so The Bicycle Institute, during those years, I was involved in events and things like that. Also, in the committee and everything like that, but there was a period where I wasn't that involved because I was doing other things. In 1982, a friend of mine came back from Europe on a bit of a holiday and was raving about this wonderful event that he went on called the London to Brighton Bike Ride and he's an old touring mate of mine, Nigel Jenkins. He lives in Melbourne now.

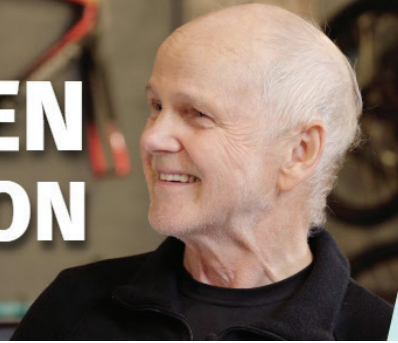
We got talking. We thought, "That's a fantastic event. Why don't we do something like this?" I said, "The magazine would support it because all of our readers would love to come on a ride like that because this is the ultimate in bicycle touring in an urban setting." We took a look around, I always joke and say that, "We didn't find the route, the route found us because it was 92 kilometers, was the London to Brighton ride. It was a city to a city, or a town to a town, so we started to look around in Sydney, because it's landlocked by all of this wonderful bush and everything like that. We could either go to Newcastle too far, or we could go to Wollongong. When we measured the distance, we almost fell off our chairs, because it's the same distance, basically. What a route, because it was absolutely spectacular.

I remember the first ride we did with some of our kids, and a woman that worked for me at the time, her son, and my son, and our partners. We rode down there and we stood down at that Stanwell Tops Lookout, and we just went, "Wow, this is going to be good." In 1982, we had about,

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modest, 250 riders. I think the Deputy Mayor of Sydney launched the event. Those 250 riders set off to the 92 kilometers to Wollongong. They had morning tea at Audley, and they rode on Lady Carrington Drive, which in those days, you could drive through, but now it's just off, sealed to traffic and only bicycles and walkers.

Then we did the rest. Then, we bought everybody back on the trains. We bought the bicycles back on the train. Everyone got a ticket with the state rail at the time, and they got back to Sydney. That event now is just now it started things, that event, now they say the MS Society, I gave the MS Society that event, after I'd sold the magazine. That event now nets the MS Society, or supports the MS Society, it's one of their major fundraising events, I think, at least a couple of million dollars a year, they raise from that event.

**Phil:** I think we should say here, that it didn't have 250 riders by the time you gave the event to MS. How many did it have?

**Warren:** No, we had some big jumps in the first year that the MS Society was involved, that the event was up to around 5,000. I think by the time I donated the event to the MS Society, it was getting towards 8,000, 9,000, 10,000. The event has been capped at 10,000, simply because of the management of it and the road-- In fact, probably if, though, the MS Society tried to start an event like that on route today, the police and the traffic authority would say, "No, we're not going to let you."

**Phil:** I think it has to be said, and people watching this would probably be wondering, an event with 10,000 riders that can raise \$2 million/\$3 million a year, which I know independently, yes, that's what they say it raises, that is on a spectacular route that you couldn't probably get approval as a startup to do now only because it's been going for decades, that is a really valuable asset.

**Warren:** Oh, yes.

**Phil:** Why did you give it to them and not sell it on the market and make a lot of money?

**Warren:** Well, probably need to go back a little bit because when I sold the magazine, I had an offer from one of my top advertisers at the time, Martin Hanley, who ran Hanley Trading, is one of the-- Hanley Trading, anyone who's been in the bike trade a number of years will know Hanley Trading. They used to be Suntour. They used to distribute Mavic, a whole lot of important brands.

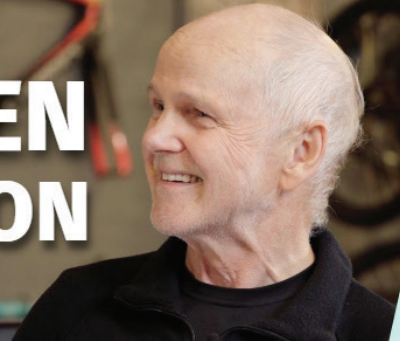
**Phil:** They were huge, back in the day.

**Warren:** That's right. He offered me a job as marketing manager. I did that for a year, but I wasn't

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really interested so much in the marketing side of it. The Gong Ride was still running at that time and the MS Society was running the event. Because I'd given them the event, they decided that they'd better do something serious about it and be serious about running this event because they realized that it was an asset.

Mind you, when I gave them the event, I think I said 8,000/9,000, it was more like 8,000, and the event, at that stage, hadn't reached the fundraising input that it has later on, but they could see the future. Ken Lewis, the marketing manager of the MS, said to me, "Well, we think we've got to do something about this. It's a fabulous event. We're going to set up an outdoor events department, fully staffed, and we're going to run this properly." I said, "Oh, who do you think you might get to run that?" He said, "Oh, we'll advertise for it."

I said, "Oh, well, if you're interested, keep me in mind, I'd be interested." He said, "Oh, I didn't think you-- I thought you were happy where you were." I said, "Oh no, I think I'd be very happy to do something like this on a professional level."

When I left the event to the MS Society after I moved on from running outdoor events at MS Society, the event we ran that year, we had a staff of about 500 trained volunteers that year, mainly because the previous year we had some issues with the route management. In order to satisfy the police and the road authority, we had to really throw everything at it. It's a lot of people.

**Phil:** You're saying you don't have 500 friends, Warren, who'll get up at 4:00 in the morning.

**Warren:** That's right, yes. Get up on a Sunday morning at four o'clock [crosstalk].

**Phil:** You must be very antisocial, I think

**Warren:** It was a great opportunity. Working for MS taught me a lot because it taught me about, I was new to the fundraising industry in a sense. I didn't know what MS was really. When they started their involvement, I certainly learned. When you work for an organization, you actually see the service that they do for their clients. It's a different thing entirely.

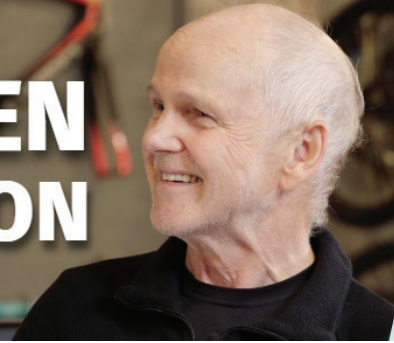
**Phil:** Getting the chronology right, was it from MS as the Events Director, that you moved to Bicycle New South Wales as the Executive Officer, Chief Executive Officer?

**Warren:** I was with MS for about three and a half years. I seem to do things in chunks of three, but also this thing of, I'm good at starting things, but I wouldn't say I get bored, I don't get bored

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at all, but my forte is not building things from that second stage, sort of thing. That's where you need somebody who's maybe a much better business person than I am, someone who can really manage larger organizations than I am. In those days, for what I was doing, it worked.

**Phil:** You're a pioneer.

**Warren:** It's sort of like that.

**Phil:** You grew Bicycle New South Wales from a very small organization to a very large, successful one. I'd like you to tell me a little bit about that.

**Warren:** Well, at the time I was on the committee. The organization had just employed-- it had taken over-- Bicycle Victoria came up to New South Wales, Bicycle Victoria was running these nine-day events, the Great Victorian Bike Ride which still runs. In those days, they were starting to get big numbers, and they started to increase their program.

They came up to New South Wales and they said, "Hey, Bicycle New South Wales, we'd like you to be involved and help you start a New South Wales version of this." They were doing rides in Tasmania. Also, every second year they'd do one in Tasmania, and then one in New Zealand even. Really amazing stuff, what they were doing, and getting thousands of people on these rides. I was on the committee, I was also working for MS, they also wanted MS involved as a charity.

We started the Great New South Wales Bike Ride which ran from 1991 from Mudgee to Sydney and got about 800 people, it was a great success. I was the route manager on that ride. I was the MS person on that ride as well. All the MS staff who worked for me for MS filled professional positions on the ride. Then, the following year, the biggest ever New South Wales Bike Ride from Kosciuszko to Sydney, had about 1,500 people on it, it was a big jump. I was the publicity manager. My operations manager was the event director, sort of thing for the ride.

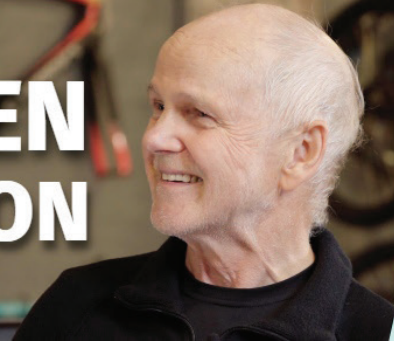
At that point, the Bicycle New South Wales, and I was on the committee at the time, decided that we would like to take this on ourselves and say, "Thanks very much, Bicycle Victoria, we really appreciate your help, but really, we really think we could do this ourselves from now on in."

In 1993 the third event, Port Macquarie to Sydney. We employed an event director, Leonie Watman, and then set off. Unfortunately, at that point, the general manager of the time for Bicycle New South Wales left for various reasons, personal reasons, work, and stuff like that. He actually went to a better job because that's one of the things about community groups, the pay is not wonderful. Actually, I thought, "Now, this is an opportunity to run an organization of which I've spent a lot of my time in and out of, and I'm very much interested in its cause, and I would like to

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see it really grow at this critical point,” because the events thing I saw as a really important way of growing the organization.

I took a massive cut in pay at MS and took up a position as the Executive Director or CEO of Bicycle New South Wales. It was Bicycle Institute New South Wales. We changed a few things. We moved to an office in the city. We grew a number of events. The Big New South Wales Bike Ride went from strength to strength. We upped the numbers on the one-day ride. We started to do advocacy. We employed an advocacy officer.

**Phil:** Give us an idea, if you don't mind, in terms of measurements of members when you started, to when you left a few years later, that role or number of staff when you started to when you finished there, what it was.

**Warren:** Yes. Well, I think the staff, when I left we had five, and when I left, it was close to 11, and there were part-timers as well. We also had this volunteer program that was really important because we would get people coming in and helping us work in the office on the events, and working in other parts of the organization. Because the thing about a community organization, you can do that. It's very difficult when you're running a for-profit organization to convince people, you got no cause and people will work for a cause, and they'll volunteer for a cause. We had a lot of wonderful people that actually came and helped.

It was quite a big office we had in the city in a building in Castlereagh Street which was directly across from the Ministry of Transport, which was where he really wanted to be. We wanted to be a player basically.

**Phil:** I know it was very tough. It's tough today, but it was perhaps even tougher back then to get political wins and wins on the ground for cycling. If you had to name one or two of your best wins in that era, what would you like to [crosstalk]?

**Warren:** Well, the one I think that I'm most proud of is the free bicycle travel on trains in New South Wales. That came about simply because we took a stand. Bicycle groups run election campaigns at election time and generally what happens is they survey the parties, they then tell their members what is on offer, and they say, "You make a decision," but we said, "No, this is a critical moment for us and we want to get the best offer."

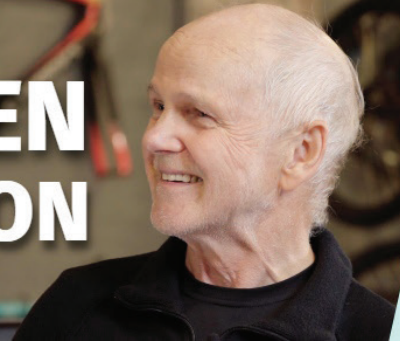
Actually, the Liberal Party had been in for a number of years, and Bruce Baird actually Mike Baird's father was the Minister for Transport, roads and transport. When we went to the government and said, "Show us your policy," they gave us a little blue booklet that the RTA, the Roads and Traffic Authority at the time published, which was all of their wonderful things about cycling. There really wasn't much at all. It was pretty small, small stuff. We said, "No, no, no, no."



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We want your policy, the Liberal Party policy. What's your policy?" They said, "No, no, no. We're the government. That's our policy."

Now, anyone who knows the way the political system works is that's not the way to approach anything really. At an election, you're really putting your pitch to the community. You're saying, "This is why you need to vote for us." If we said, "Well, we're not really happy with what the government has done, that's okay, Liberal Party, you tell us now what you want to do," and so it was very disappointing. We went to the Labor Party and they said, "Well, what do you want?"

We listed a whole lot of things we wanted. One of those was free travel on bicycle, because at the time you had to pay a child's fair to take your bicycle on a train. It wasn't as if bicycles were going to clog up the train system, it just wasn't happening, but it was really a damn inconvenience for you to actually take your bike. Sure, if you went to the country or something like that, you had to pay a fee as you still do, but suburban travel, it should be able to help you to get to work, to use the bike as a mode share type arrangement.

We put out a campaign. We did a campaign, we called it A Message in a Bottle. The pitch to the media was a bicycle bin, water bottle with our press release inside it.

**Phil:** Right, very clever.

**Warren:** We gave everyone in the media one of those, and we held a press conference. We said, "This is who we think our members and the citizens, the bike riders citizen New South Wales should vote for."

**Phil:** I'd like to finish with one other thing that you've pioneered. To the best of my knowledge, you were possibly the first to set up a professional specialist cycling consultancy business. Just tell us a little bit about that, which is--

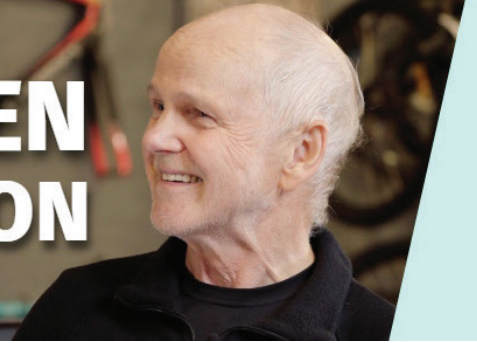
**Warren:** Yes, well, that's another thing that you could say. I could start it, but at the end of-- when I left Bicycle New South Wales I think people have said, "Well, why did you leave Bicycle New South Wales?" Basically, I think when you're working at white hot fever pitch for three and a half years, I was pretty close to being burnt out. These things happen in community groups. I was very happy with the organization as I left it, and it certainly went on from strength to strength. I wanted to do other things as well.

I'd been on government committees. I was president of the Bicycle Federation during my time, which is the amalgamation of the cycling organizations; Bicycle Victoria, Bicycle New South Wales for a number of years. For years I'd been going to the Velo-City International Bicycle Conference in Europe, and I'd been on government committees. I had been on road safety committees, I

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was also representative on the Australian Bicycle Council, which was actually due to my being president of the Bicycle Federation.

I'd spent a lot of my time seriously looking at this whole issue of bicycle as a transport mode. Yes, I'd got my touring background and I'd always continue to be touring, but being involved in the Bicycle New South Wales, one of the things you realize in an organization that's out there, that's seeing all these potholes and doesn't like what they're seeing, and they're finding it difficult to cycle, they come at you and they say, "Come on, you got to make things better. You got to get onto the government. You got to get them to do things," and, by golly, anyone who's tried to make governments do things that they don't necessarily want to do, that's a difficult thing.

**Phil:** You've been running Sustainable Transport Consultants for 24 years now, I believe. What do you think are some of the keys you've learnt and been able to do for Australia and the cycling community through your work as a consultant?

**Warren:** One of the most important things we did, myself and a colleague, a Dutch colleague called Dick van den Dool and I were invited by the RTA, at the time, to-

**Phil:** The Roads And Transport.

**Warren:** -Roads and Traffic Authority.

**Phil:** Traffic Authority.

**Warren:** Became Roads and Maritime Services, and now Transport for New South Wales, to author a new guidelines for cycling in New South Wales. That really came about because one of the first jobs I did for the RTA was to do a statewide consultation for a bike plan that the Labor Government had actually instigated. The guidelines were important because there were things happening. The councils were getting funding from the government to build things, so there was things being built, and the government realized that the national guidelines weren't all that good,. We needed something in our state to really give the right direction for the practitioners to actually build the right kind of facilities that were going to be right for the cyclists.

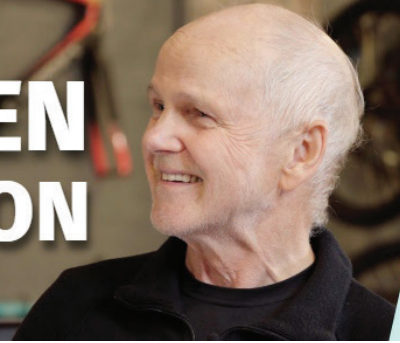
We did that. We based a lot of it on knowledge of what we'd seen overseas and what we knew of, particularly the Dutch guidelines. We are very much influenced by their guidelines, and also the Germans, and also what was happening even in the UK and the United States, although those two countries are still pretty much car countries really, it's the Europeans that really understand the way it works.

Just going back to what I was saying before, the important thing that I guess I added to it all was

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the perspective of the view from behind the handlebars rather than the view from behind the windscreen. One of the things that the general manager of Bicycles and Pedestrians at RTA at the time said, after we'd done the guidelines, was that, "I want to roll out a training course that's going to teach our graduates and our practitioners all about these guidelines, because it's no sense in just dumping that out there, because they won't read it, they won't understand it." Also, probably most of them had never ridden a bike before, so, "We need to do this."

In 2003, we started the training course that's called Designing for Bicycles, for Pedestrians and Bicycle Riders, and we've been running it ever since. In fact, in May, we've probably had about 2,000 people through it now. We've also helped start courses in Queensland and also in the ACT. The importance of that, Phil, is that nothing works in a vacuum, sort of thing, we realize that there's a process of doing things. Infrastructure doesn't appear with a wave of a magic wand, it happens because trained people design things, and then skilled train people build things. In my area, I'm quite excitedly seeing a cycle-way being built through Bondi Junction at the moment that I never, ever thought would happen. Now, councils are doing it, and the government's funding them, and it's really good.

I guess the thing is, getting that perspective, we always say the training course is really important because we run practical sessions in that training course. The people come up to us after and said, "I really appreciate that course because you got us out there walking and on a bike, and I saw things that I really never saw before, because well, I'm sitting in an office and I don't do much riding." It was revelatory for them because they suddenly got it, this is why we're doing this. This is how we need to do things like this.

I guess, in a way, I know I always say to friends, it's not rocket science, I've learnt a lot. I always say my English expression has become very bureaucratized because I've hung around too much with bureaucrats and engineers now, but you've got to speak the lingo. You've got to understand how the practitioners see the world and then translate the world for the cyclist. In a sense, I'm a middleman for getting those engineers, trained people, professional people to really produce the kind of facilities that are going to work for the users.

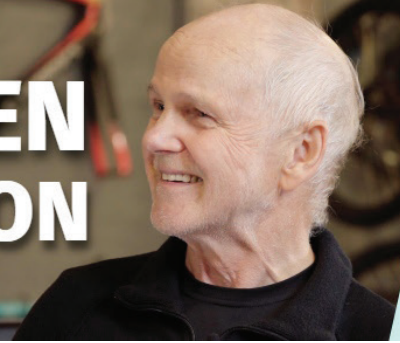
**Phil:** I must say that as 1 of the 2,000 people who've actually done that course myself, what an eyeopener it was even for me, after years of experience in the field, and even more so, an eyeopener as to the low level of experience of those people surrounding me doing that course, and how important it was. I can absolutely vouch for 100%. I just want to finish with one final question, and that's looking to the future. Where do you think we're at? You've got an almost 50-year perspective on change, but what sort of changes do you think we might be hoping to achieve in the next years ahead?

**Warren:** Well, I'm the eternal optimist, to come through the last 50 years, there are times when I figured, "You've got to be an optimist in order to move forward," sort of thing. What I've seen is when I first went to Europe and I came back to Australia, I said to some friends in the game, I

*influencers!*

Changing Minds Changing Worlds

**WARREN  
SALOMON**



said, “I’ve seen the future.” The more time goes on, the more the future takes shape in the place where I live.

Now, I was part of the design team that produced the Bourke Street Cycleway in Surry Hills for the City of Sydney. We were running the training courses in 2003, there was nothing like that there. Then, nowadays, now that’s there. Every time we go and visit that facility as part of the training course, more and more people we see riding. In a way, the future has landed in Sydney.

One of the things, I guess, that really needs to change, and it is changing, and that’s the exciting thing, you can sense it, is that particularly after all the COVID thing has changed, it’s really very much a life-changing event for a lot of people and for the culture as such, because it’s made us think about the way we do things. The way we do things is not necessarily the way we’ve done things in the past. We can do things differently. Work, for example, working at home, who would’ve thought that was possible? Now it’s been proven, it does work, sort of thing.

Also with cycling, cycling does work. All these pop-ups and all of these people buying bikes and bike shops and everything have proven that actually, yes, if you’ve got people coming in, buying bikes, getting out, and actually riding the bikes, then you’ve got a whole game changer happening here. I think actually, we’re in a really exciting situation at the moment.

I think the years ahead are going to be very interesting, and, from a cycling perspective, very enjoyable I think.

**Phil:** I hope so too. Warren Solomon, thanks very much for coming on influencers!

**Warren:** Thank you very much, Phil. I appreciate it. Pleasure.