

Walkable Neighbourhoods

"A new analysis from CEOs for Cities reveals that homes in more walkable neighbourhoods are worth more than similar homes in less-walkable neighbourhoods, pointing to a bright spot in the residential real estate market. ... 'These findings are significant for policy makers', said Carol Coletta, President and CEO of CEOs for Cities, which commissioned the research. 'They tell us that if urban leaders are intentional about developing and redeveloping their cities to make them more walkable, it will not only enhance the local tax base but will also contribute to individual wealth by increasing the value of what is, for most people, their biggest asset'. ... 'There are a number of trends that are reshaping the American Dream', said Coletta, 'and the value home buyers now place on living close to more daily destinations is one of the most important. Now, planning, zoning and development decisions have to catch up to consumers'."

Ref: Shelia Redick, CEO for Cities, 18/8/09
<http://www.ceosforcities.org/news/entry/2591>

And Also ...

"Scientists have developed a new breed of battery powered by a virus. The virus, which infects bacteria to generate its power, is not harmful to humans and could create batteries strong enough to power electronic devices and even cars ... with less environmental impact than lithium-ion batteries."

Ref Herald-Sun, 7/4/09



The Street Parking Dodge

"The Sydney hotelier Fraser Short has been charged with possession of an allegedly stolen visitor's parking permit, throwing focus on what is believed to be a burgeoning black market for such permits in parking-starved Sydney. The 33-year-old millionaire ... is charged with being in possession of 'unlawfully obtained goods', according to court documents. ... The case sheds light on what some describe as a 'black market' in stolen or illegally sold visitor parking permits. ... 'Land - especially public space - is a limited and very valuable resource in central Sydney and we need to get the balance right between competing demands', a City of Sydney spokesman said. 'At present all Sydney's streets are the same - they're all full of cars'."

Ref: Sean Nicholls. SMH, 19/8/09

Parking Levies in Ireland

"Up to 30,000 workers in the inner Dublin area currently benefit from free car parking. If that were to be valued at €3,000 a space, the benefit-in-kind taxation would cost each worker €1,260 a year. In some areas, the value could be as high as €5,000, yielding a tax dividend of €2,050. Thousands more workers have the benefit of free car parking spaces in the outer suburbs, in business parks and other cities and towns across the country. ... The taxation of car parking spaces has been mooted before but the government has always backed down in the face of stiff opposition from, among others, its own civil servants who have spaces off Dublin's Merrion Square. The tax will be applied according to the rental value of the spaces, although it would not apply to parking spots whose value falls below a given minimum threshold. Spaces for disabled drivers will be exempt."

Ref: Jane Suiter, The Sunday Times, 20/10/02

"[Ireland's] Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan has announced an excise hike of eight cent per litre on petrol, increases in car tax and a €200 levy on city employees' car parking spaces in his Budget 2009 speech. ... Mr Lenihan said he would also introduce a flat rate levy of €200 per year on workers in major urban areas who are provided with car parking spaces by their employers. ... The Minister also announced the introduction of a tax incentive to promote cycling to work. This allows employees to avail of a tax-free benefit in kind incentive of up to €1,000 to buy a bicycle and safety equipment. ... These measures were designed "to promote greater use of public transport", Mr Lenihan told the

Dáil [the National Parliament]."

Ref: Kilian Doyle, Irish Times, 14/10/08

"[The car parking levy] will apply in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford. It will cover more than 50,000 car park spaces in the private and public sectors. There will be special concessions for part-time workers and shift workers, while drivers with disabilities will be exempt from the measure. ... The fee will have to be collected by employers in the five cities through payroll deductions." Ref: RTE News, 19/11/08

And Also ...

The first Ikea in the Irish Republic was opened in Dublin at the end of July 2009 along with 1825 (mostly) free on-site car parking spaces which are expected to generate over a million car journeys in the first year. Ref: Irish Times, 25/7/09

The Pedestrian / Vehicle Conflict

"In mid July the [NSW] deputy State Coroner, Hugh Dillon, recommended a significant change to the way traffic signals operate at many intersections. Instead of both vehicles and pedestrians being given a simultaneous green signal, he recommended that left turning vehicles should be held on red for 10-15 seconds to allow pedestrians to begin crossing, establishing themselves on the crossing and moving into clear sight of drivers. His recommendation came at the end of an inquest into the tragic - and unnecessary - death of a three year old in Waterloo, Sydney. The child was being carried by her mother who was crossing the road on a green pedestrian signal when a left turning garbage truck hit them and killed the girl instantly. The driver didn't see them - they were to the left of the vehicle and the cab door was solid - blocking his view of pedestrians stepping off the kerb. The Coroner also recommended that garbage truck doors be clear in future.

"The very concept of giving pedestrians and vehicles simultaneous green signals to use the same road space at a 'controlled' intersection is questionable. Conflicts are inevitable and the Pedestrian - regardless of fault - will come off worst. But why is this commonplace in Australia? Is it to gain an extra few seconds in a signal cycle, to reduce driver delays and maximise intersection capacity? The capacity argument doesn't seem to follow. In the UK where there is less space, more people, more cars and more congestion, pedestrians and vehicles never 'share' green time - the very idea would be absurd. I know of a 'friend of a friend' who, newly arrived from England and observing a car nearly hit a person at a crossing, rushed to the nearest police station to report the dangerous, malfunctioning traffic lights.

"Far from increasing traffic flow through intersections, the sharing of green time seems to reduce it. A typical two lane intersection approach has little throughput when both left and right turning vehicles are held up waiting for pedestrians to cross (and in the case of right turners, opposing traffic). If the pedestrians were given their own phase, traffic - at least in the left lane - would move freely. In central Melbourne traffic hardly seems to move through the middle of the day when workers mix with shoppers and visitors on the streets and the pedestrian volumes at intersections reduce useful traffic green time to virtually nothing. The local use of hook turns keeps the right lane moving in some places ... [but] there appears to be little (or no?) information about the proportion of all pedestrian

casualties that result from accidents at signalised intersections - apparently the safest places for pedestrians to cross.

"Was the little girl in Waterloo really the first pedestrian killed while legitimately crossing the road? I know there have been people injured in similar circumstances. At least some signalised intersections (in Sydney) already have a red arrow to hold left turning vehicles but their placement seems ad hoc & while one arm of an intersection may be treated in this way, others may not, leaving the same pedestrians to fend for themselves. It is incredibly sad that it takes the death of a child to bring about a change - or is this an acceptable price to pay for mythical improvements in intersection performance? I hope not."

Ref: Bryony Cooper, The Flyer, August 2009
<http://www.scapestrategy.com.au/>

Regional Rail in Victoria

*"The campaign for the reinstatement of train services from Shepparton to Numurkah, Strathmerton and Cobram is gaining momentum. Passenger train services beyond Shepparton were scrapped in the early 1980s, reinstated later that decade and then discontinued again in the early 1990s. Father and son Cyril and Nicholas White started a two-man campaign to have the service restored. ... The push gained momentum in May when Moira Shire Council backed the return of passenger services. State member for Murray Valley Ken Jasper has again joined the fight. ... Mr Jasper said passenger rail services had a chequered history in the Goulburn Valley, but population growth and public demand indicated the time was right for restoration of a regular service. ... He said a rail service would provide additional capacity, particularly at peak times, improve accessibility to mobility impaired residents, and provide a high-standard passenger service to better serve the community." **Ref: On Track, Regional Rail Review, Vol 3, #2, Aug 09***

Rail Biodiesel Trial in Iowa

"Iowa Interstate Railroad is testing B10 and B20 biodiesel blends in one of its locomotives to measure wear on movable engine parts, horsepower ratings and emissions. ... [They] expect to find reduced diesel particulate matter and carbon emissions as well as improved lubricity with the use of biodiesel."



Picture: Recharge

Ref: Richard Kessler, Recharge, 17/9/09

Rail in New Zealand (Part 1)

“NZRLS [New Zealand Rail and Locomotive Society] believes that the rail network has a vital role to play within the internal transport system of New Zealand, and is a complementary mode within the transport mix. It is concerned, however, that for many years transport policy has had an inherent bias in favour of road, and in particular when evaluating transport projects. Attention is ... drawn to the example of the Republic of Ireland, until recently held up as an exemplar of good policies but (according to a recent report) now facing a fall in GDP this year of 9.2% and unemployment expected to peak at around 17% next year. Nevertheless, investment in improved railway infrastructure is not being curtailed, showing foresightedness in the future of rail transport that New Zealand would do well to follow. In New Zealand there are enough recent examples to demonstrate how investment in better infrastructure, equipment, and services results in significantly greater traffic to draw the conclusion that now is not the time to consider rail investment as a ‘second-best’ option. ...

“Much of the rail network is at present clearly not being used to its potential efficiency. This is in no small measure the result of it being allowed to run down with the consequent inability to offer new services using new and improved equipment. Many parts of the State highway network are also not used to their potential, but there is no suggestion that they be closed down. As for curing congestion by building more road space, [the Treasury discussion] document explicitly makes the point that ‘building our way out of congestion is unlikely to be an affordable or efficient strategy’.

“Railways have always had a mix of freight and passenger traffic and lines were built to connect production areas with manufacturing areas or ports. New Zealand’s first railway was the Dun Mountain Railway, built in 1862 to link the chrome mines of the Dun Mountain with the port of Nelson so the minerals could be exported to England to be used in the processing of cotton. The same purpose of lines that resulted in them being built is still applicable in 2009 even though land uses might have changed. For example, the lines from Palmerston North to Hawkes Bay and to Taranaki were built to develop the land (stock and farm supplies), and are now used for the transport of up to one million litres of milk in each train from Oringi to Whareroa. New Zealand having a so-called narrow-gauge rail system is not a constraint. Japan, South Africa, Queensland and Western Australia have the same gauge and operate efficient railways, for

both freight and passenger traffic. The constraints on average speed are the curves of the track, tunnel clearances, grades, and bridge standards, not the gauge. For a number of years South African Railways held the record for hauling the heaviest freight trains in the world. Speeds up to at least 160 kph are regularly scheduled for trains in both Japan and Queensland

“It should be noted that our so-called narrow gauge has the same loading gauge as the standard gauge British rail system. Over the last decade New Zealand has obtained over 100 former British carriages, and apart from fitting new bogies, little exterior alterations have been required to enable them to run on the network. By continually improving the quality of the infrastructure, speeds can be improved. If the design criterion for an Expressway road to allow a maximum permitted speed of 100km/h were to be applied to rail infrastructure the speed advantage of road transport would be significantly reduced. It is not clear what the high fixed costs of rail tracks, formations, and signalling systems are that differ from those of roads. If the reference is to capital costs the point is debatable given the amounts of money being talked about to be spent on, for example, the Waterview motorway connection and an Expressway through the Kapiti Coast district. A major fixed annual cost of the rail network is probably the return on its capital valuation that KiwiRail is required to make, a cost which is not required to be met by NZTA and passed on in the user charges imposed on road users.” {Continued in #129}

Ref: Submission to the National Infrastructure Unit of the Treasury, New Zealand Railway and Locomotive Society Inc, 1/10/09

Electric Vehicle Progress

“Cars are going electric - and sooner rather than later. It’s a revolution that is upon us and it’s gathering momentum. And like all good revolutions, once the public gets aboard, the new order will occur faster than anyone anticipated. Some companies, such as Renault, Nissan and Mitsubishi, are embracing the future, throwing themselves full tilt at making production EVs (electric vehicles) now. The Fluence ZE, Leaf and iMiEV are among the first EVs to hit the road. Other brands are waiting to gauge the public’s reaction, while the remainder will either get dragged along or end up being left behind. Even ardent sceptics of EVs, who are valiantly trying to hold a public-relations line that expounds the continuing virtues of efficient combustion engines, are working as fast as they can behind the scenes to catch up on EV projects.”

Ref: Andrew Heasley, The Age, 3/10/09

Making Transport Attractive (Part 4)

"In 1989, the GMPT (Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive) decided to link two disused heavy rail commuter lines via an on-street tram. To implement this idea, they launched a European-wide call for consortia ready to design, build, operate and maintain (DBOM) the new network for 15 years. The winning consortium committed itself to taking the full risk of the construction investment while providing 5% of the total cost (about \$200 million) and to take the full commercial risk of operation (no operation subsidies). The niche effect was obtained through several operating innovations, especially:

- Very simple fare structure;
- Simple timetable with one tram every 6 minutes (later changed to every 5 minutes) from 07:00 to 19:00, and every 12 minutes at other times;
- 50% fare discount for travel outside peak hours, targeted at housewives shopping and leisure trips;
- Staff hired according to service criteria (no previous transport experience needed) and trained to perform any job when necessary.

"High-speed railways have created a renaissance for interurban journeys of less than 3 hours. As an example, the Paris-Brussels Thalys service (300 km in 80 minutes) has already achieved a market share of more than 50% with business travellers forming 53% of traffic. As a result, Air France abandoned all flights on the route from 2001, replacing them by direct trains with airline-style on-board service from Brussels to Paris Roissy Charles de Gaulle Airport. The first direct Thalys service between Paris-Nord and Brussels Airport started in 2003.

"Urban stations for high-speed trains unquestionably offer a market niche for urban and suburban public transport. The taxi ranks and parking at arrival stations often have insufficient capacity to cope with the sudden mass of passengers. Consequently, passenger interfaces between such stations and the local rail network should be a priority investment area. Timetable information to main urban and suburban destinations, convenient ticketing, and unmissable signs checked by 'undercover passengers' are some possible tools that are ('mystery riders') too rarely used. Moreover, from the viewpoint of sustainable urban mobility, the recent construction of several high-speed rail stations in exurban areas with poor public transport services reflects the old attitude of mono-modal rail plus car. It eliminates rather than takes advantage of intermodality developing the public transport niche and also increases

dependence on cars in the areas. Examples are found in Florence (Italy) and Avignon (France). Some connectivity best practices are found at: Madrid's Atocha Station (high speed rail, commuter rail, and metro); Antwerp-Central (high-speed rail, commuter rail and tramways); and Düsseldorf Hauptbahnhof (high-speed rail, commuter rail and tramways)." {Continued in #129}

Ref: Pierre Laconte, Light Rail: Making Urban Transport More Attractive, Japan Railway & Transport Review 38, March 2004

More on Investing in Bike Paths

"Professor Ian Olver, said, 'This is a great initiative for encouraging increased physical activity and an important part of the broader strategy that needs to be put in place to combat rising obesity levels in the community, as recommended by the government's Preventative Health Taskforce. 'Being physically active, having a healthy diet and maintaining a healthy weight are all important ways to reduce your risk of developing chronic diseases like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, kidney disease and some cancers. The cycle paths to be built will give more Australians a reason to get on their bikes and keep fit and healthy far into the future'.

"Michael Moore, cites the positive impact the cycle paths will have on public health. 'This investment in cycle paths by the Australian Government will encourage physical activity in the community and thereby help to reduce the growing burden on health and hospital systems across the country,' said Mr Moore. 'Improving community infrastructure like cycle paths will bring a range of health and environmental benefits that will continue for years to come'.

"Quick Facts:

- The \$40m Cycle Paths Fund is part of the Rudd Government \$650m Jobs Fund economic stimulus package
- 1,928,100 Australians rode a bike in 2008, a 21% increase on the year before (ERASS 2009)
- In 2008, for the ninth year in a row Australian bicycle sales outstripped motor vehicle sales. Australians are not just buying bikes, they are using them increasingly frequently.
- Census figures show a 28% increase in riding to work across Australian capital cities. This growth is largely centred in areas with superior levels of bicycle infrastructure.
- Over 50% of car trips in Australian cities are under 5km and 30% are less than 3 km, ideal distances for travelling by bike."

Ref: Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance Media Release, 14/10/09 (ie Cancer, Diabetes, Kidney, Heart & Stroke foundations).

Tram Building in Victoria (Part 1)

“Early one December morning in 1993, workers at the Commonwealth Engineering plant in Dandenong [Victoria, Australia] put the finishing touches on a new tram, and saw it roll out of the factory on the back of a truck, headed for the Preston tram depot. Soon after, tram number B2132 started running on Melbourne's tracks. It still runs today. What those workers didn't know was that this would be the last tram built in Melbourne, for Melbourne, for at least 16 years. For Geoffrey Daniels, project manager at the Dandenong plant from 1987, the demise of locally built trams has been a great shame: ‘It wasn't the intent that it would be the last tram’. At the height of production, there were 700 workers, says Daniels. Today there are 130 at the plant, which has [now] become part of Canadian transport giant Bombardier. It is still an operating plant, but nothing like it was in Daniels' day.



“Commonwealth Engineering made 132 trams of that final model. It also built 220 other trams that remain in service on Melbourne's tracks. But since 1999, the foreign-owned companies that have run Melbourne's train and tram systems have imported all of their new stock from Europe. Last year, with overcrowding reaching crisis levels on the city's trams at rush hour, Premier John Brumby finally committed to buying 50 new trams. It was far fewer than the 200 many in the manufacturing industry had hoped for (440 by 2020 had even been floated in 2003 by the Department of Transport). But it is still an important contract. For many in manufacturing, the tram tender is a battle between importing the stock from overseas, or building them locally and creating jobs. In the past two decades, construction of new trams and trains on Australia's eastern seaboard has gone from a thriving industry to a struggling one. ‘In recent years, the NSW and Victorian governments have collectively ordered more than \$3.8 billion worth of rail rolling stock to be manufactured overseas’, says a submission from the Australasian Railway Association to a recent parliamentary inquiry into manufacturing. ‘This is equivalent to total annual sales for Toyota, Holden and Ford combined. Had this \$3.8 billion of government investment stayed in Australia, it could have generated tens of thousands of jobs’.

“For the state's struggling manufacturing sector, 50 new trams might not be as many as it wanted, but it is at least a start to rebuilding the state's train and tram construction industry. The looming tram tender has placed renewed focus on the Brumby Government's industry policies and its

support for Victoria's biggest employer: the state's manufacturing sector. Bureau of Statistics data shows that since last May, Victoria has lost nearly 35,000 manufacturing jobs. Manufacturing has suffered badly from the economic downturn, with big car-makers such as Ford and Holden slashing hundreds of staff while a host of other manufacturers have between them laid off workers in their thousands. The Brumby Government has a series of policies meant to assist the industry - including a much-delayed \$245 million plan released last November - but key players are now warning they need to see results. The Victorian director of the Australian Industry Group, Tim Piper, says the decision over who will build

Melbourne's new trams is a crucial test of the Government's commitment. If the contract is awarded locally, says Piper, Melbourne could see a rapid expansion in production. Piper says the VLocity trains, made in Dandenong for V/Line by Bombardier, provided a good example of how rolling stock could be built locally. About 70% of these trains' content was made locally, with some parts imported. The 100th VLocity carriage will roll off Bombardier's production line in December. The trains are, Piper says, high quality and have required less maintenance than expected. States around Australia are all looking for new trains and trams and Melbourne could, Piper argues, return to being a big producer in this country, and one day a component exporter.

“The Australian Industry Group and the Australian Workers Union both want the trams to be declared a project of ‘strategic significance’ by the Government, which would increase the chances of more of the work being done here. The Brumby Government's industry policy, announced last November, has come in for criticism. The policy can apply to projects with ‘whole-of-life costs’ of more than \$250 million and see local content rules of 40%. Under this policy, the Government could wholly import 50 trams from overseas but, with repairs and servicing done locally over the expected 35-year life of the trams, it would have met the local content criteria.

“The state secretary of the Australian Workers Union is Cesar Melhem. He describes the whole-of-life part of the Government's policy as ‘absolute rubbish’ because it counts maintenance as local content. ‘You can 100% import trains and comply with that nonsense policy’, he says. Melhem wants the contenders for the contract to build the trams to be required to manufacture them here if they want the work.” {Cont. in #129} Ref: Clay Lucas & Ben Schneiders. The Age. 15/10/09

Photo: Z Class Tram c1975, Yarra Trams website

Lund: City of Transit Ideas (Part 2)

“Regarding public transportation, the municipality [of Lund, in southern Sweden] has invested heavily in a high-quality, reliable, comfortable and safe alternatives. Good care was given to provide accessibility to people with mobility problems: buses use hydraulic systems to tilt and offer access to people on wheelchairs. Users can and do have good faith on the reliability of the system. If they want to be exactly sure if the bus will be on time, they just need to check online in real-time the position of the buses through a GPS system. With measures like that, it’s very hard to miss the bus...”

“The municipal officials have also understood deeply a truth that comes from experience and is – partly – supported by research in psychology: attitude change does not lead to behaviour change; it is rather the opposite that holds true. So, they established two programs that intended to show people the benefits of cycling and using mass transit, not theoretically, but in practice. In the first program they tried to recruit ‘Health-bikers’: car-users who agreed to commute for a year not by car but by bicycle, receiving free cycle equipment as an exchange, including free medical examinations. In evaluating the program, the municipality discovered that four out of five ‘health-bikers’ continue to commute by bicycle. ‘Test-riders’ on the other hand are car-users who were given free bus passes for a year, provided they promise to use mass transit instead of cars to commute to work. Evaluation showed that more than 50% of ‘test-riders’ continue using mass transit after the year has elapsed.

“Realising the importance of education, Lund initiated a project through which children designed a street outside their school, with the municipality agreeing to change it accordingly. The result was a green tableau filled with flowers and toys, which was unfortunately reverted back to a ‘normal’ street. However, children learnt some important aspects of land use and planning. This program was supplemented by a city-wide attempt to promote walking and cycling to school, establishing ‘walking buses’, which intend to promote health, traffic safety, fellowship and a community feeling for the parents. Before that, Lund had already changed the road structure dramatically around 30 schools, so as to make the crossing of cars more difficult.

“What characterises Lund’s policies is innovation and creativity, as well as a desire to incorporate citizens in dialogue and make sure they know that their input affects decision-making. To that

respect, the municipality has visited 23,000 households, sharing information, handing out brochures, recruiting new ‘test-riders’ and ‘health-bikers’ and, mostly, hearing the people out. It also hands out imaginative and hilarious sketches made by talented cartoonist Peter Jönsson. This indicates that the city has recognised the importance of approaching people from all possible sides: through arguments about health, financial savings, environmental protection and well-being, while using humour as the strongest medium. That is also why the municipality has put on its transportation website information about how much more chocolate a cyclist is ‘allowed’ to eat in relation to a car-user.

“The municipality has also engaged in dialogue with companies, with the prospect of reaching an agreement through which employees who cycle to work have their commuting time count as working hours. The rationale is that through exercise employees will be healthier and that this is a benefit for the company – an idea that would seem utopian in other parts of the world. Companies are also encouraged to favour cycling by placing car parking further away than cycle parking, building showers and changing rooms at the workplace and offering employees courses on bike repair.

“Other projects include the support of fuel-efficient cars, the promotion of car sharing and eco-driving and the creation of a car-pooling system on the Internet. A leap is being taken into checking the prospects of teleworking. The city has also made it clear that sprawl must be checked and therefore the further development of the city will occur only in places easily accessible by bicycle or public transport. To that extent, it has planned LundLink, an ambitious project that links through public transport the centre of Lund with the Ideon Science Park and the areas where most of businesses are gathered. Currently deploying only buses, plans include the development of a light rail system that will eventually evolve to include other nearby places, such as Dalby and Simrishamn. Though the system has not been fully developed yet, it already boasts a 40% increase in use of public transport.” {Continued in #129}

Ref: Theo Haris, Carbusters 35, 2008

www.carbusters.org/magazine/index.php?issue=35&go=feature4

And Also ... (Aussies in Sweden)

“You know that you have been in Sweden too long when: You understand why the underground does not only operate underground and you think Australia is wrong to drive on the left hand side.”

Ref: <http://www.coolabah.com/sweden/youknow.html>