

Now We Are 100

Back in mid-2006 this newsletter started as way of communicating the message that ferries were worthy of consideration for Victoria's Port Phillip Bay. Since then we have changed the focus of the newsletter to embrace 'sustainable cities and transport' generally & expanded the readership considerably. Now we have subscribers around the world including: Canada; China; Fiji; France; Germany; India; Japan; Kosovo; Poland, New Zealand; Sri Lanka; Sweden; UK; and the USA. This newsletter seems to fill a niche and we certainly enjoy preparing it for you. In 2008 the newsletter won a media award (see #82).

We have not lost interest in the concept of the ferries and in fact all our research indicates that they would make good economic, social and environmental sense. More on the Port Phillip ferry proposal in due course but in the meantime here are a couple of ferry items from Sydney:

"Catching the ferry is a healthy way to travel. In fact, 40.8% of commuters walk from home to the ferry wharf and 68.9% of commuters walk from the wharf to their destination."

Ref: Bret Walker, SC, Special Commission of Inquiry into Sydney Ferries Corporation, 2007

"The Sun-Herald can reveal that 10 Australian and international companies have expressed interest in running a privatised Sydney Harbour ferry service."

Ref: Paul Bilby, SMH, 22/2/09

New Bicycle Plan for Melbourne

"New bicycle commuter routes and the inclusion of special lanes in all large-scale road projects are expected to be part of the first major bicycle plan for Melbourne since the early 1980s. ... In the strategy, now to be launched next month, \$18 million a year will be spent over the next six years, with a renewed focus on priority routes into the city centre. Bicycle lanes on William Street and La Trobe Street will be bolstered as part of the plan, to make cycling in the CBD safer. VicRoads has also confirmed it is investigating reducing the speed limit in the CBD to 40 km/h, to improve safety for cyclists and pedestrians."

Ref: Clay Lucas, The Age 23/2/09

More for Roads

Federal Transport Minister Anthony Albanese and Victorian Roads Minister Tim Pallas today announced the first major section to be upgraded in the \$2.25 billion Western Ring Road project.

Ref: Joint Media Release, 26/2/09

Eco-Suburb Plan for Melbourne

"A vision for a suburb of the future with no cars, an 80 per cent reduction in carbon emissions and the ability to grow its own food has been unveiled by a State Government-funded think tank. ... A 20-hectare site for the new green suburb has even been identified on land owned by VicTrack, the government body that owns the state's rail assets. The lease on the site known as E-Gate, just off Footscray Road, expires in 2014 and Major Projects Victoria has been working with VicTrack on possibilities for the land. ...

"Professor Chris Ryan said a new sustainable suburb could be created at E-Gate, including a ban on cars. 'No cars on the site - the site is made for walking, cycling and we are going to provide on the site free, small, electric vehicles that can be picked up by any resident on the site and roamed around on the site'.... He said it was only a 25-minute walk to the central business district and there would be cars available on the suburb's fringe for residents to book. 'If this was a standard development, you would have 4000-5000 cars'. ...

"Major Projects Minister Tim Pallas will launch the Eco-City Melbourne exhibition tonight. The Government yesterday stressed it had no firm plans for the site and the ideas were part of a range of views being canvassed. ... Mr Pallas will tell the audience that ecologically sustainable development 'is no longer considered an optional extra but a necessity'." **Ref: Jason Dowling and Natalie Craig, The Age 25/2/09**

Roads Minister on Road to Damascus?

The Victorian Roads Minister, Tim Pallas, while opening the Eco-City Melbourne Exhibition on Wednesday evening 25/2/09), expressed surprise - perhaps even remorse or disappointment - that people didn't regard him as an environmentalist. Could it be that our Tim has had a *Road to Damascus* experience or was he just playing with the audience given that there will be an election next year? Remember, this is the man that said: *"People have a right to drive their cars, and they have a right to do it without being impeded upon ..."* (March 2007).

We would welcome Tim's conversion, because as Roads Minister he has the power to remove car congestion from the tram tracks, make roads safer for cyclists, reduce noise and improve both amenity and air quality. Will we see the billions presently spent on roads (and propping up the car industry and subsidising car racing) converted to sustainable modes like walking, cycling and public transport? That would be the real miracle.

Road vs Public Transport Spending

Former Victorian Minister Tom Roper assured me that the division between public transport sending and road/auto industry spending should be readily available. I'm not so sure. One government department I spoke to said that they had no idea of the actual breakdown and would be grateful if I can send them my calculations.

Robyn Evans commented: *"All the best in finding that data! This was a real difficulty when I [was researching this] because (1) those who have data are reluctant to share it, and (2) it's hotly contested anyway. Almost everybody involved has a different data set which proves their particular bent. ... The problem will continue to be money allocated from budgets all over the place and not costed equitably. This would be a bloody good research project if anyone was brave enough!"*

John Legg wrote: *"In response to your query about the split of government expenditure between roads and public transport: I don't think that there are any reliable figures, because judging by Victoria, so much effort goes into concealing and mystifying them. For example, the only reliable figures that I could locate for fare-box revenue came from an answer in parliament and so are a bit out of date. OneLink is a private company and doesn't publish its accounts. We do know how much the Government pays the operators, but not, in general, how much the operators get from ticket sales."*

"Land underneath rail lines is carried as an asset at cost while land under roads is automatically written down to zero. The published cost of public transport is inflated by an \$835 million 'asset utilisation charge' while no charge is levied in respect of the \$22 billion of road assets recognised in the VicRoads annual report."

You have already noted the incredible sleight of hand that turned the \$250 million cost of 50 trams into \$1 billion, by adding a notional figure for stabling and then summing up thirty years maintenance expenses."

Brendan from Emu Concepts informed me that there is a Senate Inquiry about to commence (presumably they don't know the actual figures either?) The Terms of Reference are:

"The investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public passenger transport infrastructure and services, with reference to the August 2005 report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage,

Sustainable Cities, and the February 2007 report of the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee, Australia's future oil supply and alternative transport fuels, including:

- a. *an audit of the state of public passenger transport in Australia;*
- b. *current and historical levels of public investment in private vehicle and public passenger transport services and infrastructure;*
- c. *an assessment of the benefits of public passenger transport, including integration with bicycle and pedestrian initiatives;*
- d. *measures by which the Commonwealth Government could facilitate improvement in public passenger transport services and infrastructure;*
- e. *the role of Commonwealth Government legislation, taxation, subsidies, policies and other mechanisms that either discourage or encourage public passenger transport; and*
- f. *best practice international examples of public passenger transport services and infrastructure."*

The Inquiry has to report by June 18, 2009 and I look forward to their findings. I note that the present Federal Government is almost halfway through its first term and in that time has managed to allocate billions of dollars for the road and auto industries but next to nothing for sustainable modes of transport. (Please prove me wrong). Remember that Australia is the only OECD country that does not substantially support public transport at the federal level, Australians take public transport seriously and there is a Federal election scheduled for next year.

Just For Fun ...



This nifty device was spotted at the 2009 Sustainable Living Festival in Melbourne

More on Parking

"My argument is that minimum parking regulations have been the single most important economic incentive driving the type of urban development people often term 'sprawl'. They force large amounts (30 - 50%) of land to be reserved for a use that is not directly economically productive. Therefore, they drive up the cost of land that can be used for other uses (because they restrict the supply and make development more expensive).

"So developers have found it much more profitable to develop in areas where land is cheap (far from centre) because they can provide the required parking for less cost. And if they are already forced to pay nearly as much for the parking as for their entire development (which is often the case in my experience), they have no economic reason to locate near where people can walk, or to be near public transport, or to offer free delivery services. If they could make the trade off and undertake the financial analysis (which we are doing for a developer overseas) they would find it much cheaper to manage their parking supply and potentially charge for it (as people who are willing to pay for parking are more likely to spend money in their shops anyway) than to provide a large supply of parking.

"Yes, of course there would still be a market for large shopping centres on the edges of town and they would provide some parking of their own will. But if the value of the land started increasing they might redevelop a lot of the parking and put housing and commercial in its place because then they have a captive market and their retail remains sustainable, whilst they get far higher rents from commercial and residential uses. And there would still be some parking of course - just an economically efficient amount.

"Also, when people have to pay directly for the cost of parking there is less demand. We know this from price elasticity studies. Some people (who find it worthwhile enough) would of course still drive and pay for parking. But others would make fewer trips, or car pool, or walk or cycle to a smaller shop that is closer, or take public transport, and some may request home delivery. And then all of those modes and services would be more efficient, because there would be greater demand for them.

"This is the case in Europe, where there is much higher mode share for public transport and walking and yet there are still people who drive and there are some commercial centres that

provide some free parking far away from urban areas where land is cheap.

"My final point is, public transport is inefficient because of market distortions that have subsidised parking. Get rid of those market distortions, and then we'll see what the most efficient and desirable urban form is, and the most efficient transport modes."

Ref: 'Julie', Frogblog, 13/2/09

More on Government Spin

"Looking back after crossing Spencer Street from the railway station that once sensibly bore its name, it's hard to miss the State Government poster and its massively lettered message: 'We're buying 120 new trains and trams. (It's part of the plan.)' My first thought, having endured the routinely late train that adds three or more hours to my weekly commuting time, was that I hoped that achieved more than previous hideously expensive elements of the plan, starting with the Southern Cross Station, a disturbingly monumental and ineffective Government response to the problem of late and unreliable trains. The Government is apparently so proud of that part of the plan that Transport Minister Lynne Kosky has locked away all documents concerning the \$700 million station project for 50 years.

"Then my focus fell on the phrase new trains and trams - didn't that go without saying? Well, no. The 2009 plan is clearly better than the 2007 plan when the Government bought back some ageing Hitachi trains for more than seven times what a collector had paid for them in 2002. They were so riddled with rust that they had to be withdrawn from service last year.

"But back to the billboard, which is at least twice the size of any of the score of commercial propaganda posters for shoes, clothing and homeware that adorn the otherwise astonishingly drab facade of the neighbouring DFO shopping complex. For such a big advertisement, the content is minimal - two sentences against a lightly clouded blue sky. The visual meaning? Your guess is as good as mine.

"Given that it's your money and mine that pays for this state propaganda, I'm disappointed with such a massively literal, witless effort. We paid for this? It's literally telling us no more, in fact much less, than we have read and heard many times in the news media. Why use our money to tell us something we already know? Just do it (to borrow a spectacularly effective example of commercial propaganda)."

Ref: John Watson, The Age, 25/2/09

Cars & Cities (Part 1)

"Since at least the end of World War II, the battle between cars and cities, a battle over the shape of the city itself, has been an epic mismatch. An oversimplified chronology would read something like this: the car helps to create sprawl; sprawl siphons people and political power away from the hearts of cities; the car returns to attack the city, which was never designed to accommodate so many; the city is forced to transform itself, ceding sidewalks to streets, trolley tracks to traffic lanes, parks to parking lots, whole neighbourhoods to expressways.

"In the United States, the critic Lewis Mumford foresaw a grim end to the whole process: 'a tomb of concrete roads and ramps covering the dead corpse of a city'. While the effects have not been quite that dire yet, the imbalance remains tremendous. On a purely human level, it can be witnessed any weekday in Times Square, where armies of angry pedestrians crowd around S.U.V.'s pinioned in crosswalks, the drivers inside easily outnumbered 100 to 1.

"But those drivers and the people who profit from them in cities - principally garage owners, automobile clubs and road builders - have had tremendous political influence over the years. They have portrayed unfettered access to public tax-supported roads as something like a modern amendment to the rights of man. And while it may be in the long-term interests of drivers to pay for using some roads in order to make them passable again, to put that money into subsidizing more efficient conveyances like trains and buses, city leaders have long viewed administering that corrective as something close to electoral suicide. Even the most crusading anti-car mayors - like John V. Lindsay in New York, who came within weeks of ordering a Midtown traffic ban in the early 1970's, and Edward I. Koch after him, who came almost as close to imposing tolls on the free East River bridges - have ultimately backed down or lost their battles. Though it might seem like a relatively new phenomenon, saturation traffic has existed in many cities for decades, virtually unchanged. Depending on whom you believe, it is incredibly destructive, costing London alone over \$300 million a year in lost productivity and revenue just because of congestion in the tiny central portion of the city. (One New York City study in the late 1990's found that traffic problems in Manhattan cost the city as much as \$4 billion a year in lost productivity.)



'The land was cheap, but'

"With its mazelike medieval streets, London was a city plagued with congestion long before the car. In his diaries, Samuel Pepys twice recorded being stuck in 17th-century horse-and-buggy jams. When the car came along, the original notion was that such age-old transportation problems could be solved if enough new roads were built to handle cities' needs, a strategy called 'predict and provide'. But by the 1960's, only a half-century after the car came into common use, economists and traffic planners were starting to notice that new roads seemed only to create more traffic.

"By 1977, when the British punk band the Jam recorded 'London Traffic' ('No one knows the answer/No one seems to care/Take a look at our city/Take the traffic elsewhere'), the average speed of a car in central London was 12 miles an hour, or a little faster than the top running speed of a domestic pig. At the turn of the millennium, more than two decades later, many Londoners could only look back on those congested years with nostalgia. The average speed had dropped to less than nine miles per hour for the first time in modern record-keeping, meaning that car travel through Britain's capital was generally as slow as by coach a century ago. 'We're addicted, really', Bev Ramsden, a veteran taxi driver and dispatcher, told me one wet weekday morning, inching down the A4 highway

through the gray margins of Hammersmith, nowhere near the most congested part of the city. 'Like addicts, I think we're getting to the point where we're realizing how crazy this is. Someone's got to do something'.

"It will probably go down as one of the stranger chapters in the history of traffic policy that the man who finally did something is a former lefty radical (once known as Red Ken) applying conservative free-market ideas. ... [however] he did not launch his assault without making a lot of practical calculations about its effect on his future. That morning, in fact, waiting downstairs for him in a cavernous boardroom was a group of strategists who were highly paid to do just that. It was telling that most of these strategists were not from London at all but from a place with much worse traffic problems and a much more treacherous political climate for trying to solve them: New York City. (Average traffic speed: about seven miles per hour, no faster than a running possum.)"

Ref: Randy Kennedy, New York Times, 20/4/03
{To be continued in #101}