

Black Holes and the Car Industry

"Ford's engine-making operations at Geelong in Victoria are in doubt as smaller more fuel-efficient cars become more popular. Ford is currently reviewing its operations at the Geelong plant, which makes six-cylinder engines. The company has not guaranteed the long-term future of the plant's 600 workers. Company spokeswoman Sinead McAlary says Ford will keep workers informed of any major changes to its operations. 'Consumers are looking for different types of vehicles, particularly looking at alternative fuel strategies,' she said."

Ref: ABC News 13/7/07

Well that last sentence comes as a complete surprise! It makes you wonder about the planning process in the car industry. Is anyone around that remembers a small oil crisis in the early 1970's? I would have thought that 35 years was long enough for the Australian car industry to plan for more sustainable vehicles. The Federal Industry Minister Ian Macfarlane said: *"The reality is that by lowering tariffs and providing the industry with \$7.3 billion worth of assistance, we have allowed that industry to become internationally competitive."* \$7.3 billion could have been useful in providing sustainable transport infrastructure. Meantime, in a country much closer to oilfields:

"Iran will stop producing purely petrol-driven cars and produce more dual-fuel vehicles, which also run on gas All vehicles produced from July 23 onwards would have dual-fuel facilities installed."

Ref: MX News 10/7/07

Malaysia

Recently I managed to explore part of Malaysia's railway system including the old KL Railway Station of Moorish design and the efficient new 'KL Sentral' [pictured below which also connects with the new elevated rail system. There was



significant new high-rise residential development all along my rail route into Kuala Lumpur but one concern was that it was set about a kilometre from the track rather than being centred on the rural railway stations.

Southern Cross Station

Southern Cross Station – Melbourne's country and interstate terminal - was awarded the Lubetkin Prize for the most outstanding building outside the European Union. According to Victorian Minister for Public Transport, Lynne Kosky: *"The facility incorporates all that is Melbourne – innovation, style and progress.... This transport hub is one of the most challenging architectural feats Australia has ever seen and it is satisfying to see Victoria leading the nation in the development of world class projects"*. (Ref: Media Release 23/6/07)

The complex is quite impressive, particularly in the way it can handle the crowds from the nearby stadium but if it *'incorporates all that is Melbourne – innovation, style and progress'* then we need to ask: What happened to the Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) aspects:

- Rainwater harvesting off the massive roof?
- Electricity harvesting using building integrated PV panels?
- Natural lighting?
- Active ventilation powered by PV panels?
- Hot water from solar thermal panels?

There is some provision for natural lighting but clearly insufficient as considerable artificial lighting is used even on bright sunny days. Note the natural light flooding into the Kuala Lumpur station [pictured below left]. One solution would have been to install building integrated photovoltaic (BIPV) panels in part of the roof. These allow a percentage of daylighting, while providing shading against the hot sun and also producing electricity which could help offset greenhouse gas production from mains electricity. The new New York Railway Station incorporated BIPV in the roof of their building¹. BIPV could have been used at Southern Cross to operate an active air extraction unit as air pollution from diesel is a continuing problem. These technologies are easy to incorporate² and it's a pity to have yet again another lost opportunity for maximising ESD in our buildings. Meantime, what happened to the nearby coach station [pictured right]? It's hard to imagine a drearier gate to Melbourne after a long bus trip.



¹ See

<http://www.schott.com/solarthermal/english/news/press.html?NID=1776&PHPSESSID=91>

² See Case Studies at www.goingsolar.com.au

Ferry Feedback

"...while an attractive concept, there are some difficulties with ferries – large subsidies, weather, transport to and from the landing points which can be an issue in themselves, the CBD as a destination is well up river with restrictive speed limits, low bridges and heavy container traffic, the riverbanks are very sensitive to erosion from wash. As other modes, ferries use fuel and pollute....Had Melbourne been developed with ferries as a primary mode, as possibly San Francisco and certainly Sydney has, then the settlement patterns and trip making would reflect that and there would be a latent demand. However in Melbourne's case it would be a real challenge to establish mass transit style patronage from a standing start when settlement patterns are not naturally supportive".

Susie Strain 12/7/07

"I know this important project will reach fruition and am looking forward to seeing the champagne break over the first vessel in the new environmentally-friendly fleet! It will be a great day for Melbourne and its transport and tourism operations".

Rachel Carlisle 10/5/07

Thanks for the feedback. It may be that ferries are not viable for Port Phillip Bay but I think that we would be remiss if we didn't have the debate. It would certainly be a lost opportunity for both improving public transit and enhancing tourism opportunities. To respond to Susie's points:

- Yes, substantial subsidies will be needed to establish a viable ferry network service, but it would be expected that running costs would be covered by patronage.
- Weather and landing points are issues but not insurmountable.
- It is not anticipated that the main Bay ferries would run up the Yarra – mainly due to the extra distance and issues with ships. Rather, Port Melbourne is a short land link from the CBD with an existing transit corridor.
- Alternative fuels will need to be investigated, eg: Clean diesel, Bio-diesel and CNG.
- On the last point, yes it is strange how we have ignored the Bay while developing almost all along the coastline. Is it ever too late to rethink how we connect our settlement patterns particularly in the light of Peak Oil? Ferries I suspect will become a supplementary service, strengthening and supporting our new and existing land services. They would certainly have been useful during the snap V/Line strike from Geelong on Saturday, July 14.

Car Pooling

The more effective use of motor vehicles is an important element of any integrated sustainable transport strategy. Most of the public dialogue about environmental transport solutions has focused on improving our public transport systems and the promotion of cycling and walking. It is, however, sensible and realistic to acknowledge that certain members of the public will not engage in these options as readily as others, for a variety of reasons. For example, it may not be practical for residents in the outer suburbs of Melbourne to commute by public transport to their workplace, where it would involve multiple modes and excessive travel times. One way of reducing the amount of single-occupant car trips for these commuters is to promote the use of car pooling - sharing a lift to work with other commuters who live and work near them. The key to successful car pooling is a widely promoted, on-line database on a highly-visited website. It is critical that the database has a strong concentration of people who live and work near each other to make the service attractive by providing a high probability of a practical match with like commuters.

A number of concerned individuals and budding entrepreneurs are making laudable efforts in this sphere. Examples include www.icarpool.com.au, www.ozcarpool.com.au & www.carfriends.com.au. However in the long term they are unlikely to result in a large uptake of car pooling, as they do not focus on a single area of geographic locality, and accordingly will not achieve a critical mass of participants. Presumably these providers may also lack capital to promote their respective websites on a widespread and ongoing basis.

In future editions of the *Transport Newsletter* we will explore alternative ways of encouraging car pooling on a significant and sustained basis. In the meantime, take a look at the websites above if you are a reluctant car commuter and would like to reduce your car trips.

Thanks to Darren McClelland for this item.

And Also...

Speaking of 'new New York', the Dr Who scriptwriters created a wonderful parody on motorways, where transit lanes are so congested that commuters are trapped for years in their vehicles, surrounded by dense smog. Actually, it sounds familiar.

Online: www.goingsolar.com.au/transport

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