

Gliding Jets

"Aviation group Scandinavian Airlines System said on Monday it had designed a new landing method for aircraft, which could slash fuel consumption and emissions of carbon dioxide. The new technique, which involves planes gliding into land following an optimum route mapped out by satellite, could save around 100kg of fuel in a twin-engined jet. ... That is the equivalent of around 300kg of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere when the fuel is burnt. ... The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a scientific body which assesses climate change, says air transport produces two per cent of all carbon dioxide emissions from humans and 13 per cent of CO2 from transport. The new landing method involves an aircraft's engines being put into neutral as it comes into land, letting the plane glide in following a route mapped out for it by satellite. Just before the craft lands, the pilot takes up the controls again."

Ref: Sydney Morning Herald, 11/8/09

London Airport – but which one?

"Eight airports currently use the capital's name including London Stansted Airport, which is about 40 miles from the capital and London Luton Airport, 35 miles away."

Ref: AAP, The Age, 19/8/09

Clothes Miles

"Travellers will be able to hire clothes for their holiday instead of lugging heavy luggage to the airport in a new service to be launched in Australia next year. Under the new concept, people will be able to book the clothes they want to wear online before they embark on their trip, and the items will be waiting in their hotel room when they arrive. Canadian entrepreneur Catharine MacIntosh hopes to launch the Zero Baggage concept simultaneously on the Gold Coast and her hometown Toronto in late 2010. As well as being more energy efficient, Ms MacIntosh said the move would save time wasted waiting in queues with bags and the worry about your bag being lost or stolen. Travellers will be able to choose between new and pre-worn clothes."

Ref: Angela Saurine, NEWS.com.au, 10/8/09



'Next time I'll do the booking.'

Problems with Air - in the Air

"A survey of pilots and crew has found alarmingly high levels of illnesses they have contracted since beginning work for airlines. ... Campaigners claim that the high levels of illness are the result of toxic engine fumes contaminating the air in cabins, and say this has implications for passenger safety and the health of frequent fliers. Scientists have claimed that toxins enter the cabin as a result of the 'bleed air' system used on modern aircraft. Air is drawn out of the compression section of the engine and cooled. It then enters the cabin, where it mixes with recirculated air that has passed through filters designed to remove bacteria and viruses. These 'recirculated air' filters do not remove fumes or vapours from the engine, so if engine oil or hydraulic fuel leaks, toxic chemicals can contaminate the air supply. ... Earlier this year, undercover investigators claimed to have found high levels of a dangerous toxin on several planes. Of 31 swab samples taken secretly from the aircraft cabins of popular airlines, 28 were found to contain high levels of tricresyl phosphate (TCP), an organophosphate contained in modern jet oil as an anti-wear additive, which can lead to drowsiness, respiratory problems and neurological illnesses."

Ref: Charles Starmer-Smith, The Age, 22/7/09

And Also ...

"Ryanair this year abandoned plans for a 'fat tax' on obese passengers, because it would slow down check-in procedures." Ref: The Age, 23/7/09

More on 'A City Too Far' {in #119}

"Following a fatality at Asquith on Sunday 9 August, RailCorp arranged emergency buses to transport passengers using CityRail & CountyLink services disrupted by the incident. One passenger, Mr Jerome Conway, later complained to the media that he had been directed to board the wrong bus and that instead of being taken to Gosford, he ended up in Brisbane. ... He said the bus he was on did not stop at Gosford and described his experience as a major inconvenience. ... Our investigations have now established that the bus did in fact stop at Gosford with appropriate announcements being made by the driver. This has been confirmed by others on the bus. The driver also denies that he made the unhelpful comments attributed to him by Mr Conway. Why Mr Conway failed to alight at Gosford is not known to us. What is clear is that ... arrangements at Hornsby were performed thoroughly by our staff under difficult circumstances and that the bus company, Pegasus, performed its role to the high standards expected." Ref: http://www.railcorp.info/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/7528/090817-Coach_Brisbane.pdf

Indonesia's Traffic Nightmare

"New laws requiring disabled pedestrians to wear traffic signs have met with frustration and derision in Indonesia, where in the eyes of the law cars have taken priority over people. The laws will do nothing to improve road safety or ease the traffic that is choking the life out of the capital city of some 12 million people, and serve only to highlight official incompetence, analysts said.

"Within five years, if nothing changes, experts predict Jakarta will reach total gridlock, with every main road and backstreet clogged with barely moving, pollution-spewing cars. That's too late for the long-awaited urban rail link known as the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT), which has only just entered the design stage and won't be operational until 2016 at the earliest. 'Just like a big flood, Jakarta could be paralysed. The city's mobility will die', University of Indonesia researcher Nyoman Teguh Prasadha said.

"Instead of requiring level footpaths and ramps, lawmakers voted unanimously this month to demand disabled people wear signs announcing their condition so motorists won't run them down as they cross the street. Experts say the new traffic law is sadly typical of a country which for decades has allowed cars and an obsession with car ownership to run rampant over basic imperatives of urban planning. 'It is strange when handicapped people are asked to carry extra burdens and obligations', Institute of Transportation Studies (Instran) chairman Darmaningtyas said. 'The law is a triumph for the automotive industry. It's completely useless for alleviating the traffic problem'.

"The number of motor vehicles including motorcycles in greater Jakarta has almost tripled in the past eight years to 9.52 million. Meanwhile road space has grown less than one percent annually since 2004, according to the Indonesian Transport Society. 'Traffic congestion is like cancer', Institute for Transportation and Development Policy specialist Harya Setyaka said. 'This cancer has developed over 30 years as Jakarta begins to develop haphazardly beyond its carrying capacity'. A 2004 study by the Japan International Cooperation Agency found that traffic jams cost Jakarta some 8.3 trillion rupiah (822 million US dollars) a year in extra fuel consumption, lost productivity and health impact. They also cost lives. 'I once had a critical patient who died because we got stuck in traffic', ambulance driver Hasanudin said. But the family wasn't angry - there's nothing they can do about the traffic'.

"The political elite doesn't seem too worried either -- they move around the city escorted by traffic-clearing police with sirens blaring. Better still, the super rich hire helicopter taxis to fly from meeting to meeting. 'It's no longer a luxury but more of a necessity for business people', said Maria Goretti Lioba, marketing manager for helicopter taxi service Air Pacific. The company operates two helicopters and carries 50 passengers a month. 'Our business is thriving', Lioba said.

"An initial plan to expand Jakarta's colonial-era rail network by adding an inner-city skyrail has stalled due to mismanagement and funding problems. Headless concrete pillars for the skyrail still adorn parts of the city, serving only as giant monuments to decades of failed planning and short-sightedness.

"Construction of the MRT - a single 14.5-kilometre (nine-mile) line from the densely populated south to the centre of the city - will begin in 2011. The Japan-backed project is scheduled to cost 1.5 billion US dollars. Manpalagupta Sitorus, spokesman for MRT Jakarta company which is owned by Jakarta province, said the MRT would carry 400,000 passengers a day by 2020. 'The main idea of having MRT is to change people's habits from using private vehicles to using mass public transport', he said. But the MRT alone will not be enough to end Jakarta's traffic nightmare, he said. 'Supporting policies such as limiting the inflow of private vehicles are still needed to slash congestion', he said."

Ref: Alvin Darlanika Soedarjo, The Age, 12/7/09

The Walkers of India (Part 1)

"The number is stunning. Even today nearly one third of daily travel trips in Delhi, and more than half of Mumbai are walk trips. In most other Indian cities people who commute by walking outnumber those who use their vehicles. Yet, the walkers remain invisible in the maze of motorized traffic that chokes our roads. Pedestrians walk in extremely unsafe and hostile conditions, in constant conflict with motorized traffic and are easy victims to crashes and accidents. Countless people trip over potholes, slip on sludge, or are grievously hurt by bumping into numerous obstacles strewn along the footpaths. There is continuous erosion of space for walkers even though every journey begins and ends with a walking trip. Our civic authorities have little respect for them." {Continued in #121}

Ref: Footfalls – Obstacle Course to Liveable Cities, Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi, 2009
<http://www.gtkp.com/uploads/public/documents/Knowledge/Walkability.pdf>

Car Dependency (Part 2)

“There is little doubt that the convenience of the car compared with other forms of motorised transport played a major role in its rise to popularity. However, this convenience was complemented by a marketing juggernaut, involving the new car companies, as well as suburban developers and retailers, that relied upon people using cars.

“The image of the car as a symbol of wealth, power and freedom was born in America but was enthusiastically mirrored in most other developed countries. As America began to grow around the dominance of the car, this was clearly reflected in its urban form. Drive-in movie theatres and malls with large car parks started to appear. By only 1948, there were around 26 000 motels in America and by 1958, more than 4 000 drive-in movie theatres. Suburban life in the satellite suburbs also took hold, all at a time when America’s oil production was still increasing and had not yet peaked.

“As has been the ongoing historic trend, many countries looked to America for pointers on modernisation. Australia was no exception, in fact quite the opposite, adopting the ‘drive-in’ model with great fervour. Robin Boyd named this phenomenon ‘Austerica,’ commenting that it was ‘not [so much] a place but a way of life.’ Graeme Davison added that this adoption was a ‘frenetic (hysterical) pursuit of what was cheapest and nastiest in American culture’ and that the movement saw ‘America’s present as Australia’s future’ (Davison 2004). The concept of the car as a freedom machine took hold, giving birth to an Australian car manufacturing industry and eventually, a uniquely Australian car culture.

“Another key cause of car dependency has been the snowball effect of basing the urban construct around the car. As highways and roads took over the landscapes of our cities, this in turn encouraged more car use. As the number of cars and new outer suburbs steadily increased, so too did the need for road upgrades. This seesaw effect of one factor encouraging the other meant that the car movement developed its own independent momentum. However, even this seemed to reach its limits, as the main benefit of car travel (convenience) became overshadowed by congestion, air pollution and the displacement of people and communities.

“Electricity for transport was used before the discovery of oil. Prior to people using personal oil-based motorised transport, they relied upon electric shared transit systems such as trams

and trolley cars. The shift from public transport to car travel saw a radical change in the urban landscape. While nodal or linear concentration along mass transit corridors had been the general trend during the electric era, this was replaced by much more decentralised development that relied on the convenience and flexibility of the car. This new urban structure was most clearly demonstrated by the rise of the suburbs. It is ironic that the current push towards transit-oriented development in many ways reflects the urban form of the electric era, albeit with much higher densities. From experiencing first hand the deficits of scattered urban form, we are now effectively going back to the future.

“It must be said that the car does offer many benefits, as is suggested by its popularity. Convenience, safety, freedom, choice and self-expression are a few. The car does however, produce perhaps even more negative results, some of which are not immediately obvious.

“From an environmental perspective, cars contribute to the consumption of the earth’s finite resources. This occurs on two levels – in the manufacturing process and then over the period of its use on the road. The burning of fossil fuels for this utility creates harmful noxious gases and particulates that negatively affect air quality. The combustion of these fuels is also a significant contributing factor to the warming of the planet’s atmosphere.” {To be continued in #121}

Ref: Myles Graham, 9/7/09

(For the full article email steve@goingsolar.com.au)

Ghost Bikes



A Ghost Bike remains a year after it was first installed in Toronto. Despite a bike lane having been proposed years ago along the same route nothing has been done to make this street safer for cyclists.

Photo by Hamish Wilson

Memorial Map for fatal cyclist collisions in Toronto:
<http://maps.google.ca/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&msa=0&msid=104617466898194970790.000453019cc83c0f11cc8&z=11>

Homemade Trams (Part 1)

“US streetcar maker United Streetcar and Czech tram maker Skoda have jointly developed a 10 T3 light rail tram for the city, giving the US its first home-made light rail tram in the past 60 years. The tram has been built using technology from Skoda's 10T cars that are already in use in Portland. The tram, financed by US federal funding, is in compliance with the Federal Transit Administration's 'Buy America' Act which requires a vehicle to have at least 60% domestic content to qualify for funds.”

Ref: On Track Vol 3, #1, July 2009

“As gas [oil] prices soared and dozens of North American communities sought to reintroduce electric streetcars as an alternative to diesel buses, Europe's tram builders were some of the biggest beneficiaries. Now, as the administration of President-elect Barack Obama contemplates an infrastructure expansion to keep Americans working through a severe slowdown, trams may be one of the building blocks of economic revival and energy efficiency. ‘Trams were invented by the Americans’, said Jean-Noël Debroise, vice president for product planning at Alstom, the French streetcar builder that is selling its sleek Citadis tram to cities like Houston and Toronto. ‘It's a big market’, he said.

“European companies like Alstom, Siemens of Germany, AnsaldoBreda of Italy, CAF of Spain and Skoda of the Czech Republic will be at the head of the line. They, along with non-European companies like Bombardier of Canada and Kinki Sharyo of Japan, are among the leading suppliers of streetcars, which are also known as light rail vehicles. ‘If we get a program funded at the federal level, a lot of cities will be expressing interest’, said Jeffrey F. Boothe, a Washington lawyer specializing in public transport. ‘At the end of the day, only lack of federal money was stopping them’.

“There are still plenty of obstacles to overcome, especially as state and local governments struggle to sell bonds during the credit market slowdown. But that has not stopped the Europeans from watching one of the few fast-growing markets in the world: the United States. In the second quarter of 2008, use of public transport rose by 5.2 per cent, while light rail use jumped 12.3 per cent, according to the American Public Transportation Association. As of last year, almost 1,800 miles of tramways were operating or planned in American cities. In May, Siemens, the market leader, landed a \$277 million contract to supply streetcars to the Utah Transit Authority. The vehicles will be ready for

service by 2012 and will be built at a Siemens factory in Sacramento. This year, Siemens signed a \$184 million order for a new light rail line in Denver. ‘The Denver development was not atypical’, said Oliver O. Hauck, president and chief executive of Siemens Transportation Systems. ‘We began with an initial, small order’ that eventually mushroomed into a substantial commitment. Siemens first delivered eight streetcars to Denver in 1993; the last order was for 55 cars and Mr. Hauck expects more. ...

“American contracts have served as a crucial support for Europe's tram builders, offsetting a slump in domestic markets. They are largely shut out of markets in Eastern Europe and Asia, which are controlled by local competitors. And Western European countries are close to saturation. A recent survey for the Association of the European Rail Industry by the Roland Berger consulting group forecast annual growth of about 1 per cent for European light rail over the next decade, against more than 10 per cent in North America.

“Most European cities, even those with extensive subway systems, also rely on trams. For American cities, trams are increasingly seen as an alternative to far more expensive underground systems. Siemens started the North American tram rolling in 1975, when it signed deals to deliver modern streetcars to Calgary and Edmonton in Alberta. Five years later, it delivered its first tram cars to the United States, to San Diego. ‘We supplied an existing European product, an imported vehicle’, Mr. Hauck said, ‘though from then on, we increased local content’.

“Obstacles abounded for the European manufacturers. For one thing, the Buy American Act required that 60 per cent of a tram car, by value, come from the United States. Siemens, to meet the requirements, opened an assembly line in Sacramento. ‘We are now at 70 per cent local content, with a potential for 90 percent’, said Robin Stimson, a Siemens vice president. Siemens has trams operating in Charlotte, Houston, Norfolk, and many other cities. Other European players have made the market increasingly competitive. The Czech Skoda group (no relation to Volkswagen's Skoda subsidiary) has delivered trams to Portland and Tacoma’ and is now bidding for a contract in Toronto. ...” {Continued in #121}

Ref: John Tagliabue, New York Times, 11/11/08

Free Weekend Zone 2 Buses in Sept 09

“Melburnians are encouraged to jump onboard the bus and take advantage of the free travel on buses in Zone 2 every weekend in September.”

Ref: Victorian Govt Media Release, 21/8/09