

City Living in Europe

"I am an Australian that has been living in Europe (Germany and the Netherlands) for the last 16 years. Due to historical reasons, many of the European cities have grown with high density living (as the streets were first built hundreds of years ago when there were only pedestrians). The high density means good public transport is possible, and enables vibrant communities all throughout the cities. Apartments are standard, in 'houses' - buildings with 3 or 4 stories, one or two apartments on each floor. I currently live in Cologne in Germany, and live within two minutes walk from the supermarket, chemist, gym, several restaurants and bars and all number of other services. The city life in Europe is one of the reasons I like living here - a crass difference to having to take the car even to buy a litre of milk. In fact, I don't even own a car (although I am a member of a car sharing organisation, with which I can rent a car cheaply by the hour, and pick it up 200m from my front door). This kind of city layout is essential if the city is to survive in a new world after peak oil. Sprawling low density suburbs make public transport infrastructure impossible, and when the oil price rises again, these suburbs will die. This has already happened in many U.S. cities. Moving to such a new city layout is an important political challenge of the coming years."

Ref: 'Mathew', Background Briefing, 28/11/09
www.abc.net.au/rn/backgroundbriefing/stories/2009/2746551.htm

Leading by Example in Australia

"Maroondah's new mayor has vowed to ditch the mayoral car and use public transport instead. ... Cr Makin said: 'Given that I am a resident in the centre of Ringwood, an area where we are encouraging people to use sustainable forms of transport, I want to lead by example.'" Ref: Melinda Marshall, Maroondah Leader, 8/12/09

"[Australian] Federal politicians are using a taxpayer-funded perk to pay for gas-guzzling SUVs. A staggering 225 out of the 243 private-plated cars chosen by MPs and Senators have six or eight-cylinder engines, in contrast to the national trend towards smaller, more fuel efficient models. Only a handful of MPs drive low-emission hybrids. The ... most popular car among federal politicians is the Ford Territory, Australia's answer to the SUV and possibly the heaviest Aussie-built passenger car ever made. It was chosen by 81 MPs, including many who live in suburban electorates. The Federal Government's own Green Vehicle Guide gives the Territory a woeful 2.5 stars out of five."

Ref: Kelvin Bissett, The Punch, 15/12/09

EXCLUSIVE

CLAUS COMMITS TO
SINGLE
DEER
SLEIGH

Big savings
in global
emissions



McKean

S. Claus goes green.

Bring-Your-Own Bike Lane

"A close brush with a distracted driver is enough to intimidate the most avid bikers from riding at night. The problem isn't just about visibility, as safety lights are effective at capturing the attention of a driver. However, these lights are typically constrained to the bike frame, which highlights only a fraction of the bike's envelope. Bike lanes have proven to be an effective method of protecting cyclists on congested roads. One key is that the lane establishes a well defined boundary beyond the envelope of the bicycle, providing a greater margin of safety between the car and the cyclist. Yet, only a small fraction of streets have dedicated bike lanes, and with an installation cost of \$5,000 to \$50,000 per mile, we shouldn't expect to find them everywhere anytime soon. Instead of adapting cycling to established bike lanes, the bike lane should adapt to the cyclists. This is the idea behind the Light Lane. Our system projects a crisply defined virtual bike lane onto pavement, using a laser, providing the driver with a familiar boundary to avoid. With a wider margin of safety, bikers will regain their confidence to ride at night, making the bike a more viable commuting alternative."

Ref: Alex Tee & Evan Gant, Dustbowl, 9/1/09

www.altitudeinc.com/downloads/021609_bikelane_Boston.pdf



Problems with Trucks (Part 2)

"Until the early 1960s, railways dominated all but the shortest freight trips in Australia, according to a federal transport study released in July. Today, that study says, 'rail freight is a negligible share of urban freight movements'. Goods shipped between Melbourne and Sydney were, roughly, half moved by rail in 1972 and half moved by road (and a tiny percentage moved by sea).

"Jump forward three decades and 88% of goods shipped between Melbourne and Sydney travel by road. To many transport experts, this sort of long-haulage being done by road and not rail is insanely wasteful. 'Putting a steel wheel on a steel rail requires less energy to move a unit than putting that same unit on a rubber tyre on to bitumen', says David Wilson, a logistics consultant and a State Government transport bureaucrat in the 1980s. The standard response from government after government, says Wilson, has been to build better freeways to cope with truck movements. 'This just doesn't work'. Since B-doubles were first legalised on Australian roads in 1986, the weight they can carry has doubled, thanks to technology and investment...

"Certainly the Government is making all the right noises about getting freight back on to rail, even if the reality is the continued dominance of the truck. In 2007, the Government bought back the regional rail network after it was privatised in 1999, in a deal likely to exceed \$200 million and that Auditor-General Des Pearson said was approved on 'incomplete analysis and advice'. Since then, the federal and state governments have poured money back into rail freight, with \$1.3 billion promised to freight projects including \$173 million for the Dynon Road rail bridge and \$551 million for new tracks and a rail bypass of Wodonga. For Jackie Fristacky, chairwoman of lobby group the Metropolitan Transport Forum, this is a promising sign. Her group wants more freight moved by rail, but believes the Brumby Government listens too much to truck operators and not enough to others affected by freight. 'The Government is doing everything it can to facilitate truck movements and just giving lip service to rail freight', she says."

Ref: Clay Lucas, The Age, 7/10/09

And Also ...

"Using hammer and chisel, Ramchandra Das took 14 years to make a 4.2-metre hole through rock because he wanted to park his truck outside his home and a mountain was in the way."

Ref: The Age, 4/12/09

Problems with High Speed Rail

"There is a different view to the one expressed in this newsletter about high speed rail (HSR). Many UK transport professionals take the view that HSR is a hugely expensive white elephant to encourage rich people to travel more often over longer distances with a huge public subsidy at a time when our urban rail systems (say 50km radius around all our cities) are all in very poor condition and not fit for purpose. HSR supporters want the majority of an estimated £36 billion (pounds sterling) to come from the taxpayer and I don't want this. This is a UK view and it is up to Australians to work out what they think is appropriate for Australian geography but HST in the UK is wrong-headed."

Ref: John Whitelegg, 24/11/09

Comment: We like to encourage the debate and John makes some good points. Most people would assume that HSR is better than planes on short routes between major cities. Should it though be a choice between HSR and local rail improvements (assuming the HSR is appropriate for the region)? Why not do both? On the speed question I'm reminded how I used to enjoy catching the overnight train from the centre of Melbourne to the centre of Sydney. The train would leave about 6.30pm and we would firstly enjoy a meal in the restaurant car before retiring to the sleeper. The train would conveniently arrive about 8am. Then they sped up the service. The train now leaves at about 8pm (making dinner difficult) and arrives at 6.55pm (meaning a very early wake-up). The restaurant car has been replaced by a buffet car (and you can imagine the tempting menu). Of course a HSR between Melbourne and Sydney would only take about 3 hours (just time for a long lunch) without the hassles of airports. Below is an extract from John's article in the Guardian:

"There is something quite seductive about speed. It sounds good, and economists cling to the misleading idea that saving time saves money and produces an economic bonus that the whole of society can share. The supporters of HSR argue that it will increase the capacity of the rail system to move people and freight, stimulate the economy, steal passengers from domestic aviation and reduce greenhouse gases. High-speed rail will indeed increase capacity, especially if it proceeds on German and French models and produces new lines across open countryside. But what is not addressed is why we need the increased capacity, and whether or not this is the right way to go about it. ... We could even have a policy about developing strongly independent cities, such as those in Germany. The 'need' to travel to London

is a result of decades of public and private policy and cash to centralise functions there and to avoid the idea that Newcastle upon Tyne, Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool could operate as high-level attractive financial, cultural, corporate HQ and media centres, just as Frankfurt, Munich and Hamburg do in Germany.

“We do need to move more freight around the UK by means other than road, but the links with HSR and better rail opportunities for freight are tenuous. Alternatives to HSR include reopening lines closed in the 1960s for normal rail running, using coastal shipping, inland waterways and even planning our industrial and logistic sites so that they were located near to ports, waterways and rail logistic centres. ... HSR is promoted as something that can sort out nasty carbon-producing aircraft on domestic routes. It has done this on the Paris-Lyon and Madrid-Seville lines, but this ability to trash a single air route should not be interpreted as something that can dent the growth of air travel. Germany has one of the largest HSR systems in the world yet has seen an explosion in internal air travel. HSR does not reduce the fuel consumption of domestic aviation or reduce annual carbon emissions from aircraft. And it produces twice as much CO2 per passenger kilometre as a non-high speed train. If we are serious about reducing our carbon emissions by 80% by 2050, we should not move towards higher speed, more carbon intensive forms of transport and a policy of increasing the mass of travel. ...

“Switzerland offers a vision of what a rail system in the UK could look like if it celebrated all our cities, reflected the need to offer attractive rail services to all social and income groups, and set out to avoid cattle-truck conditions. The double-decker trains running from Zurich to Basle 60 times a day offer comfort, reliability, and a pleasant journey on a major commuter route. This could be the future on the Liverpool-Manchester-Leeds route, and on many routes in the south-east of England, but there appears to be no well-oiled machine lobbying for these passengers.”

Ref: John Whitelegg, The Guardian, 28/4/09

“I agree that accessibility is more important than mobility. People should be able to live good lives



Photo: G. Bowater/Corbis

without always moving ever larger distances ever faster. But hitting at railways is not the answer. We should be thinking about how to reduce flying and driving, not how to bully the railways. Stop talking about carbon emissions from trains and start talking about dismantling coal plants and shifting to sustainable energy. High-speed railways have an undeserved reputation for being expensive. They are at least as cost-effective as railway upgrades. The West Coast Mainline upgrade cost £10bn according to Wikipedia. If a new TGV-style railway can be built for £11bn, that's a bargain.”

Ref: Erik Sandblom, The Guardian, 29/4/09

And Also ...

“I've travelled a lot on the German ICE network, the French TGV as well as the Swiss railways and must give them all top marks for doing the job that they were built for. On time - comfortable - very quick and clean. The system is being expanded because the governments have had a thought through concept from the beginning 20-30years ago. The British rail system is quite simply a national disgrace and an absolute cock-up, run by mentally retarded franchises and watched over / sold out by a multitude of political monkeys. Give the job of rail-overlord to someone from Swissrail for the next 30 years and let them sort out the mess that nobody in the UK seems capable of doing.” **Ref: 'Mickhal', The Guardian, 30/10/09**

New Zealand Snapper

“From mid 2010 some Auckland buses will progressively begin accepting Snapper cards, and the technology can readily be extended”

Ref: Snapper Press Release, 1/12/09

And Also ...

“In a bizarre twist Snapper announced today that they are planning to introduce their own integrated ticketing system into Auckland ... just days before the Auckland Regional Transport Authority (ARTA) and the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) are expected to announce they have finally given the integrated ticketing contract to Thales, a French company. ... This is obviously ludicrous. As ARTA's website explains the whole point of integrated ticketing is to make public transport more convenient and easy to use.”

Ref: Frogblog, 2/12/09

Senate Report Extracts (Part 7)

5.21 "Submissions noted that in most developed nations the central government takes a significant role in public transport planning and funding: 'The general Federal position on urban public transport involvement has been that it is the responsibility of the States. This is unfortunate since there are clearly important national economic, social and environmental objectives which public transport can assist with. This position is also in stark contrast with the position of other countries... Australia is unique in being the only OECD country which does not have some Federal role in funding and supporting public transport'."

5.56 "Many submissions argued that the concessionary tax treatment of cars as a fringe benefit (car FBT) should be abolished. They argued that the concession encourages the use of cars, significantly contributes to urban traffic congestion and parking problems, and is contrary to widely held goals to promote public transport and restrain transport greenhouse emissions. They argued that there is no similar concessionary treatment of public transport fares, which biases employers to offer car fringe benefits and not public transport fringe benefits."

5.62 "The car FBT concession is one of the largest tax expenditures outside superannuation and capital gains tax. It is almost equal to GST exemption of health supplies (\$2.3 billion in 2008-09) or GST exemption of education supplies (\$2.25 billion in 2008-09)."

5.63 "It appears that concessionary fringe benefits taxation of cars was adopted to support the Australian car industry, which at the time (1986) attracted significant government support and provided nearly 85% of car sales. Australian-made cars are now only 25% of all car sales, however they are still a high proportion of fleet (business) sales; and fleet sales are more likely to be fringe benefits cars. ..."

5.64 "If the purpose of the concession is to support the Australian car industry (no other purpose has been suggested), the government for some reason is reluctant to admit it. ..."

5.72 "Many submissions noted that the construction of the statutory formula encourages excess driving simply to reach one of the thresholds (15,000, 25,000 and 40,000km) that earns a lower tax...."

5.73 "Since excess driving incurs costs the incentive exists only for drivers whose 'genuine' mileage is already within striking distance of one of the thresholds. A 2007 survey of 1,250 fringe benefits cars estimated that about 19% of them had driven further deliberately to reach a threshold."

5.82 "A 2004 Sydney study found that 52% of workers had employer assistance to travel to work, most of which related to cars, and 17% reported that the employer 'provides company car'. Those whose car use was subsidised made more car trips (average 5.89 car trips per day) than those who were not subsidised (average 4.17 car trips per day)."

5.83 "Submissions stressed that regardless of the actual amount of driving involved, the tax concession is bad in principle because it encourages a 'car culture' in the workplace, and discourages employers from taking initiatives to encourage public transport use."

Additional Comments:

"The Australian Greens welcome this report which clearly makes the case for the inherent value of well funded public transport services. The document is a valuable and coherent summary of the many reasons why targeted Commonwealth investment in public and active transport is timely and essential. Almost all submissions argued that the Australian Government should play a much greater role in promoting and providing funding for public transport and active transport. In the face of this evidence, it borders on the bizarre that the report does not make a clear recommendation in this respect.

"The Committee heard evidence that central governments of nearly all industrialised nations play a significant role in public transport planning and funding, and that Australia is the only OECD country in which the Federal Government does not have a formal role in funding and supporting public transport. The Australian Automobile Association and the National Transport Commission urged the Australian Government to establish an ongoing funding program for public transport and active transport comparable to its roads programs. Two previous Parliamentary Committee Reports have clearly and unequivocally called for federal funding for public transport and urban mass transit and this reflects the more recent recommendations by Garnaut (2008) and Infrastructure Australia (2008).

"The Government is yet to respond to the previous Parliamentary inquiries; it is hoped that this report

may play some role in focusing Government attention on the urgent need for a systematic re-prioritising of transport funding. The Committee also recognises that building more roads does not alleviate congestion, but actually encourages growth of traffic and entrenches patterns of urban development that create high car use.

“Despite this fact, the Commonwealth continues to fund roads, thus worsening congestion, and refuses to institutionalise targeted funding for public transport measures that will alleviate that congestion. The report takes a contradictory position in the executive summary and at, implying that public transport remain solely the financial and planning responsibility of the States, while then going on to persuasively argue the case why this should change. The report notes that the Committee ‘agrees that the demand on public transport infrastructure will continue to rise and require an expansion’ however refuses to take the next logical step to recommend that the Commonwealth allocate any funding for this task.”

Ref: Investment of Commonwealth and State Funds in Public Passenger Transport - Senate Transport Reference Committee, August 2009 See full report and footnotes at: http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/rrat_ctte/public_transport/report/report.pdf

Comments on the Senate Report

“Metropolitan Transport Forum (MTF) Chair, Cr Jackie Fristacky, said the Senate Inquiry into Passenger Transport Infrastructure and Services Funding, presents a forceful case for federal funding of public transport. Cr Fristacky praised the Report for setting out the data on federal subsidies to the car industry, and how this distorts the transport market, discriminating against public transport and encouraging excessive car use.

“MTF welcomed the report highlighting the need for transparent cost-benefit analysis. The Committee quoted the public subsidy for car travel at 38c per passenger km. This figure does not include local government expenditure on roads and all external costs. The MTF argues the public subsidy for car use, when fully costed, is at least 50c per passenger km.

“Cr Fristacky commended the Senate Committee for recognising the value of public transport for a wide range of social purposes. ‘The Senate Committee sends a clear message on the integral link between public transport, energy efficiency, congestion and emission reduction,

urban amenity, better land use, improved health and social inclusion’. The Committee acknowledged ‘a serious problem of transport disadvantage in that many people who can least afford it are forced to spend an excessive proportion of their income on running cars’. This applies particularly in outer suburbs where many people of lower economic status live because of cheaper housing.”

Ref: MTF Media Release, 21/8/09

More in Park(ing) Day

“On a busy street in Los Angeles, a neighbourhood association took up nine parking spots and set up a hangout with a grill, a children's wading pool and a gardening workshop to teach people how to grow drought-tolerant plants. In midtown Manhattan, theatre students from Fordham University staged a Shakespeare in the Parking Spot festival. In Chicago, an architecture firm turned two parking spaces into a pit stop where bicyclists could chill out on a grassy knoll and refuel on drinks and snacks. They're some of the pocket parks created for Park(ing) Day. The movement started as a single installation four years ago in San Francisco and has become a worldwide event reaching more than 100 cities on four continents.

“Matthew Passmore, who helped start Park(ing) Day, said the concept strikes a chord with urban dwellers everywhere because they're dealing with similar issues of traffic congestion and pollution. The temporary parks highlight the fact that curbside parking ‘results in increased traffic, wasted fuel and more pollution’, Passmore said. He cites a study by Donald Shoup, a professor of urban planning at the University of California, Los Angeles, which found drivers spent an average of 3.3 minutes, or 800 metres, circling the block in search of a parking space. Over a year, vehicles travelled 15,300 km - the equivalent of 38 trips around the earth - just looking for a parking spot. Shoup said many drivers would rather cruise for open spots on the street than park in higher-priced lots and garages. ‘Converting a parking space into something else challenges people's assumption about how space is used and allows them to re-imagine the possibilities of the urban landscape,’ Passmore said.” **Ref: Sky News, 19/9/09**

And Also ...

“Saudi Arabia is leading oil producing countries in the Middle East on calling for the world to compensate them for lost income as renewable energy sources compete with their oil.”

Ref: WME Environmental Magazine, Nov 2009

Interview with Oz Kayak (Part 6)

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:

Oz Kayak: The Victorian Railways had at least one, effective, powerful spokesperson, in the engineering profession. Lined up against him were a dozen engineers of the same standard in VicRoads. The VicRoads officers – engineers – we used to discuss the tactics for handling the key Railway adversary, even though we naturally believed we were trying to do the same job, we were just trying to do it differently. And if we talk about the 70s in particular, railway practices, that is, railway construction practices, were far different to road construction practices. The railways had more restrictions during construction. It boiled down to the fact that we tried to get solutions in place within one financial year.

Stephen Ingrouille: In a budgetary cycle?

OK: Correct. We [VicRoads] were far more attuned to budgetary cycles. It appeared to me at the time, although we didn't discuss it in this way: that the Railway administration was far more disposed to placate all interests; so they were far more fearful of criticism.

SI: From politicians?

OK: Public, politicians; and I suspect, also from their own labour force.

SI: What decade are we talking about?

OK: The Railways lost momentum in the late 60s, early 70s. In the context of design and construction to serve the system, there was a government agenda – a civil engineering agenda – to eliminate railway crossings. But there was a budgetary constraint and what you found was that the priorities for the sequence of construction – I believe (and this is a personal view) – were determined more by VicRoads rather than the Railways. Also, the Commonwealth money, which was tied to certain deliverables including standards and safety, was roads focussed. The road funding was very heavily influenced at Federal level - and in particular by the Country Party – to move more by road. The future of the freight industry was seen as more road focused because it was door-to-door. In the mid-60s we were still under

direction to deliver bridge [building] components by rail, where a railway existed and where the railway could do the job. We were directed to shorten the length of beams so that they could be transported and off-loaded by the railway network. None of that constraint existed later in the 60s. But in the early period I had to write a report justifying why my sixty foot beams which were too long to be carried by rail, had to be carried by truck. And I could demonstrate this on economic grounds because of the cost of double-handling. The other thing was that we were able to built current-technology structures whereas the Railways were still designing bridges, and they would give them to consultants – so there is no reason why the consultants would not produce the same product as we did with our in-house design – maybe that's another factor, in-house verses consultants who were tame to get the next job, they did what the railways wanted; whereas in the CRB (Country Roads Board) environment, we were rebellious, we wanted to try the latest, after all, we thought that we were the smartest.

SI: The Railways were locked into traditional ways of thinking, although their bridges were functional?

OK: Safe and functional, yes. Part of that heritage of practice came from 1900 or so when the Railways had major bridge mishaps which resulted in Royal Commissions. And those conservative [bridge building] practices continued well after their time. By the way, the Railways were very innovative in 1870 and earlier, very innovative. The thing is a railway disaster or railway incident is far more dramatically reported. The fact is that on the roads we have a death a day – you don't see anything like that on the railways but when you do have one, it's high drama.

SI: We do talk about the road toll, almost to the point that that's our acceptable point of risk.

{Continued in #137}

Relaxed Commuter Cycling

"I am a relaxed commuter, cycling to and from the railway station in my office clothes, where twenty people on bikes could replace one person in a car. As for walking-friendly streets & neighbourhoods, they can be cycle friendly too. We need networks of paths connecting suburbs with activity centres, a reduction of residential car speeds to a maximum of 30km/hr, and separated cycle ways along the arterial roads. I would especially like to see greenways like Bogota. For the more intense cycling commuters, end-of-journey facilities would go a long way to encourage a big increase."

Ref: John Merory, 9/12/09