

London Traffic Lights Trial

“Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, is behind an effort to switch off traffic signals in the city’s centre. London would be the world’s first major city to attempt to bring order through apparent chaos, if a new experiment proves successful. Although appearing radical, similar initiatives have already been undertaken in Europe. In the Dutch town of Drachten – where many of the signals were removed out – the number of people injured in accidents fell because road users took greater care. Accidents at one major intersection in the town fell from 36 in four years to just two in the two years after traffic lights were removed. The flow of traffic also improved despite a rise in traffic volume. In many towns in the USA, motorists approach four-way junctions where there are no signals and have to negotiate priority between themselves. The experiment is being conducted by Transport for London and Westminster City Council, and it could see more than 100 signals eventually being removed from the heart of the capital.” **Ref: Traffic Technology Today, 3/9/09**



‘We don’t buy petrol anymore. We just get the car behind to push us.’

Dallas DART

“Traffic lights are turning red more often in downtown Dallas ... to accommodate more trains. ... It’s all part of the changes ahead for DART, and for Dallas, as the city’s 26-year-old transit agency prepares to add its first major new line in more than a decade. The Green Line, which will debut four stations this month and 16 more by 2010, adds 28 miles of rail to DART and has cost about \$1.8 billion. ... At each of the new stations, DART has added public art and new sidewalks – and perhaps most important, expects significant real estate development to transform the neighbourhoods. Already at the Baylor stop ... an apartment tower with ground-floor retail shops has opened just a few yards from the rail station [and it is] about 90% full [with] a third of its tenants moved in within the past 60 days in anticipation of the opening of the rail station. ... Some of the other stations look lonelier: Deep Ellum Station, for instance, is just outside of that district and is mostly surrounded by parking spaces and vacant lots.” **Ref: Michael Lindenberger, Dallas News, 2/9/09**

UK Drivers Prefer Congestion

“A UK report summarizing a new survey on car use and congestion ... shows that more than half of all motorists would rather take the chance of being stuck in a traffic jam than get on public transport. The report, ‘The Congestion Challenge’, also shows that opposition towards local road charging schemes, aimed at cutting congestion, has hardened over the past eight years. The report reveals that the public appear to have resigned themselves to a congested, low-performance future. They remain unconvinced about alternatives to the car, and are generally unsupportive of ways to reduce congestion, unless these are paid for out of the ‘public purse’. Additional charges for travel into town centres and on motorways, no matter what the caveats, are unpopular. The survey found:

- 53% of drivers say they would rather risk being stuck in a traffic jam than take public transport.
- Though at the same time 77% support increasing the number and frequency of buses as a way of tackling traffic growth.
- 41% of drivers consider congestion to be a serious problem in their local area, a figure that has fallen from 63% in 1999.
- Yet 61% of drivers think congestion will rise over the next five years.
- 44% of drivers oppose any form of congestion charge for driving into the centre of towns and cities even if the money is spent on improving local transport. That compares with 32% in 2001.
- Support for such congestion charging schemes has fallen from 54% to 41% over the same period.

“Professor Stephen Glaister, director of the RAC Foundation says, ‘Over time people have come to regard congestion as less of an issue. But this flies in the face of the fact that congestion is increasing, so the depressing reality must be that motorists have become resigned to it. The public are also extremely pessimistic about what they expect from tomorrow’s transport system. This is an indictment of the politicians who have repeatedly failed to tackle it in a meaningful way.’”

Ref: Traffic Technology Today, 31/7/09

And Also ...

Irish “Transport Minister Seamus Brennan last night moved to close a loophole that has allowed businessmen, including Ryanair boss Michael O’Leary, to buy taxi plates to use Dublin’s bus lanes. Solicitors, accountants and even a washing machine repairman have been getting plates it was claimed. ... Hundreds of maintenance and service companies have also bought plates, costing €6,000, to help them get around the congested city.” **Ref: www.taxi.ie, March 2005**

Car Dependency (Part 4)

"In many ways, a lot of the solutions to car dependency lie in reflecting upon our way of life before the car asserted its dominance. Making non-car modes such as public transport, cycling and walking more accessible and attractive as a transit option is at the heart of the shift away from car reliance. Linked with this is transit oriented development (TOD), where neighbourhoods are laid out in hubs along defined transit corridors. This urban model offers significant benefits in reducing people's need to use or own a car. TODs also have many complementary benefits, such as fostering a greater sense of community and localised economies.

"The role of increased urban density is generally a key component of the TOD methodology, as public transport is not viable in low density sprawling areas. Alternatively, higher densities around transport nodes usually equal greater efficiency and less energy use. People are more able to access public transport, instead of relying on a car to commute from remote sprawled areas. Critical to limiting sprawl and promoting higher density is the clear definition of urban growth boundaries.

"Imposing traffic restraints is another way to discourage car dependency. Traffic calming techniques such as speed humps or chicanes are one option. Another is the reclamation of road space for pedestrian use, reducing the total area available to cars. In both cases, 'there is ample evidence that such measures can improve the local environment, liveability and safety, both by reducing traffic flows and by limiting the speed of vehicles'. A step further, car free zones are often bound to generate controversy but offer the ultimate restraint option for cars and the influence they have on city dynamics and the sense of place.

"While not necessarily reducing car dependency, investigating alternative fuels could reduce environmental impacts, although would not address health or social implications. Perhaps the most promising of these is plug in electric technology. One particularly exciting concept is being developed by the Sustainability Policy Institute at Curtin University. The idea seeks to solve two problems simultaneously – the environmental impact of internal combustion engine cars and the energy storage issue related to renewable energy. Here, plug in electric cars when not in use and charging, are used as batteries by the electricity grid to store renewable energy.

"The oil price hikes of 2008, where oil eclipsed US\$140 per barrel, stirred many policy makers and governments from complacency, to seriously question the sustainability of car dependency. From Sweden's Oil Free 2020 program to the renaissance of Adelaide's rail and tram systems, decision makers have re-appraised car dominance across the globe. Whether the scale of their comprehension of the problem and resulting action will be adequate remains to be seen.

*"The post peak oil future predicted by theorists such as Howard Kunstler and Richard Heinberg includes massive and irreversible change, not only to the way we travel but our whole way of life. Reducing car dependency before we are forced to, would be prudent not only from an environmental, social and health perspective but also from a risk management point of view. It seems that the alternatives may not necessarily be lifestyle compromises but instead could present exciting opportunities. The choice of whether this period of transition is embraced or delayed will decide how well we are able to adapt to an energy constrained future." Ref: Myles Graham, 9/7/09
(For the full article email steve@goingsolar.com.au)*



42 Brompton Folding Bikes in One Parking Spot
Ref: Matthew Blackett, Spacing Toronto, 27/8/09
<http://spacing.ca/wire/2009/08/27/42-folding-bikes-vs-one-car/>

Royally Stupid

"Perhaps the folks at the Royal Mail Service failed to read the reports - cycling workers are healthier, and lose fewer work days than their counterparts that don't bike. So why, you would wonder, has Royal Mail decided to phase out 25,000 bikes (and thus the automatic exercise of 25,000 workers), and switch to motorized vans and four-wheeled trolleys (hand-pulled as well as battery-driven) to deliver the mail? Faster mail delivery is the only reason given. Ever heard of electric-motor retrofitting?"

Ref: April Streeter, Treehugger, 25/8/09

Iranian Oil and a Coup (Part 2)

“Annabelle Quince: In 1941, during World War II, the allies invaded Iran, deposed Reza Shah, who had ruled since 1921, and replaced him with his young son. Mark Gasiorowski is a professor of political science, and the editor of Mohammad Mossadeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran.

“Mark Gasiorowski: He had been installed in power in 1941 at the age of 21 when the British and the Russians jointly invaded Iran, to make a supply route for the Russian war effort. The Shah's father, Reza Shah, was not regarded as being pliable enough and the British and the Russians were concerned that Reza Shah might be pro-German, and just couldn't stand that, so they overthrew Reza Shah and installed on the throne his young son. So the young Shah was only 21 years old at the time, he had a very weak personality, he was a very brooding figure, not at all decisive, and that remained the case up until the Mossadeq era, he was not a dominant powerful monarch. He was something more than a constitutional monarch let's say, the sort that Britain has now, so actually he was not the kind of strong, dominant monarch that he really became. And so in this period from 1941 until Mossadeq became prime minister in 1951, this is a period of – I wouldn't really call it democracy but I would certainly call it pluralism – when there was very wide open political activity in Iran. And very quickly during World War II, lots of different political parties emerged, lots of different newspapers emerged, the parliament quickly became a very dynamic body; it was a real period of political foment.

“Mansour Farhang: This is a period that every political formation in Iran from the Royalists to the Communists, even the fascist party, they were all active.

“Annabelle Quince: Professor Mansour Farhang was the Iranian ambassador to the United Nations after the revolution in 1979, and was a young man in Tehran during this period.

“Mansour Farhang: Organising, publishing, debating, demonstrating; so it was chaotic but nevertheless it was an experience of democratic parties that Iranians had never had. And Mossadeq emerged as the most popular and the most trusted leader of the nationalist liberal forces in Iran. He was a Swiss-educated lawyer, and yet he was deeply connected with Iranian culture and in folk ways.

“Annabelle Quince: Mossadeq's policies put him at odds with the British and the ruling elite in Iran.

“Mansour Farhang: He had two principles: one was nationalisation of the Iran oil industry and settlement of the differences with the British through peaceful or legal means, and his second objective was to create infrastructure for open and free elections in Iran. So the first principle threatened British interests in the region. This was the very first time that a native government in the Middle East region was challenging British nature, for the first time. And then his second goal, establishment and implementation of free elections, that was extremely threatening to the landowning class, particularly in the country centres and these old aristocratic-type people who were connected to the monarchic regime, and they simply did not want to submit to free elections, but they knew that free elections in Iran would have meant a significant reduction of their power and influence. So there was this coalition between old-type political class in Iran and Great Britain, and this combination finally managed to solicit the support of the United States.”

{To be continued in #123} Ref: ABC Radio National: Background Briefing: Oil, Democracy and a CIA Coup, 30/9/07 See:

www.abc.net.au/rn/rearvision/stories/2009/2605245.htm

The Walkers of India (Part 3)

“Walking is under severe stress from all sides. Wrong policies are leading to urban sprawl, increasing journey distances and making cities less walkable. This is so evident in Delhi. Car centric infrastructure for seamless, signal free travel through flyovers, expressways and elevated ways, is severing urban landscape, disrupting direct shortest routes of the walkers and increasing distances and travel time for walkers. Insatiable need for space for motorized vehicles is leading to arbitrary surrender of walking space in cities. Social disdain towards walkers is another cause of neglect of walking space.

“It is time to set a whole new term of policy debate that can compel regulators to seek solutions to find a whole new way of organizing cities to improve the quality of urban life. Getting good walk ways is only the first step towards creating non-motorised space in our cities. It is possible for cities to move directly to high end public transport and an urban way of life that is dominated by walking and cycling. Modern transport infrastructure development is at a take off stage in our cities. If the infrastructure design gives priority to pedestrians, cycling and public transport the mobility paradigm can be transformed and made more sustainable. This is possible only if the policy understanding can be built on the linkage between walking and the sustainable travel options in cities.

“Congestion, crawling traffic and high pollution levels have made cities unliveable. In many Indian cities congestion now occurs for longer portion of the day, cause inordinate delays that affect more people and goods than ever before. Congestion imposes high costs on urban communities – it can be as high as 2 - 3 per cent of the GDP. More than half of the cities are critically polluted in India. Explosive numbers of vehicles and increased driving distances are also inciting gas guzzling and climate impacts. This will get a lot worse if vehicle numbers continue to increase, more commuters shift to personal vehicles, and transport infrastructure is planned mainly for cars.

“Already huge investments have been made in roads, and elevated roadways. Yet, this has not helped to solve the problem. Delhi, the capital city of India, is most privileged to have more than 20 per cent of its land area under roads. It is continuously resorting to road widening and flyovers. And yet the city is gridlocked. Traffic speed and road availability per vehicle has dropped consistently over time. ...

“Any attempt to augment public transport and increase its usage will lead to correspondent increase in walking. It is roughly estimated that public transport users are also walkers four times every day. Experts point out that even 50 per cent increase in kilometre travelled by public transport would lead to massive increases in the quantum of walking. ...

“While all journeys end and begin with a walk trip, a large number of people walk to access essential services like education, local shopping, leisure trips within neighbourhoods and job centres. Many of these journeys are usually less than a kilometre or two. This is very significant part of non-motorised trips that has enormous potential for pollution mitigation. But increasingly, the walking trips within this distance range are being replaced by motorized trips due to hostile walking conditions. The experience from other countries shows that a significant proportion of the car trips in the distance range of 3 kilometres can be easily substituted by walking trips if adequate steps are taken. For instance, in Bogota 70 per cent of the car trips were below 3 kilometres in 1998. This has now reduced with improved access to pedestrian facilities and augmentation of the public transit. Even in well planned German cities 80 per cent of the car



trips in the distance range of 3 kms are being targeted to be substituted by non-motorised trips.

“This is evident in other Asian cities as well. The US based International Transport Development Programme has demonstrated in Surabaya in Indonesia that pedestrian barricades and one-way streets meant to facilitate long distance motorized trips force longer walking distances in neighbourhoods that encourage switch to motorized vehicles. According to their estimates these pro-car measures have generated additional daily 7000 kilometres of vehicle traffic that are easily substitutable by walking trips. Thus, there is an enormous potential to convert short distance trips to non-motorised trips. There is a complete policy disdain when it comes to addressing social and equity concerns in mobility planning. India’s urban poor are too poor to even afford a bus ride for daily commuting. Often the only option for them is to walk. ...

“The renewed interest in walking globally is a fall out of the interest in building cities in new ways to reduce energy, pollution and climate impacts of urbanisation. This is central to reversing automobility. Compact cities need well planned mixed land-use, well managed density and congenial pedestrian environment to make neighbourhoods safe and vibrant. This can shorten trip length that can become walkable. In the western world even health dynamics is playing an important role in reinforcing walking, as a measure to fight obesity. ... Studies in China have found that Chinese men who acquired a car experienced a 1.8 kg greater weight gain and were twice as likely to become obese compared with men whose vehicle ownership remained unchanged. ...

“A US study in King County shows that the average resident of a pedestrian friendly neighbourhood drive less than those living in sprawling neighbourhood and the resident of walkable neighbourhood weigh 7 pounds less and suffer fewer car accidents. Zero pollution and zero fossil fuel energy make walking one of the most eco friendly modes of transport in Indian cities. The World Health Organisation (WHO) is now making an explicit link between the walking and improvement in health status of the community.”

Ref: Footfalls – Obstacle Course to Liveable Cities, Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi, 2009 [Continued in #123]

<http://www.gtkp.com/uploads/public/documents/Knowledge/Walkability.pdf> (Photo is from the same report)

And Also ...

“Building roads to cure congestion is like buying bigger clothes to cure obesity.”

Ref: John Grant, The Age, 5/9/09