

Shrinking Cities in the US

"The [US] government [is] looking at expanding a pioneering scheme in Flint, one of the poorest US cities, which involves razing entire districts and returning the land to nature. Local politicians believe the city must contract by as much as 40%, concentrating the dwindling population and local services into a more viable area.

"The radical experiment is the brainchild of Dan Kildee, treasurer of Genesee County, which includes Flint. Having outlined his strategy to Barack Obama during the election campaign, Mr Kildee has now been approached by the US government and a group of charities who want him to apply what he has learnt to the rest of the country. Mr Kildee said he will concentrate on 50 cities, identified in a recent study by the Brookings Institution, an influential Washington think-tank, as potentially needing to shrink substantially to cope with their declining fortunes.

"Most are former industrial cities in the 'rust belt' of America's Mid-West and North East. They include Detroit, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Baltimore and Memphis. In Detroit, shattered by the woes of the US car industry, there are already plans to split it into a collection of small urban centres separated from each other by countryside. 'The real question is not whether these cities shrink – we're all shrinking – but whether we let it happen in a destructive or sustainable way', said Mr Kildee. 'Decline is a fact of life in Flint. Resisting it is like resisting gravity'.

"Karina Pallagst, director of the Shrinking Cities in a Global Perspective programme at the University of California, Berkeley, said there was 'both a cultural and political taboo' about admitting decline in America. 'Places like Flint have hit rock bottom. They're at the point where it's better to start knocking a lot of buildings down', she said. Flint, sixty miles north of Detroit, was the original home of General Motors. The car giant once employed 79,000 local people but that figure has shrunk to around 8,000. Unemployment is now approaching 20% and the total population has almost halved to 110,000. The exodus – particularly of young people – coupled with the consequent collapse in property prices, has left street after street in sections of the city almost entirely abandoned. In the city centre, the once grand Durant Hotel – named after William Durant, GM's founder – is a symbol of the city's decline, said Mr Kildee. The large



building has been empty since 1973, roughly when Flint's decline began. Regarded as a model city in the motor industry's boom years, Flint may once again be emulated, though for very different reasons. But Mr Kildee, who has lived there nearly all his life, said he had first to overcome a deeply ingrained American cultural mindset that 'big is good' and that cities should sprawl – Flint covers 34 square miles. He said: 'The obsession with growth is sadly a very American thing. Across the US, there's an assumption that all development is good, that if communities are growing they are successful. If they're shrinking, they're failing'. But some Flint dustcarts are collecting just one

rubbish bag a week, roads are decaying, police are very understaffed and there were simply too few people to pay for services, he said. If the city didn't downsize it will eventually go bankrupt, he added.

"Flint's recovery efforts have been helped by a new state law passed a few years ago which allowed local governments to buy up empty properties very cheaply. They could then knock them down or sell them on to owners who will occupy them. The city wants to specialise in health and education services, both areas which cannot easily be relocated abroad. The local authority has restored the city's attractive but formerly deserted centre but has pulled down 1,100 abandoned homes in outlying areas. Mr Kildee estimated another 3,000 needed to be demolished, although the city boundaries will remain the same. Already, some streets peter out into woods or meadows, no trace remaining of the homes that once stood there. Choosing which areas to knock down will be delicate but many of them were already obvious, he said. The city is buying up houses in more affluent areas to offer people in neighbourhoods it wants to demolish. Nobody will be forced to move, said Mr Kildee. 'Much of the land will be given back to nature. People will enjoy living near a forest or meadow', he said. Mr Kildee acknowledged that some fellow Americans considered his solution 'defeatist' but he insisted it was 'no more defeatist than pruning an overgrown tree so it can bear fruit again'." Photo: Getty

Ref: Tom Leonard, UK Telegraph, 12/6/09

And Also ...

"Screw the returning to nature idea, plant corn for ethanol in all of these places, especially in the places where factories once stood. The land is going to be too 'contaminated' for anything else."
Ref: 'John', UK Telegraph comments, 19/6/09

Yike Bike

"Enter the YikeBike, the extraordinary lovechild of a Segway and a penny farthing with dwarfism. ... The saddle is perched on the front wheel and lowering oneself on to it is a bit like sitting on a swivel chair without its base and then trying to stay balanced while lifting one's legs. ... I look faintly ridiculous but the YikeBike is surprisingly nippy (15mph) and great fun. Drawbacks include run time (six miles between charges) and cost (more than £3,000)."

Ref: Simon Osborne, Independent , 5/9/09

"What we have here is a folding electric bike that weighs less than 10Kg with a range of about 10Km and that is as easy to charge as a laptop and not that much bigger when folded, which the team behind it hope will one day be the transport of choice of the style-conscious urban commuter for the short hops from apartment to office."

Ref: Tony Farrelly, Road.CC, 3/9/09



www.yikebike.com/site/home

Cars Down and Up

"Japan is the first major developed country to experience a decline in car ownership, with lack of interest among young people in owning cars, especially in urban areas. However, China's 1.3b people don't feel the same way with monthly car sales for January 09 surpassing those in the U.S. for the first time. And, India, where just eight people per thousand own a car, is seeing a graduation from two to four wheels amongst its middle class, with compact cars sales up 23% since April. Public transport is a significant provider of jobs, with operators creating 1m direct jobs in Europe, and every direct job is linked to four jobs in other sectors of the economy. Further, public transport is reported to create 25% more jobs than the same investment in building roads."

Ref: Kite Richards, The Flyer, 1/11/09

<http://www.scapestrategy.com.au/>

And Also ...

Lake Macquarie City Council north of Sydney in New South Wales is advertising for a Sustainability Project Coordinator. One of the benefits, listed below 'Corporate Fit Program' but above 'Long Service Leave after Five Years' is: 'Free Parking'.

Ref: Enviro Jobs, 23/11/09

Problems with Building Freeways

"Billions of dollars spent building freeways across Melbourne since 1995 have failed to deliver the spectacular time savings promised to justify their construction. ... Transport analyst John Odgers, ... in the first analysis of its kind for Melbourne, has reviewed the promises made by consulting groups whose work was used to successfully argue for several big freeways built in Melbourne since the 1990s. The roads include CityLink, the Deer Park bypass, EastLink and the extension of the Eastern Freeway. The average speed Melburnians travel on freeways today is 78 km/h, the same as it was in 1995. Chief among the rationale for building each major new road, the study shows, was the travel time savings the roads were promised to create. The road builders claimed the savings would bring huge economic gains to Melbourne, as businesses and individuals moved about the city more efficiently. But Mr Odgers' study shows this has not happened - something disputed by those who worked on the road projects. ..."

"Melburnians are spending hundreds of thousands more hours on freeways - leading to zero gains in speeds or travel times, as roads fill up as soon as they are built. ... If monitoring the entire day, Melbourne's freeway speeds have remained virtually static - except for a brief respite in 2000 shortly after CityLink opened. Many new roads, such as the \$750 million Frankston bypass and the Government's proposed \$5 billion WestLink freeway tunnel under Footscray, are being justified using similar predictions of travel time savings. 'Perhaps the German word schlimmbesserung - meaning an improvement that makes things worse - is an apt descriptor for the massive program of new road construction that has marked Melbourne's 'solution' to its transport challenges over the last several decades,' Mr Odgers' report concludes. But Dr John Cox, one of the main authors of the cost-benefit analysis used to justify construction of CityLink in the late 1990s, said the study did not stack up. 'Imagine if CityLink was stopped - you would get a lot of travel time costs', he said. 'To say that CityLink doesn't cause travel time savings is pretty silly really'."

Ref: Clay Lucas, The Age, 4/9/09

"Think of how outstanding our public transport system might have been had that money been better spent."

Ref: Malcolm Pacey, The Age, 5/9/09

"We can provide millions each year to support a car race that has dubious social benefit and may provoke hoon behaviour but we fail to provide an adequate public transport system."

Ref: Gael Barrett, The Age, 5/9/09

Senate Report Extracts (Part 4)

3.40 "Transport accounts for 14.6% of Australia's greenhouse emissions. Passenger cars are responsible for 53% of transport emissions. Transport emissions are the second greatest source of emissions growth after stationary energy."

3.44 "Submissions stressed that there should be a multi-faceted approach to reducing transport emissions, of which a carbon charge is one element. This will include more ambitious fuel efficiency standards for cars, travel demand management; road pricing that reflects the full costs of road transport; land use planning policies to reduce the demand for travel; and better public transport so that motorists facing higher fuels prices have more alternatives."

3.45 "The present car/public transport modal split in Australian cities is about 90%/10% on average. This may suggest that any realistically achievable increase in public transport use (for example, an 80/20 split, which is a goal in some policies), would still have only a small effect on total transport energy use. However the benefits would be increased by these considerations:

- On average one public transport trip tends to replace more than one car trip, as people adjust their habits to travel more efficiently; so increasing public transport mode share implies decreasing total travel.
- While the average bus/train trip is about twice as fuel efficient as the average car trip, the gain from transferring the marginal trip will be much greater, since the marginal energy cost of putting an extra rider on an existing train or bus service is practically zero. Increasing public transport use implies an increasing average load factor, which will increase the energy advantage of public transport.
- Where greater public transport use reduces traffic congestion, the remaining motorists may enjoy greater fuel efficiency in the less congested conditions."

3.46 "Health costs of the current transport mix include -

- road deaths and injuries;
- effects of motor vehicle pollution;
- effects of an inactive car-dependent lifestyle."

3.47 "Greater public transport use, implying less car use, has benefits in reducing these costs."

3.48 "In 2000 the BTRE estimated road crash costs 'conservatively' at nearly \$15 billion per year (1996 dollars), comprising human costs \$8.3 billion, vehicle costs \$4.1 billion, and

general costs \$2.5 billion. Since then road deaths have fallen, but injuries requiring hospitalisation have increased. In 2005-06 31,204 people were seriously injured in road crashes. A 2006 study estimated the road crash cost in 2003 at \$17 billion. ..."

3.50 "Pollution in the form of particulates and noxious gases from motor vehicles increases ill health from cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. Particulates are microscopic solid particles produced by the combustion of petrol and diesel and, combined with road dust, are suspended in the air and inhaled. This contributes to a cumulative decrease in lung function efficiency and can contribute to the incidence of breathlessness, heart disease and asthma. There is increasing recognition that even small exposures are injurious."

3.51 "Motor vehicles are the main cause of air pollution in cities. The BTRE has estimated that in 2000 motor vehicle pollution accounted for between 900 and 4500 morbidity cases, and between 900 and 2000 early deaths (this may be compared with Australia's road toll of 1,464 dead in 2008). The economic cost of pollution-related morbidity in 2000 was estimated at between \$0.4 billion and \$1.2 billion, and the economic cost of premature mortality was estimated at between \$1.1 billion and \$2.6 billion."

3.52 "A shift from car travel to public transport will help reduce air pollution. While overall a very large increase in public transport use would be needed to have more than a small marginal effect on pollution (because of the low public transport mode share at present), the prospects of public transport are best in more congested areas, and these are the areas that suffer most pollution."

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 #134}

NZ Accepts Electric Rail Efficiency

The NZ "government has approved a \$500 million loan to Kiwirail to purchase [114] electric railcars for Auckland ... i.e., enough rail cars to meet up passenger demand up until the mid 2020s."

Ref: Frogblog 26/11/09

"Getting the rail network operating as efficiently as possible is vital to increased economic growth that will deliver flow-on effects for the rest of the country." **Ref: Steven Joyce, NZ Transport Minister, Media Release, 24/11/09**

Planning for Failure

"[Victorian Planning Minister] Justin Madden recently discovered something important. It's unclear precisely when the blinding light of this big idea hit the Planning Minister. It is, after all, hardly a secret. But last week, this fundamental principle finally debuted in the state's urban sprawl planning guidelines. The big idea is this: new suburbs on the city's fringe should be built as 'real communities'. They should be compact, well-connected to transport and jobs, within walking distance of shops, blessed with open space and water-savvy. The Victorian Government has discovered sustainable communities. Pity it's 10 years late. ...

"Madden announced that housing developers now need to comply with new Precinct Structure Plan guidelines, a kind of overlay for suburbs of 3000 dwellings or more. The point, he said, was to 'change the way our future suburbs look, feel and what they offer to families'. These new guidelines would ensure fringe developments avoided becoming isolated, so-called 'dormitory' suburbs - places where there is, essentially, nothing to do but sleep. These principles, of course, are welcomed, especially by planning and transport experts who have been talking about them probably since a young Justin Madden was kicking a football around Airport West, a suburb that once sat on the city fringe. But the unfortunate reality is that these guidelines are hollow, just more political spin to salve the growing disquiet about the size of Melbourne, now the world's eighth most sprawling metropolis.

"Earlier this year, the Government announced with little public discussion that Melbourne's urban growth boundary needed to expand by 41,000 hectares. It was the planning equivalent of letting out Lady Melbourne's swelling waistline. But these guidelines are a bit like pretending a few skinny lattes is a diet. First, they are guidelines, not compulsory planning laws. Second, the requirement that developers boost housing density from an average of 10 houses a hectare to 15 is limp-wristed. Many developers are already aiming for 15. At 20 dwellings a hectare, Melbourne would get 64% more housing and 30 years' land supply, as RMIT's Michael Buxton has pointed out. But why stop there? It takes a minimum of 30 houses a hectare to make public transport viable in the outer suburbs, according to the University of Melbourne's Carolyn Whitzman. Which leads to the next bit of spin. The message delivered last week was that developers, with local councils and agencies, must ensure new

homes in the urban sprawl are 'walking distance' to transport. Perhaps Madden means walking distance to the garage. Since when has it been the responsibility of developers and local government to provide rail, train and bus links to new suburbs? Surely, this is the core business of State Government. And where is the Brumby Government's plan to ensure these new suburbs are not stranded, car-dependent enclaves? Or, as Whitzman put it last week, 'the slums of tomorrow in the growth areas of today'. Where is the Brumby Government's plan to provide public transport to the car-dependent enclaves we already have?"

Ref: Melissa Fyfe, The Age, 11/10/09

And Also ...



"Rolling along a single huge wheel, this motor bus combines safety with high speed. ... Promising to revolutionise the field of motor transportation, the new Dyno-Wheel bus [has] a single drum wheel [that] supports the car at high speeds. Control wheels on either side are raised or lowered in response to the steering gear, to tip the bus slightly and change the direction of travel. Small fore and aft wheels come into action only when stopping and starting. A stabilising fin keeps the car level at high speeds." **Ref: Victor Pesek, Modern Mechanix and Inventions, June 1935**

See also the 'Gyrauto' in Newsletter #131 which was designed by Italian engineer Ernest Fraquelli and introduced into Europe to replace the orthodox type of vehicle then in use. It could attain speeds of 116 mph with all components and passengers suspended between two huge rubber-tired wheels.

History of VicRoads (Part 3)

"In 1974, the State Government legislated to transfer the road related functions (road planning, road design and construction) and approximately 140 staff from the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) to the CRB [Country Roads Board]. ...

"The earliest moves on the road safety front were the adoption of uniform road direction and danger signs by all States (except Tasmania) in 1927. However, it was almost another decade before a uniform traffic code was adopted for Melbourne (1936), with a state-wide code adopted five years later in 1944. The first road safety group was formed in 1927 – the National Safety Council (NSC) – under the auspices of the National Roads Association of Australia and the RACV. Other early safety initiatives included the appearance of traffic lights (1930) and the passage of the Motor Act 1932, which required all vehicles to have and maintain 'in good order' tyres, windscreen wipers, rear view mirrors and horns.

"Nonetheless, the road toll was continuing to rise and public concern led the RACV to organise a road safety conference in 1938. It identified a lack of public education as a major contributor to crashes. However, its plans to tackle this situation were temporarily set back by the outbreak of World War II. Despite the efforts of the NSC there was little improvement after the war until the establishment in 1956 of a three-member Traffic Commission to control traffic and improve road safety throughout Victoria. The Commission oversaw the introduction of many safety measures. But the road toll continued rising. The watershed came in 1970 when Victoria became the first State in the world to introduce the compulsory wearing of seatbelts; the first of a series of radical measures that saw Victoria's road toll fall from more than 1000 fatalities per annum in 1970 to approximately 400 per annum since the early 1990's. The same year the seatbelt legislation was debated, the Traffic Commission was abolished and replaced by the larger and more powerful Road Safety and Traffic Authority – part of the Ministry of Police and Emergency Services. This organisation oversaw the introduction in 1976 of another key safety measure: random roadside breath testing (RBT). This was another Victorian first for Australia.

"In 1982 the Road Safety and Traffic Authority was moved from the Ministry of Police and Emergency Services to the Ministry of Transport. In 1983 the Road Safety and Traffic Authority

was combined with the TRB and MRB to become the Road Traffic Authority. The same year, the CRB changed its name to the Road Construction Authority (RCA), thereby eliminating the confusion its original name had caused for nearly 70 years! Slowly but surely the organisations involved in Victoria's road and traffic management were converging. The final logical step came in 1989 when the RTA and RCA were merged to become the Road Corporation – better known to millions of Victorians by its trading name – VicRoads."

Ref: About VicRoads, VicRoads Website, 2009

Interview with Oz Kayak (Part 3)

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 continues our discussion:

Stephen Ingrouille: So somebody wanted to build freeways down our creek valleys?

Oz Kayak: The planners. We had wonderful 1960s planners. They knew that they needed several options. So they skilfully built in several alignments. And in those days they would buy strategic parcels of land and sometimes – myself included – we were mischievous, in setting up the chess board, and that was one thing that the railways couldn't do. The railways were not in an expanding environment, they were in a declining environment, whereas the Roads Authority and road use was on the increase. The country was obviously employing a lot of people in the car industry, with two major manufacturers, but there were other factors in play. What you had were trade-offs between the Country Party, the Liberal Party and maybe the Labor Party, but certainly during the [Liberal] Bolte era, there were trade-offs. Huge investments in rural areas that were never warranted, and I'm talking now about the aluminium smelter at Portland in Western Victoria with high voltage power being dragged from Eastern Victoria. So you had people moving big pieces. I observed the deals that were done.

SI: Are you suggesting that for things that were happening in rural areas, such as Portland, political trade-offs were being made such as the building of freeways in central Melbourne?

OK: Yes.

SI: And we are talking about the 50s or 60s?

OK: 60s and 70s.

SI: Yet you were saying that the powers-that-be were aware that there might have been some

other alternatives, because they were inviting guest speakers to talk about these things. They must have also been aware what was happen overseas, we know that there were problems from the 50s in building freeways in urban areas, in New York for ...

OK: But we took our cues from the West Coast of America. We used the West Coast American approach. We didn't build parkways, etc. That wasn't the agenda. We took all of our cues from LA. That's a slight exaggeration – we were heavily influenced. A few of us read German design magazines and we introduced top class designs, because we came from a different cultural background, but we would never have been permitted to consider a bicycle lane on a bridge, that wouldn't have been an option. I did put some stuff in once – some safety barriers – because I went to Germany in 1974, paid for by the Victorian Government, and I tried to introduce some of those things back here but didn't get far ...

SI: ... Bicycle lanes ...?

OK: No environment measures. For example in Germany in 1974 for at least ten years they had never been allowed to drop any debris into a river while they were building a bridge, everything had canopies underneath, now we have the same, but when I tried to put that into the specifications on one my bridges in 1975, I didn't get far.

SI: Who was blocking that?

OK: Well it was not the way we did things. You can change everything eventually, especially with good knowledge, and of course if you are the last man out. All of Europe doesn't allow cement to go into its drinking supply. The other thing was: we were scrapping all the lead off - all of our steel structures had lead on them - so in the 1970s we poisoned the locals – the stuff went into the air and it got into their roof tanks. We raised it [as an issue] but no, that was outside our brief, outside of the Act.

{Continued in #134}



Noise Pollution in Europe

“More than 41 million people in cities of at least 250,000 people from 19 countries that submitted road transport data to the European Environment Agency (EEA) deal with road racket averaging 55 decibels or higher - the World Health Organisation threshold for health impacts. ... Some 3.6 million urban dwellers cope with an ear-splitting levels of 70 decibels or higher. Many European Union countries - including France, Portugal, Belgium and Greece - failed to provide complete data before a December 2007 cut-off date, leaving major gaps in the transport noise database ... But earlier this year the EEA estimated that some 67 million urbanites in the 27-nation European Union are confronted with noise levels above the 55 decibel mark. ‘Besides disturbing sleep, there is increasing evidence that transport noise can effect the cardiovascular system, mental health & school performance’, said Oscar Romero, a spokesman for the Copenhagen-based EU agency.

“Noise has gotten a ‘late start’ compared to other forms of pollution, both in terms of regulation and public opinion, he said. ‘If you compare the level of awareness about air quality or greenhouse gas emissions to noise, I think we are still at an early stage’ ... Scientists have also been slow to focus on how constant noise levels influence mental and physical health, as well in the classroom and the workplace, he pointed out. Air traffic noise pollution is affects a large number of people in the Netherlands, Germany & especially Britain, where more than 800,000 people are exposed to steady decibel levels ranging from 55 to more than 75. ‘We also have studies piling up about how noise is affecting wildlife’, Romero said. In 2002, the EEA's 32 members adopted the Environmental Noise Directive, pledging to provide standardised data on noise levels from road, rail and air transport.” Ref: AFP, West Australian, 27/10/09

NZ Rejects Vehicle Fuel Efficiency

“Why does the [NZ] National Government continue to put the squeeze on essential Government spending in health and education while refusing to save money by ensuring that govt vehicles are fuel efficient? ... Earlier this year, Transport Minister Steven Joyce ruled out any kind of across-the-board vehicle fuel efficiency standards, judging them to be heavy-handed & expensive. However, visiting International Energy Agency (IEA), Dr Nigel Jollands, disagrees. ... Dr Jollands cited New Zealand for lagging behind the rest of the OECD with vehicle fuel efficiency. He said, ‘There is definitely a role for the government to mandate and regulate fuel efficiency standards of vehicles coming in’.” Ref: Russel Norman, 19/11/09