

Problems with Population Growth

"Last year we added almost the equivalent of the state of Tasmania - 480,000 people - in a single year. ... [Aust] State governments are already struggling to keep up with the current growth, let alone dealing with many millions more. Just look at the 30-year fiasco that is Sydney's mythical second airport. Brisbane can't decide what to do about dams, Melbourne can't implement a co-ordinated public transport system and we are building hugely expensive desalination plants just to have enough drinking water. Does anyone really believe we are suddenly going to discover the secret of adding a city bigger than Canberra every year for the next 40 years? As Labor backbencher Kelvin Thomson has previously warned, we are sleep-walking towards disaster."

Ref: Dick Smith, Daily Telegraph, 11/2/10



Population growth

Brisbane Bus System Overhaul

"Brisbane's bus system is set to undergo a major overhaul, with route changes and an additional 20,000 seats made available for commuters."

Ref: Tony Moore, Brisbane Times, 10/2/10

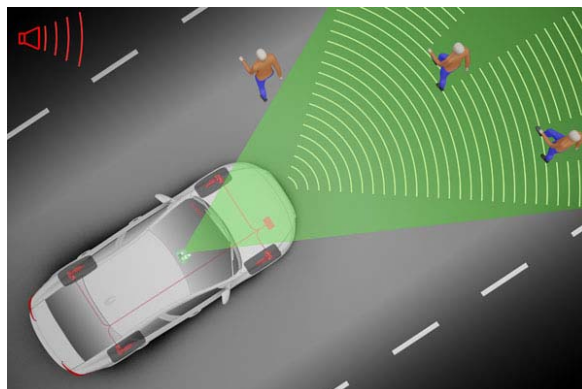
"I'm not sure we should be congratulating the state government for this, spending billions and none of it is on trains. New tunnels... no train lines... new roads, no train lines. Clog up the roads with ugly yellow busses! Move into the outer suburbs where the governments don't build infrastructure any more, and get a crappy bus to work."

Ref: 'Duncan', Brisbane Times, 11/2/10

The Car that Avoids Pedestrians

"The [Volvo] S60 will automatically brake to a standstill from a speed of up to 35km/h if the system detects the driver is not reacting to an imminent impact with a pedestrian. Volvo says Pedestrian Detection will also slow the car from higher speeds, claiming a reduction in speed from 50km/h to 25km/h can reduce the risk of fatality by up to 85%."

Ref: Jez Spinks, The Age, 9/2/10



Oil and War – The Falklands

When I was doing some research a year or so ago on the relationship between oil and war I was told that the Falklands War was really about oil, so it was interesting to see this article last week:

"The oil rig Ocean Guardian arrived in Falklands waters on Friday in defiance of the warnings from the Argentine authorities. Royal Navy ships have already been put on standby to protect commercial shipping after Argentina said all vessels passing through its waters would have to apply for a permit. The authorities stopped a shipment of pipes bound for the islands 10 days ago. ... The new threat came as Argentina accused Britain of raising the 'spectre of war' because British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said on Thursday 'all the preparations' had been made to ensure the Falklands were 'properly protected'."

Ref: Damien McElroy, SMH, 21/2/10

More on the Forth Ferry Proposal

"A new hovercraft or ferry service across the Forth could be operating within two years, says Fife's transport chair Tony Martin. His comments came after Stagecoach boss Brian Souter announced a £14 million joint venture with the world's leading hovercraft producer. The cross-Forth link could be a ferry, a hovercraft or both. That issue remains open but Mr Martin said: 'The hovercraft service seems to be Brian Souter's personal vision and so that may be a driving force'. More than 32,000 passengers took part in a trial operation in 2007 and Stagecoach estimates that the proposed service could attract 870,000 customers a year. Two hovercraft, each carrying up to 150 passengers, would provide crossings every 25 minutes at peak times and an hourly off-peak service. ... The crossings would be integrated with shuttle bus links from Portobello to Ocean Terminal and Waverley Bridge. ... James Gaggero, chairman of the Bland Group, said ... 'Our hovercraft have been sold to 39 countries across six continents whilst our fast frequent service between Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight serves more than 800,000 customers annually and is a tourist attraction in itself. Mr Martin said 'Fife Council has £1 million committed in its capital programme for a cross Forth ferry/hovercraft and we recently submitted a bid to Europe for a further funding contribution'."

Ref: Gary Fitzpatrick, Dunfermline Press, 26/11/09

Canadian Tar Sands Revolt

"Shell chief executive Peter Voser will be forced to defend the company's controversial investment in Canada's tar sands at his first annual general meeting, after calls from shareholders that the project be put under further scrutiny. A coalition of institutional investors has forced a resolution onto the agenda calling for the Anglo-Dutch group's audit committee to undertake a special review of the risks attached to the carbon-heavy oil production at Athabasca in Alberta. Co-operative Asset Management and 141 other institutional and individual shareholders raise 'concerns for the long-term success of the company arising from the risks associated with oil sands'. Shell, which will hold its AGM in May, has been one of the lead companies in moves to develop oil reserves that are either mined or sucked out of the ground using expensive and energy-intensive techniques. BP and Total of France are also engaged in the sector.

"Shell has insisted that 'unconventional' hydro-carbon sources such as tar sands are all justified to ensure that the world does not run out of oil too soon. But environmentalists have condemned their exploitation as 'the biggest environmental crime in history' and said it must be stopped before it tips the planet over into runaway climate change. ...

"Shell disputes the scale of the pollution but also says it will use carbon, capture and storage techniques to mitigate any negative impact. This argument has not stopped environmentalists – or shareholders – from opposing the plans. 'Given Shell's level of commitment to oil sands there is a greater obligation to shareholders to reassure how it would cope under a number of scenarios', said Niall O'Shea, head of responsible investing at Co-operative Asset Management. 'What if carbon capture and storage proves too costly in the oil sands? What if sustained high oil prices and carbon regulation lead to switching away from marginal, high-cost, high-carbon sources? And then there's the cost of cleaning up the locality. Companies must be more rigorous and transparent with their investors', he added."

Ref: Terry Macalister, The Guardian, 18/1/10



Canadian Tar Sands

Photograph: Jeff McIntosh/AP

US Demand for Canadian Tar Sands

"Tar sands are the symptom. The disease is addiction to automobiles combined with peak oil. Obama's hands are tied because in the US there is virtually no one with the ability to question the overwhelming and pervasive addiction to automobiles that grips this country. Most of my fellow Americans live in towns and cities that are only usable by car, and few people still alive here today have any personal memory of anything else. If you gave the typical American a choice of living the rest of his or her life without a car, or without legs, the latter option would actually have less impact on his or her mobility. There are other ways to get between couch and fridge.

"The US has 4.5% of the world's population burning 25% of the world's oil extraction. US oil extraction peaked in 1970 and has generally declined since, while US oil combustion has generally increased. Today the US imports over

65% of the oil it burns. The top three sources: Canada, Saudi Arabia, and Mexico. Mexico's oil extraction is currently in free-fall. Barring some miraculous new discovery, Mexico will soon stop exporting oil to El Norte and instead begin competing for oil from the dwindling list of countries which

are still net exporters. (Among the growing list of competitors: the United Kingdom, whose North Sea fields are also playing out.)

"How will the US make good the loss of Mexico's oil? The US is looking at a choice between importing more oil from Canada vs. the terrorist breeding ground of Saudi Arabia and other OPEC undesirables. Only a tiny number of countries have any possibility of increasing their oil exports over the next ten years. Canada is one, Iraq is another. It is hardly a coincidence that the US invaded Iraq and is now paying to demolish the Canadian wilderness. The average American is a gas-wasting dullard who behaves as if gasoline comes out of the pump by magic, but the people who run the country know better. Our leaders understand what it takes to supply the opiate of the people, and they understand if they fail to keep the devil's juice coming they'll be voted right out."

Ref: 'Teratornis', Readers' Comments, The Guardian, 18/1/10

Robert Moses on Cities (Part 2)

“Let me ask the Gamaliels [‘wise people’] of the city a few pointed questions. By what practical and acceptable means would they limit the growth of population? How would they reduce the output of cars, and if they could, what would take the place of the car as an employer of workers or as a means of transport in a motorized civilization? If more cars are inevitable, must there not be roads for them to run on? If so, they must be built somewhere, and built in accordance with modern design. Where? This is a motor age, and the motorcar spells mobility.

“Is the present distinction between parkways, landscaped limited-access expressways, boulevards, ordinary highways, and city streets unscientific? If so, what do the critics propose as a substitute? Is mass commuter railroad transportation the sole and entire answer to urban street congestion? Is conflict between rubber and rails in fact irrepressible? Are there not practical combinations of public, quasi-public, and private financing which can solve the riddle? And what of the people who prefer cars and car pools and find them more comfortable, faster, and even cheaper than rails?

“If a family likes present city life, should it be forced to live according to avant-garde architectural formulas? Do most professional planners in fact know what people think and want? The incredible affection of slum dwellers for the old neighbourhood and their stubborn unwillingness to move are the despair of experts.”

Ref: Robert Moses, *Are Cities Dead*, The Atlantic Monthly, January 1962

www.theatlantic.com/issues/62jan/0162moses.htm



“In the late 1950s Jane Jacobs campaigned successfully to stop Robert Moses’ plan to extend Fifth Avenue as a four-lane highway through the centre of Washington Square Park”

Photo: Michael Appleton, NY Times; Text: NYTimes

Robert Moses (Part 4)

“Moses and [Jane] Jacobs clashed during the 1950s and ‘60s over three of the huge public works projects Moses tried to force on Manhattan. It is hard even to list them now without cringing — or nearly weeping with gratitude that they never came to pass. There was his plan to build a four-lane highway through the middle of Washington Square Park. Another project would have razed 14 blocks in the heart of Greenwich Village under the guise of urban renewal. There was also a plan to plunge a 10-lane elevated superhighway, to be called the Lower Manhattan Expressway, through SoHo, Little Italy, Chinatown and the Lower East Side. Each of these projects is, from today’s vantage point, clearly insane; each would have had cataclysmic effects on the quality of life in Manhattan. But their flaws were less obvious to many at the time. It took an accidental activist, Jacobs, and her ability to marshal popular support and political will, to stop them.”

Ref: Dwight Garner, New York Times. 4/8/09

Robert Caro’s “1974 biography, ‘The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York’, documented many of what he regards as Moses’ transgressions, like acres of sterile public housing towers, parks and playgrounds for the rich and comfortable, and highways that sundered working-class neighbourhoods and dispossessed a quarter of a million people. ... That Moses was highhanded, racist and contemptuous of the poor draws no argument even from the most ardent revisionists. But his grand vision and iron will, they say, seeded New York with highways, parks, swimming pools and cultural halls, from the Belt Parkway to Lincoln Centre, and thus allowed the modern city to flower. ...

“Inevitably, power corrupts. Moses gouges highways through neighbourhoods, secures the loyalty of venal politicians and hoards bridge and tunnel receipts, starving subways and schools. His dreams grow gargantuan: He envisions a mammoth highway stretching from Staten Island through Brooklyn and Fire Island to Montauk Point. Two bridges would gird Long Island Sound, and a highway would slash into Greenwich Village. It was never enough. SoHo, TriBeCa and the meatpacking district are the city’s hottest neighbourhoods; Moses wanted to flatten them. Community opposition killed his final project, the \$1.7 billion superhighway proposal known as Westway. Opponents took the money and poured much of it into a transit system then near collapse.”

Ref: Michael Powell, New York Times. 6/5/07

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/06/nyregion/thecity/06hist.html?_r=1

Problems with Electric Vehicles

“After more than a century of technological innovation, the wheels of the car industry seem to be doing little more than turning full circle. At the beginning of the last century, petrol was the exciting new alternative fuel. As a budding car industry began to find its legs, only 20% of the vehicles registered in the US were powered by petrol. The most popular form of propulsion was steam power, followed by electric. Henry Ford's wife even drove an electric car. Women preferred them because you could start them with a push of a button rather than having to manually crank them into action.



Stanley Motor Carriage car, propelled by steam.

Photo: Paul Bradshaw

“The Baker Electric car was one of the most popular on the market and it could travel up to 80 kilometres on a single charge. Fast forward more than a century to the recent Frankfurt motor show where Toyota, the world leader in alternative fuel technology, revealed a plug-in version of its hybrid Prius that is able to travel just 20 kilometres on its electric motor. Late next year, General Motors will release a car that has an electric-only range of roughly 65 kilometres. Big deal. ...

“Internal combustion engines are, at their best, incredibly efficient ways of harnessing energy and turning it into forward motion. They thrived – and electric cars withered – because they were more efficient. While oil was plentiful and the earth was cooler, the logic of petrol power was indisputable. But that was then, this is now and circa-2009 the world's car makers are heading back to the future, tripping over each other to embrace electric vehicles.

“Problem is, the fundamental flaws that spelt the end of the electric car in the early 20th century still remain today. Remember General Motors' doomed electric car experiment in the 1990s?

“Despite the conspiracy theories, the car tanked because it cost a billion



The Baker electric car could travel up to 80 kilometres on a single charge.

Photo: Paul Bradshaw

dollars to develop and they could only lease 800 of them. It doesn't take an economics degree to work that one out. Two decades later, the frailties of the technology remain. Range is limited, development is prohibitively costly and, to make matters worse, many doubt whether plug-ins are any better for the environment than conventionally powered cars if

they're plugged into a grid powered by brown coal. There are also concerns that some of the precious metals in their batteries are in short supply and not the type of thing you'd want to see in your local landfill a few years down the track.

“Mitsubishi is planning to launch the first plug-in electric vehicle in Australia [this] year, but don't expect it to

rocket up the best-seller list any time soon. In Japan, the tiny city runabout sells for the equivalent of \$70,000, more than three times the price of a comparable petrol version. Electric vehicles are likely to stay prohibitively expensive for some time, leaving the internal combustion engine to reign supreme.

“Museum-goers 50 years from now may well look at today's Holden Commodore as a quaint reminder of the distant past, but even if everyone is driving around in electric vehicles by then, we'll only realistically be back to where we were in the 1900s. Imagine where they might be if we hadn't been distracted by the lure of internal combustion. For an industry that trades on mobility, the car industry seems to be moving pretty damn slow.”

Ref: Richard Blackburn, SMH. 16/12/09

“Unfortunately, the petrol engine as we now know it has about a 25-30% efficiency. The rest of the PE is lost in heat, friction, noise and driving internal and auxiliary devices. Electric motors tend to have 3x or higher efficiency, which means less power is wasted.”

Ref: Comments, SMH 17/12/09

“One of the reasons the Baker electric car did so well was that it was very light. Why do we need one

tonne vehicles to drive one person around town?” Ref: Comments, SMH 17/12/09

"Less than 20% of the energy in petrol pushes you forward. It also takes energy to drill for oil, refine it and transport it. ... Even if you're using brown coal, power stations are at least twice as efficient as internal combustion engines." **Ref: Comments, SMH 17/12/09**

"Had the car industry put a similar amount of R&D into electrical engines as it has into internal combustion engines, we'd be a whole lot further down the track. But no - oil was cheap and the cost of pollution was foisted on society at large. ... It took only a decade of more focussed development to make some big strides in battery and engine technology for electric cars."

Ref: Comments, SMH 17/12/09

"For moving people around the city, a car will never be efficient. It takes up much room both queuing in traffic and when parked. Government funding would be better spent on rail or buses, be they electric or diesel."

Ref: Comments, SMH 17/12/09

Eight Problems with Cars in the US

- 1. Traffic:** From 1950 to 1970, the U.S. automobile population grew four times faster than the human population. As a result, we Americans spent nearly 500,000 years stuck in traffic in 2007 - nearly 4.2 billion hours.
- 2. Cars Kill Children:** The leading cause of death for children aged 5 to 14 in New York City is pedestrian automobile accidents.
- 3. Cars Kill Animals:** Automobiles, SUVs, trucks, and other fossil fuel-burning vehicles kill a million wild animals per week in the U.S. - not counting tens of thousands of family pets.
- 4. Sprawl:** During the last century, an area equal to all the arable land in Ohio, Indiana, and Pennsylvania was paved in the U.S.
- 5. Waste:** Cars create 7 billion pounds of unrecycled scrap and waste annually and approximately one billion discarded tires are littering our increasingly paved landscape.
- 6. Global Warming:** More than 333 million tons of carbon dioxide are emitted by U.S. cars each year, - that's more than one-fifth of the nation's total carbon dioxide emissions.
- 7. Oil Consumption:** The U.S. consumes about 21 million barrels of oil per day. 10,000 gallons of gasoline are burned in the U.S. every second.
- 8. Car Wars:** During the 40 days of the (first) Gulf War, 146 Americans died keeping the world safe for petroleum while at home, 4900 Americans died in motor vehicle accidents.

Ref: Mickey Z, Planet Green, 26/8/09

Problems with Park'n'Ride

"Park and ride facilities are, by their very nature, staid, land-intensive, and devoid of any real activity for the majority of the day. They also tend to be focused solely on the car rather than the driver and produce poor quality pedestrian environments. These qualities are in direct conflict with TOD [Transit Orientated Development] principles and best practice urban design. In a recent paper I conclude that, in the long term, park and ride facilities should be limited, possibly only providing for persons with disabilities at stations that are, or should be, part of TODs. I also conclude that existing facilities should not be expanded at these locations and any replacement of parking should be in temporary locations that can be redeveloped in the future, or at key park and ride locations elsewhere on the network."

Ref: Garth Nolan, Urban Design Forum #88, December 2009

Interview with Oz Kayak (Part 14)

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:

SI: But the RACV has also been active in the promotion of new roads, and as we know, new roads means the generation of more traffic, more congestion. The worry is that the promotion of a bike-sharing scheme for Melbourne is just a smoke-screen, a bit of 'greenwash'.

OK: I know more than one person in the RACV, and they have their ear to the ground, and it's not an exercise in greenwash. I made reference earlier to Max Lay who was a major shaper in the state of Victoria on the responsible addressing of environmental issues. Max, amongst others, certainly knows that if you put an extra lane in, it's an extra 1,500 vehicles per hour – potentially – but that didn't stop the exploration of a 'greenish model'. I think that what both are poor on still, that is the RACV and VicRoads, is what's called 'social capital'. And I have not yet seen – it may exist and maybe somebody will respond to this article – an analysis that models in the sedentary behaviour and its impact, for the extra lane of traffic. They'll be modelling in the noise. They'll be modelling in the air pollution and a few other things, but I'd like to be aware that they have modelled in the negative impact of sedentary behaviour.

SI: They being...?

OK: In this case: VicRoads. I don't think it is the RACV's role as an advocacy group. {Cont. #145}

The Case for High Speed Rail (Part 2)

"The California line is on the short list of high speed rail priorities prepared by the America 2050 group, ranking it fifth nationally in terms of ridership demand behind four other lines for the Northeast. ...



High Speed Rail Phasing Map Ref: www.america2050.org

"[Building] America's high speed rail network will be expensive - about that, there is no disagreement. The \$8 billion appropriated for high speed rail in the stimulus plan was dwarfed by the \$103 billion in applications the FRA [Federal Railroad Administration] received for the funds, and is a small fraction of what the total network will cost. The California run alone will probably cost over \$40 billion to construct, and that's after the state's existing commitments to building support networks and light rail links. On the other hand, as the director of the BART light rail system pointed out this week in his testimony to San Francisco city supervisors with the city's Peak Oil Preparedness Task Force, the U.S. currently spends as much on parking as it does on national defence. ...

"The true costs of remaining committed to our current road and air infrastructure are never taken into full account. . . like the health care costs of polluted air; the cost of continuously maintaining roads, bridges and tunnels; the availability of materials (remember, several cities in America literally could not buy asphalt during the oil frenzy of last year, because refiners were cracking every last lighter molecule they could from the crude); the trillions of dollars we are spending on oil imports and defence operations in oil producing regions of the world; the billions' worth of damage that our current ways do to the

environment; the insurance costs of keeping up 240 million cars and light trucks; the damage and death that those millions of drivers cause; and so on, ad infinitum. Rail is cheaper, safer, and better on every single count. When the boundaries are properly defined, the entire transformation of transportation from liquid fuels to renewable electricity would create millions of permanent jobs, and could probably pay for itself. But the cost isn't really the point anyway.

"America still has no energy plan, let alone a plan to address the looming threat of peak oil. With the decline of global oil production starting around 2012 already 'baked in', due to a lack of sufficient oil megaprojects, we desperately need to start making tracks toward a high speed rail infrastructure. . . or face a painful future of fuel shortages and economic dislocation (at best). No part of our transportation system is as

vulnerable to volatile fuel prices as the airline industry. It was built on the expectation that oil would rarely cost more than \$40 a barrel, and it is completely dead if oil stays over \$100 a barrel. Last year's oil price spikes put many smaller carriers out of business and cost the major carriers billions. Then the operators who had the largest hedges against rising prices last year got whacked again as prices plummeted.

"For my money, the airline industry may as well be dead. Not just because of the damage that oil price volatility has done and will continue to do - and not just because the experience of air travel has become a painful routine of delays and personal insults - but because it's so inferior in every way to high speed rail travel for distances under 500 miles. The TGV line from Paris and Lyons virtually eliminated air travel between those cities, and the high speed line from Madrid to Barcelona cut air travel in half in the first year of its operation. ...

"The serious pursuit of high speed rail would also make a real and significant dent in CO2 emissions, and enable part of the urgent transformation we must accomplish from liquid fuels to renewably generated electricity. As Lord Andrew Adonis, Britain's transport secretary, put it in the SERA publication: 'High speed rail is now pretty well a no-brainer transport strategy for the 21st century'."

Ref: Chris Nelder, Green Chip Review, 19/10/09