

Ken Livingston on Congestion

“Ken Livingston: *The traffic speed in central London was so low that Big Business came to me and said you’ve got to do a congestion charge or firms are going to start leaving here to go to Paris or Frankfurt ... if we hadn’t done that, by now, London would be in permanent grid-lock, it would be a disaster.*

“Fran Kelly: *So it was business that can up with the notion of the congestion tax?*

“KL: *The original person to think of it, back in 1952 was Milton Friedman, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher’s favourite Economist; it wasn’t some just old Leftie idea that had been kicking around. Just recognise that, at the moment you are spending so much time in traffic jams, in a sense you are managing traffic by jams, it is better to have a pricing mechanism and people can make rational decisions whether to drive or get public transport. It [a congestion charge] gave us about 150 million pounds a year which we invested in buses and building new light rail so we increased the [public transport] capacity. When we introduced it 40% of people stopped driving their car [into London’s city centre]. It happened from day one. And suddenly it looked like London was a different city.*



“FK: *And how did the people feel about it ...*

“KL: *For the four or five years after we did the congestion charge, the retail trade in central London, went up four-times the annual rate, [compared] to the rest of the country. Although it seemed very different, in actual fact they [the shop keepers] were doing very well. People were just prepared to get on a bus or the Tube to come in [to London]. ... We didn’t introduce the congestion charge until we’d improved public transport, otherwise people don’t have anywhere to go. And the other big thing that we found, just by making the roads more tolerable, loads more people got on their bike, which is perhaps the best answer to all this problem. And also given our obesity problem, which all the English speaking world seems to have, it [the congestion charge] tackles another problem as well.”*

Ref: ABC Radio National – Breakfast, 16/9/09
<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/breakfast/stories/2009/2687058.htm>

Picture: 16 traffic lanes in Russia Ref: Funnypictures

Transport Fee Survey in the US (Pt 1)

“Set at variable rates, with higher rates for more polluting vehicles and lower rates for those that pollute less, this approach to transportation taxes and fees adapts the traditional transportation finance system to achieve two critical public benefits at once: encouraging drivers to choose more environmentally-friendly transportation options and raising revenue for needed programs. To test public support for green transportation taxes and fees, the authors conducted a random telephone survey of 1,500 Californians that asked respondents their views on five hypothetical tax and fee options: a flat-rate and a green vehicle registration fee, a flat-rate and a green mileage fee, and a ‘feebate’ program for new vehicle purchases under which more-polluting vehicles would be charged a tax and less-polluting vehicles would receive a rebate. The survey results show that the concept of green transportation taxes and fees strongly appeals to Californians.

“The survey tested this in two ways: by testing support for the three hypothetical green transportation tax and fee policies, and also by comparing support levels for flat-rate versus green versions of two taxes. Majorities of the respondents supported all three green taxes and fees tested. Another striking finding from the survey is that support for the green taxes and fees did not vary greatly by population subgroups; a diverse range of Californians supported the green taxes and fees. An analysis comparing support for the green and flat-rate vehicle registration fee and feebate proposals confirmed that in every subgroup, more people within that subgroup supported the green than the flat version of the two taxes tested.” {To be continued in #132}

Ref: Asha Agrawal, et al, Green Transportation Taxes and Fees: A Survey Of Californians, Mineta Transport Institute, June 2009

More on Nitrogen in Tyres {in #130}

“Inflating tyres with nitrogen is – largely speaking – expensive bunkum. Air is 80% nitrogen anyway, so I’m not sure what ‘air molecules’ are (the implied counterpart in the press release). Even if all the oxygen content leaks away, you still have 80% of the original pressure. Upon re inflation, you have, arguably, 96% nitrogen, and each subsequent inflation will increase the proportion of nitrogen. The dryness may be a benefit, but dry air is less energy-intensive than pure nitrogen. Pure nitrogen is used in the tyres of aircraft and Formula 1 cars, but in both cases fire risk is the primary reason. The risk is low in a road crash of the air in a tyre contributing to fire.”

Ref: John Harland, 13/11/09

Senate Report Extracts (Part 2)

3.1 "This chapter summarises and comments on the arguments put in submissions about the benefits of public transport."

3.2 "The major benefits are said to be:

- public transport moderates traffic congestion;
- priority to public transport, walking and cycling improves the general urban amenity by economising the space needed for cars and strengthening existing transit-accessible centres;
- public transport, being more energy-efficient than car travel, supports policies to improve energy efficiency, reduce reliance on imported oil, and reduce transport greenhouse emissions;
- public transport use promotes public health;
- public transport is needed to reduce the transport disadvantage and social isolation of people without cars."

3.3 "All governments accept these benefits. State strategic plans now commonly include ambitious goals to increase public transport use. It appears that public attitudes also favour improving public transport. For example, the International Association of Public Transport (UITP) referred to a recent Melbourne survey in which respondents agreed far more with 'the government needs to provide more on public transport' (92% agreed) than with 'it is more important to give people tax cuts' (61% agreed) or 'the government needs to spend more on road infrastructure' (58% agreed)."

3.5 "On present trends urban traffic will increase by 37 per cent between 2005 and 2020. The result will inevitably be more traffic congestion."

3.6 "The Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (BITRE) has estimated that the avoidable cost of congestion in the Australian capital cities was about \$9.5 billion in 2005, and in the base case (business as usual on present trends) this will increase to \$20.4 billion in 2020."

3.11 "It is by now generally accepted, including by road authorities, that urban traffic congestion cannot be solved by building roads - or at least, not only by building roads. This is because building roads encourages the growth of traffic and entrenches patterns of urban development that create high car use. Even without this feedback, building enough roads to handle traffic growth would be impractical and unaffordable:

'Past transport studies and experience have shown that building freeways does not solve congestion, and they will in fact increase congestion in the long term'."

3.14 "If public transport alternatives are improved, more motorists will use them,

and the equilibrium point for the traffic will be a less congested situation."

3.15 "When traffic is close to the capacity of a road even a small increase in traffic can greatly increase congestion. From that position even a small reduction in traffic may have disproportionate benefits."

3.16 "This applies best to services that are independent of the traffic congestion. Buses and trams cannot attract motorists from congested traffic if they are caught up in it themselves. This suggests a strong need for more bus and tram priority measures."

3.17 "The benefit is increased by 'transit leverage': the car travel forgone is greater than the public transport travel created, as public transport users tend to plan their travel more economically."

3.18 "The second role of public transport in coping with traffic congestion is an indirect, political one: better public transport is essential to make congestion charges economically defensible and politically acceptable."

3.19 "A motorist entering a congested road suffers delay, but also causes delay to others. A cost that a person imposes on someone else without paying for is an 'external cost.' If motorists are not required to pay for the costs they impose on others, their behaviour will not respond to the full cost, and economically inefficient overuse of the road will result. Congestion is the most significant road-related external cost."

3.20 "Tailored 'congestion charges' are a way of reducing the external congestion cost. Motorists are charged to use roads at the most congested times and places. Those who value their use of the road less than the charge adjust their behaviour by travelling less often, or at other times, or switching to public transport. Those who value the use of the road more have a less congested trip. The overall result for community welfare is positive."

Ref: Investment of Commonwealth and State Funds in Public Passenger Transport - Senate Transport Reference Committee, August 2009

http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/rrat_ctte/public_transport/report/report.pdf {Cont. in #132}



And Also ...

"You know you're too long in Australia if ...

You understand that all train timetables are works of fiction."

Ref: Irish in Australia, St Kevin's Gaelic Athletic Club

Upgrading Connex timetables

History of VicRoads (Part 1)

“The first ‘road’ to be built in Victoria by European settlers was on Phillip Island, two centuries ago. The project manager was the commander of HM Brig Lady Nelson – John Murray. Murray was surveying the Bass Strait area on behalf of Victoria’s first road authority – the Government of New South Wales – in 1801. The New South Wales Government continued to oversee the development of Australia’s south eastern corner until 1851, when Victoria was proclaimed a Colony in its own right. By this time, its roads were in a parlous condition and the new Victorian Government tackled the issue as a matter of priority. It was spurred on by the huge increase in traffic fuelled by the gold rushes, and in 1853 an Act for making and improving roads in the Colony of Victoria was passed.

“A Central Road Board and District Road Boards were established, the former responsible for main roads and the latter for local roads. The State Government was to finance main roads and half the cost of local roads, while maintenance would be funded through tolls. The Central Road Board was a great success, but nonetheless was abolished in 1857 and its responsibilities transferred to the new Board of Land and Works. These were days when rail travel was in the ascendant, taking up much of central government’s time and money. The responsibility for building and maintaining roads was increasingly devolved to local authorities. Here, local interests often prevailed over the greater good, leading to patchwork development of the Colony’s road system.

“But roads were to undergo a resurgence – not surprisingly, driven by the ever increasing popularity of the motor car at the turn of the century (the first motor vehicle in Melbourne appeared in 1897). The period 1851–57 had shown the value of central direction on road management and in 1913 the Country Roads Board was established – the heir of the Central Road Board and a parent of VicRoads.”

{To be continued in #132} Ref: About VicRoads, VicRoads Website, 2009

Interview with Oz Kayak (Part 1)

Oz Kayak started as an engineering cadet with the Victorian Roads Authority, later worked with Victorian Railways and today is passionate about active forms of transport, community health and urban design. Here is our discussion:

Stephen Ingrouille: Back in 2006 I was engaged by one of the Councils on the fringe of

Melbourne to help increase the degree of sustainability in a proposed development of a 794 hectare ‘greenfields’ site. Though I was to oversee all the environmental elements it soon became clear that the battlelines would be drawn on the road construction aspects. On one side were the Department of Sustainability officers, senior council officers, the urban designers, the transport planners and myself. On the side were some junior council officers (traffic department), officers from the road authority, and the traffic planners. The paddocks to be developed were adjoining an existing cul-de-sac suburb of typical urban sprawl with plenty of houses but little amenity. The proposal was to build the amenity – schools, shops, etc – on the new site so that both the new and the exiting communities would be well served. To make this work in sustainable urban design terms, accessibility for walkers and cyclists would need to be paramount so that health and livability could be enhanced. Another goal was the minimisation of traffic generation on the new site, again by encouraging walking and cycling and through the use of a nearby rail line.

The road dividing the developments is currently a single lane in each direction and the proposal was to reduce speeds by various traffic calming measures to encourage safe access across the road. The pro-roads group however had different plans. For them, this road was to be developed into three lanes each way – a major arterial road. Not only that, but the development site was to be dissected ‘on the mile grid’ by six-lane roads. Why? Why build six-lane roads for empty paddocks? Answer: ‘its part of the 15 year plan’. What about residents wanting to cross those roads? Underpasses would be built. There was even a suggestion to build underpasses or flyovers at all the new intersections. Moving traffic was what mattered; questions about amenity, pollution, Peak Oil and traffic accidents were met with blank stares. You had to admire their tenacity and single-mindedness – the aim to drive six-lane roads wherever they could – it was after all part of the plan. From where does this thinking come?

Oz Kayak: I doubt whether such a statement ever came from anyone in an Australian Federal or State Government Agency. Sounds like something from the creative mind of a certain academic. It was certainly never part of Country Roads Board (CRB), Road Construction Authority (RCA), VicRoads nor Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) development planning. When I worked at the CRB, I participated in management courses where we played with such scenarios but they were never a serious option. However I could imagine someone who had it in for the CRB or

needed a 'news break' creating such an urban myth from what they had 'heard' was being discussed at the CRB. There are people still alive who ran such mischievous lines. It was one of my jobs at the CRB to put them right. I once attended an RCA training session where we were evaluated on how well we handled controversial questions that would never even be permitted on the Agency Planning Agenda. As I recall, Terry Laidler of ABC talk back fame was one of the people paid to coach us on how to handle such left field questions. Divided roads with two lanes in each direction on a one mile grid could have been proposed in outer-urban developments on the west coast of the USA in the 1960s. But no greater intensity than that.

SI: As you can see from my opening remarks there was a very strong push by elements of the council, VicRoads, and the traffic planners to establish six-lane roads on the mile grid (even though the direction from senior management at the Council was to make this development as sustainable as possible). The site was at Cranbourne West, on the south-eastern edge of Melbourne, and a glance at the Melways street directory maps [128, 129, 132 & 133] clearly shows the roads being laid out on the mile grid so somebody, perhaps the council, had the foresight do this forward planning. The issue we had was that they - the pro-roads group - were pursuing the grand vision without regard to the changing circumstances (high petrol costs, etc) and also the issues of connectivity across Evans Road (to encourage walking and cycling). The point I was trying to make was that VicRoads has been very good with its forward planning, while as far as I know the Department of Transport doesn't have plans prepared to extend the train system every time a new suburb is proposed. With the significant increase in CBD living you don't see the tram operators putting in cross tracks (in planning for future routes) when they dig up and replace the tram lines as part of the routine maintenance. Why didn't the other agencies (eg the Railways Board) utilise the tactics of the road authority?

OK: They tried, but were not as smart. That is why the CRB after three rebirths still exists as VicRoads, and people like Colin Jordan [Chief Executive of VicRoads from 1992 to 2001] and Brian Negus [VicRoads Regional Manager in 2004] now have powerful positions at the RACV [Royal Automobile Association of Victoria]. It started during the Second World War with a team of engineers building the North-South Military Highway in central Australia. The way they built the road was to construct a central strip

of bitumen and then go back later and widen it so *that* culture was started. When some returned to Victoria they recruited more of the central Australian road builders. They were on a mission to build roads – to build a highway right to the door of the railways head office!

SI: Who started this recruitment?

OK: Many were already employed by the CRB or in municipal government and when they came back to Victoria, we had rationing and we had really limited resources. But also the people who came back from central Australia had the skills and if you could get a grader or bulldozer, or asphalt unit or whatever, then you had the men who knew how to handle this equipment. In addition, the officers – and men – who returned were used to a disciplined environment. This is the late 40s, 1950s culture that we are talking about. So we had this opportunity of a pool of equipment for building the infrastructure for road transport. In addition to that, the roads authority always had construction regiments – and VicRoads probably still has – where men could take time off on full pay. So the army reserve reflects the tradition. I'm not so sure that in 2009 it is still functioning, but one step to promotion certainly included good service and we had many ex-military and current military personnel in our hierarchy.

SI: Was there somebody from the military that was leading this recruitment?

OK: Yes, our chairman, he had been a prisoner of war in Changi [Singapore].

SI: So he wasn't on the North-South Road?

OK: No. Also many of our recruits had also been in Changi, including his batman, so from the Chairman down, in my opinion, in the 1950's and 60's the CRB reflected values of the time, and encompassed the finest virtues of a paramilitary organisation. {To be continued in #132}



North-South Military Highway (1943)

A convoy approaching a staging camp on the north south military highway. Allied works council tar and bitumen boilers are seen on the side of the road. Hundreds of miles of this highway have been surfaced with bitumen. **Ref: Australian War Museum**

Making Transport Attractive (Part 7)

"Having described a number of attempts by operators to gain new customers, we have to admit that the number of readily available new customers is small simply because of the unequal competition with cars for the use of public space. Although public-transport operators can regain small market segments themselves, large segments will only be recovered by adopting land-use policies that are public transport friendly. The city itself could be developed along lines compatible with effective use of public and non-motorized transport, allowing people to reduce automobile dependence and encouraging linear patterns of urban extensions.

"In the UK, in line with its commitment to cut emissions of greenhouse gases and to reduce urban sprawl, the government has decided that 60% of all new urban development until 2010 will be on 'brownfield' sites in existing urban areas instead of 'greenfield' locations. In addition, Planning Policy Guideline 13 forbids all development not adjacent to existing urbanized areas. In the future, development of large ex-urban shopping centres like Bluewater Park will no longer be approved. The UK government also reviewed its road program, following the 1995 report of its Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Roads Assessment (SACTRA). This report concluded that the additional traffic generated by new roads often exceeds the additional capacity they provide. Finally, the government introduced legislation enabling local authorities to levy a yearly charge of £150 (£1 = US\$1.80) on workplace parking provided by employers. This levy could be used to improve public transport. Unfortunately, the need to get the agreement of all local authorities in a conurbation to the levy has delayed the implementation of this mobility tool. Portland's (Oregon) ongoing policy of urban containment is part of the same broad category. Under this policy, all urban development must remain within the borders of the urbanized perimeter set by the 1973 State legislation. This has proved successful in attracting higher density activities and housing to the city. It also enabled the city to introduce a new tramway system and reduce its automobile dependence." {Continued in #132}

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



Sprawl or Farms in the Sydney Basin?

"Preserving the farms on Sydney's fringe in the name of agricultural self-sufficiency will cripple the city's growth, putting extra pressure on renters and home owners, a property developers' lobby group says. 'The costs of that are further restrictions on our supply of new housing. Sydney has already seen over the past 10 years what happens when you don't allow for adequate growth outward. Rents have gone up by 22% in the past two years for three-bedroom houses', said Aaron Gadiel, chief executive officer of the Urban Taskforce. His comments follow revelations in a report by Peter Malcolm and Riad Fahd from the NSW Department of Industry and Investment that agriculture is shrinking dramatically in the Sydney basin and just 1050 vegetable farms remain. The report recommended a review into whether these farms should be expanded to make the metropolis more self-sufficient in produce, but Mr Gadiel said that retaining existing agricultural land may not improve the carbon footprint of the city's vegetable consumers. Using giant warehouses and large trucks to bring produce from outside Sydney may be more carbon efficient than relying on smaller city-fringe farmers with small vehicles requiring numerous journeys, he said. The remaining farms cover an area of 2025 hectares ... and more than half will disappear when the north-west and south-west growth areas earmarked by the Government are developed over the next two decades, the researchers found. Some farmland is set to accommodate industrial centres providing employment, said Mr Gadiel. 'Should we ... deprive ourselves of housing and job creating industries to prop up an industry which is not economically viable? If we say those farms stay as is, what you are really saying to people in western Sydney is: you have to get in the car and drive to the city and eastern suburbs, emitting tonnes of carbon. That could have a far worse impact on climate change than this issue of food miles'. Farming jobs can flow to other areas of NSW which depend on agricultural production and can grow the vegetables Sydney needs, he said.

"However, the chairman of the NSW Farmers' Association horticulture committee, Peter Darley, said that the city needed to retain its farms because they had a more reliable water source than those further west, especially during drought. 'You must also maintain food security close to your population base', he said. Sydney farmers can eliminate the 'middle man' because they are within 50 kilometres of the market, but if they moved further west, they would have to employ more people to move the produce, increasing the cost of vegetables, he said."

Ref: Debrah Jopson, SMH, 13/10/09

Suburban Sprawl in Europe (Part 3)

“Cars are eco-town killers. Transportation accounts for some one-third of all energy use and CO2 emissions in the UK, Europe, and the United States. Getting people out of their cars requires a combination of strategies, from the passive – such as compact development, pedestrian and bicycle paths, and substantial public transport – to the draconian – restrictions on parking, taxes on driving, limits on car ownership, and moratoriums on highway expansion, none of which are part of the eco-town plans. Inner cities once produced the greatest amounts of CO2; now it's the expanding urban fringe.

“In the UK over the past 20 years, transportation and domestic use have each surpassed and now far exceed the energy consumption of industry. Personal car use consumes the most. The greater the urban density, the lower the emissions. ‘Town-making is a complicated business’ states James Hulme, director of public affairs for the Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment, UK. The eco-town protesters, Hulme says, had legitimate concerns. The plans as they stood would have created ‘mono-use estates’; ‘dormitories’ for commuters; towns that failed to integrate living, shopping, and workplaces and thereby continued to give driving precedence over walking.

“According to a report to the British government by the BioRegional Development Group, a non-profit group in Surrey, UK a well-planned eco-town could reduce its residents' share of total greenhouse emissions by 76%. The average time for walking between homes, schools, services, and shops would be no more than 15 minutes. Bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly street plans would reduce overall car use by 75%. This, however, would be only a beginning.

“The car continues to haunt the dreams of carbon-neutral town planners. Despite lower-carbon fuels, stricter emissions standards, and better fuel efficiency, CO2 emissions will continue to rise as long as the number of vehicle miles travelled – VMT (or in Europe, VKT, for kilometres) – continues to increase.

“Steve Winkleman of the Centre for Clean Air Policy in Washington DC, has found that even if average fuel efficiency in the US increases to 35 miles per gallon, as it's required to do by 2020, the predicted increase in VMT would effectively negate any reductions in total vehicle CO2 emissions. The rise in VMT far outpaces population growth, and increased commuting is

not the only explanation. Trips to and from work account for only some 20% of miles travelled. A growing proportion of these miles is made up of the distances that must be driven in the suburbs because one lives nowhere near where one shops or goes out to eat, drink, or see a film or where the kids go to school, play ball, take dance lessons, or get a haircut.

“The US may have invented sprawl, but now it's a problem in Europe too, and especially in fast-growing Eastern and Central Europe. It's happening even in places where the total population is declining. Over the past 20 years, there have been four times as many new cars in Europe as new babies. VKT is expected to increase 40% by 2030, with a corresponding rise in CO2 emissions.

“To get people out of their cars, says Steve Melia, a researcher at the University of the West of England, it will take more than reconfigured roads and new bus routes. He points to the town of Vauban, Germany, with 2,000 homes and 6,000 people, where cars now account for only 16% of local travel as a result of the prohibition on street parking except for pickup and delivery. More than three-quarters of residents bicycle to work on the town's and the region's well-established bike routes, although they can keep a car in an offsite parking garage. The British government's eco-town prospectus mentions Vauban as an exemplar of eco-development, but Melia believes that when it comes to cars, the eco-town formula falls far short. In his view, the government has to make a commitment to creating extensive bicycle networks as well as car-free neighbourhoods, or ‘the scepticism of the critics will have proved well founded’.

“From the EU's standpoint, the hope is that national and local governments initiate planning processes that will rein in sprawl. The urbanists' hope is that concerns for global warming, as well as the global recession, have people looking for ways to change their economically profligate and carbon-costly habits. Give communities a new paradigm for growth and new, sustainable designs for living may follow.”

Ref: Bruce Stutz, Carbusters 38, 2009

www.carbusters.org/maqazine/index.php?issue=38&qo=feature3

The West Gate Bridge Collapse

“For 38 years workers have been gathering under the West Gate Bridge [in Melbourne] to remember that moment, when at 11.50am on 15 October 1970 a 111-metre span collapsed sending 35 men to their death.”

Ref: ETU Newsletter, November 2009