

Major Cities Unit

“...The Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics has estimated that urban congestion alone will cost nearly \$20 billion by 2020 if we persist with current policies. What’s more, at least 1 in 10 working parents are estimated to spend longer in their cars commuting to and from work, than at home with their children. ... This disengagement cannot continue if we are serious about securing our national prosperity. That’s why I am pleased to announce the Government’s next step towards making sure Australia’s major cities remain places where people want to live, work, raise a family and do business. To this end, the Government will establish and resource a Major Cities Unit in my Department, renewing the Commonwealth’s focus on cities and, more broadly, on urban development. By major cities, I mean more than our eight capital cities. For example, critical regional centres like Townsville, Newcastle, the Gold Coast and Geelong have grown enormously. As these centres expand, they face many of the same infrastructure and planning challenges our capital cities have encountered. Currently our cities deal with a myriad of federal government departments which affect their economic, social, and environmental outcomes. A more coordinated and integrated approach is needed. The Major Cities Unit will do just that.” **Ref: Part of the speech by Anthony Albanese, Federal Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Leader of the House, 30/4/08**

“For too long, Australia has been amongst the only developed nations without a national plan for growth in our cities”, said IPA Chairman Mark Birrell. ... ‘Solving urban congestion is the most pressing issue facing Australia’s Governments. Congestion already costs Australia \$16 billion each year – or \$63 million each and every working day. Without significant investment in transport infrastructure, congestion in Australia’s cities will double by 2015.’ **Ref: Media Release, Infrastructure Partnerships Australia, 30/4/08**

“Australia’s peak building and construction industry association, Master Builders Australia, has strongly endorsed the Government’s decision to establish a Major Cities Unit to address the needs of Australia’s cities, saying that the initiative is long overdue. ‘Our major capital cities are crying out for efficient transport systems, water security, and the efficient provision and location of community services like schools, hospitals and childcare facilities’, said [Master Builders Australia CEO, Wilhelm] Harnisch.” **Ref: Media Release, MBA, 30/4/08**

“The announcement made yesterday by Minister Albanese of the development and implementation of a ‘Major Cities Unit’ which will renew the Commonwealth’s focus on cities and urban development is welcomed by the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA). Di Jay, PIA CEO said ... ‘With



the development of this Unit the Commonwealth now has the opportunity to foster integrated planning, housing, urban management and infrastructure investment systems to deliver sustainable communities across Australia’.” **Ref:**

Media Release, PIA, 1/5/08

Mum, there's a strange man at the door saying, "Bloody traffic!"

Transport & Renewable Energy

Comment: One of the issues in Victoria is that our trams and trains (and future) plug-in electric cars run on electricity produced from dirty brown coal. It was disappointing therefore to see the Victorian Government kill off a proposal for a gross feed-in tariff for solar electricity similar to the extremely successful models used in Germany, Spain and California. With its abundant sunshine, Australia’s photovoltaic industry could be leading the world. All of those warehouse roofs could be feeding power into the grid during the peak hours when energy is needed the most and this energy could help to run our transit systems. At the moment, just one tram runs from renewable energy.

The government’s excuse is that it does not want to raise electricity prices slightly but given the way we waste energy, it’s clear that for most, the price of electricity is much too low. As Professor Alan Pears points out: “I did some rough calculations for 10,000 homes and it seemed to have a negligible impact on electricity prices. Have these ‘feed-in sceptics’ actually estimated the impacts versus the industry development potential?” A PV industry would not just reduce greenhouse gases, but solar panels on north-facing roofs would help keep buildings cooler on hot summer days.

“It is not too late for the Victorian Government to go one better than South Australia and Queensland and introduce a world-class, progressive and effective feed-in tariff paid on the total generation from rooftop solar systems. Such a scheme would build a robust renewable energy industry in Victoria, fulfil the Government’s election commitment, and help households play their part in tackling the challenges of climate change.”

Ref: Brad Shone, The Age, 9/5/08

Victorian Budget

"... Green groups and public transport advocates are not ... impressed saying there is not enough investment in the future. ... 'No new trains, trams, tracks... Where are they? That's what we need', [Opposition leader Ted Baillieu] said. Daniel Bowen of the Public Transport Users Group agrees. 'Most people will continue to be dependent on cars even as we face chronic traffic congestion even as we face rising fuel prices,' he said."

Ref: ABC News, 6/5/08

While it is good to see some works on the rail network to provide capacity where overcrowded, and finally some attention to the South Morang extension, these projects fall far short of the scale of works required on the networks, particularly for rail and bus. If we follow the advice of the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability, Ian MacPhail, we need projects that reduce emissions, not increase them. This raises the issue of how to fund rail projects of the scale that Eddington proposes. Rising petrol prices and emission trading are only going to build public transport demand. To quote from the Metropolitan Transport Forum submission to the state budget: *"While the State Government has recognised the need to control emissions with a number of programs, they have so far been marginal. It is now time to centralise emission management in the budget and provide a framework and targets to direct transport investment and management. To do anything else is to isolate Victoria in a high emission dependent lifestyle which will fast become obsolete and costly."*

Ref: Susie Strain, MTF 7/5/08

Comment: The Victorian Government, at both the ministerial and departmental level is to be congratulated for all the efforts to improve public transport. It is clear however that much more has to be done – for reasons other than climate change – at a rate much faster than is on the current agenda. Add climate change into the mix, and you can only wonder at the procrastination.

The first thing that becomes apparent on the transport aspects of the Budget is the even neatness of the allocation: PT gets \$794.1m while Roads gets \$769.7m. (There is something parental about this – the naughty twin gets the same prize as the good twin.) \$32m in the PT budget is for car parking but this is really about roads rather than PT. In the media release for some reason this amount is tangled up with an upgrade to Noble Park Station. Budget Paper

Table B.1 indicates \$1.5m for this upgrade and \$26.9m for parking. The astute reader will note this does not add up to \$32m. I asked the department for clarification on this and other budget matters including:

- \$12m for Early Bird Tickets (this is to compensate Connex and others).
- \$24.8m to lease five trams for three years instead of buying five trams @ around \$5m each (ie \$25m) and keeping them for longer.
- \$10.4m for 'design works for the extension of the Epping line to South Morang'. Note that you don't actually get any track built or signals installed for the \$10.4m. I've asked for a breakdown of this figure. Table B.1 says \$4m in 08/09 and \$6.4m in 09/10. \$10.4m might be a perfectly reasonable figure but it would be good to know.

Perhaps the most questionable allocation is for the car parking. It could be between 10 and 40 years before the capital cost is recovered [See #55] and even worse if the cars that fill up the spaces take advantage of the Early Bird Tickets. For other reasons car parking at stations is questionable, but if you must have it, why not charge for it?

On the South Gippsland rail line it would be good to see a guarantee that that the corridor (all the way to Foster) will be preserved for future use.

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"It appears that the State Government has decided that they will close the South Gippsland railway beyond Cranbourne and remove the track between Cranbourne and Nyora. This information is contained in the 2008 State Budget papers. This line was to be re-opened as part of the election promises made when the Labor party depended upon the then independents in the parliament."

**Ref: John Frost, 7/5/08**

*"Despite the Government's expectation that growth would remain focused on Melbourne, and despite having just ditched a promise to restore passenger rail services to Leongatha, the [Vic] Treasurer went out of his way to paint the budget as friendly to regional areas. 'We believe regional Victoria is the beating heart of this state,' he said."* **Ref: Jason Dowling & Darren Gray, The Age 7/5/08**

## And Also ...

*"The Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry called yesterday's transport infrastructure announcements 'unglamorous', but said they might 'become more so in the future after the Government's response to the Eddington report'."* **Ref: Jason Dowling & Darren Gray, The Age 7/5/08** **Comment:** More so unglamorous?

## Problems with Ships

*"Emissions from ocean-going ships are believed to be responsible for some 60,000 deaths a year from heart and lung-related cancers, according to new research. The study, published in the journal Environmental Science and Technology and the journal of the American Chemical Society, has called for tougher that calls for tougher fuel standards. 'For a long time there's been this perception that ship emissions are out there in the ocean and they don't really affect anyone on land and I think this study shows that this is clearly false,' says David Marshall, senior counsel at the Boston-based Clean Air Task Force, which co-commissioned the study. 'They do matter and they do need to be controlled.' Shanghai, Singapore and Hong Kong, three of the world's five busiest ports, are likely to suffer disproportionate impacts from ship-related emissions, the researchers say. Currently, sulphur emissions from international shipping represent about 8% of sulphur emissions from all fossil fuels. Most ships run on bunker fuel, which is cheaper than distillate, but more polluting. Scientists believe it is also getting dirtier over time as distillate fuels become cleaner, as the sulphur driven out of distillates ends up in the residuals used by ships."*

**Ref: Sky News Online 6/5/08**

## Pearls-on-a-String in the UK

*"Today, the 'sustainable urban extension' is an important element in a portfolio of solutions to the problem of meeting the need for housing and related development. Both new settlements and urban extensions provide opportunities for concentrated rather than sprawling development. ... Without doubt, new settlements and urban extensions have played a major role in providing solutions to housing shortages, but lessons from the past must be learned and implemented if we are to provide liveable, viable and sustainable communities today. ... we can now conceive of the cluster of linked new settlements as a new and appropriate form of the new town model. ... It hardly needs stating that excellent public transport is essential to the operation of a networked cluster."* **Ref: Best Practice in Urban Extensions and New Settlements TCPA, March 2007** [www.tcpa.org.uk](http://www.tcpa.org.uk)

## And Also ...

*"Many fund managers will simply invest your money in the biggest companies. Of the world's 12 biggest, 6 sell oil and 4 sell cars. What'll happen to your money as oil runs out?"* **Ref: Austethical ad in VNPA Park Watch March 08**

## MOSES

*"The 'motorways of the sea' concept aims at introducing new maritime-based logistics chains in Europe, which should bring about a structural change in the organisation of European freight transport, creating more sustainable and more commercially efficient chains than road-only transport. Fuller use will have to be made not only of European maritime transport resources, but also of the potential in rail and inland waterway. The MOSES project ('Motorway of the sea European style') is developing a new intermodal approach."*

### More information:

[http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=FP6\\_PROJ&ACTION=D&DOC=19&CAT=PROJ&QUERY=1204198906461&RCN=85688](http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=FP6_PROJ&ACTION=D&DOC=19&CAT=PROJ&QUERY=1204198906461&RCN=85688) **Thanks to Ferne Edwards for this item.**

## Biogas Train in Sweden

*On a train in Sweden "modern gas engines with catalysers have replaced both of the diesel engines. In one fell swoop, the train's environmental performance has changed dramatically for the better. The train adds no carbon dioxide to the atmosphere and biogas is a renewable fuel source. One other advantage is the fact that biogas is produced locally. In short – low emissions, renewable fuel source and locally produced. It is a cost effective, environmental alternative to electrifying lower volume rail services. Besides the engine switch, the train has been completely made over. We have equipped the railcar with a large flat screen, mobile phone signal amplifier, power points for laptop computers, a hot drinks vending machine, and improved ventilation – everything to make the train journey more enjoyable. Biogas is formed by the decomposition of micro-bacteria in organic material in an oxygen-free environment, a natural process that occurs in swamps, and marshes, for example. In biogas plants, this takes place under controlled conditions in a digestion chamber. The gases formed in this process, mostly methane and carbon dioxide are collected. For use as an engine fuel, the methane content has to be boosted to around 97 %, which is done by removing most of the carbon dioxide."* **Ref: Svensk Biogas**



[http://www.svenskbiogas.se/sb/docs/english/Biogastrain\\_produkblad\\_2005.pdf](http://www.svenskbiogas.se/sb/docs/english/Biogastrain_produkblad_2005.pdf)

## Problems with Cars

*“According to recent research from the [Victorian] Department of Infrastructure, cars in Melbourne produce an average of around 210 grams of carbon dioxide per passenger /km, compared with 160 grams for trams. In peak periods, cars operate less efficiently, whereas a full tram produces only 120 grams of carbon dioxide per passenger km – about half the rate of cars. In off-peak periods, when there is available capacity on tram services, people who decide to leave their car at home and catch the tram are effectively saving 100% of their transport emissions. On average, then, taking into account available capacity in off-peak periods, car users can save around 75% of their emissions by switching to tram travel. Another interesting fact: a car driver who undertakes a 30km round trip every working day can save 1500 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year by switching to public transport. That is 30,000 black balloons.”*

**Ref: Yarra Trams Information Sheet 25/3/08**

*“Climate change, peak oil, mounting traffic congestion and planning inertia have given Melbourne a transport headache. For half a century, we have hitched our hopes to an impossible dream — the dream of automobility. The freedom to drive when, where and as often as we like has become almost a sacred right. Now our dream has become a nightmare. As petrol prices rise and the environmental costs of maintaining a car-based city hit home, we may wonder how we got ourselves into this jam. And whether we can get out of it.”*

**Ref: Graeme Davison. The Age, 30/3/08**

*“Car engines convert 15% of the energy available in their petrol to motion. The rest is heat, which is part of the reason cities are warmer than the countryside. Few want to ride engines. Engines push cars and together they are some 15 times heavier than drivers; so only one part of that 15% moves the driver; 14 move the car. Beyond that, energy is the energy required to make, maintain and dismantle cars after their dash is done. Still further is the energy to make the infrastructures cars drive in, and to repair the damage they cause us and to the environment. So, for urban commuting, the energetics of the car are very poor. And still we drive. A similar calculus can be used for the time taken to travel by car. Including the time taken to earn the money to buy, register, insure, maintain, recycle and make good the damage it causes and then dividing this into the number of kilometres actually driven annually, an average speed less than crawling speed is attained. How*

*/why do we overlook these contradictions? And, in the light of other options such as commuting by bicycle and train (bike-rail), which is faster, cheaper, healthier and environmentally sounder, why, still, do we persist?*

*“We persist because the contradictions are invisible. Nothing in our schooling or in our public education (advertising, government publications, media) offers us the intellectual lenses that would enable us to look at what we do in terms of its wider contexts. ... Consider the urban commuter car or DODO (Driver Only Driver Owned car). The first DO comes about because we are relatively wealthy and expect that having our car beside us gives us flexibility, security and comfort. All three of these are narrowly determined. There is no recognition of the comfort to be gained from the fitness that walking or cycling delivers. ... The second DO refers to the idea that access to a car is best when it is part of us, wholly owned! Once acquired and maintained like that, we would be mad not to use it, fuel being a relatively minor cost. So car ownership militates against using other means of transport.”*

**Ref: Frank Fisher. The Age, 30/3/08**

## And Also ...

*“Our anxiety about rising petrol prices does not stop us from buying top-of-the-range four-wheel-drive vehicles.”* **Ref: Julian Lee, The Age. 19/1/08**

*“Pollution from transport increased by 29.9% in Victoria between 1990 & 2005”.*

**The Age, 3/4/08**



## NSW Transport Police Blitz

*“A police blitz on Sydney trains, buses and ferries has paid dividends, the NSW government says, with the operation netting 220 arrests for crimes such as robbery, assault and malicious damage. Operation Vision 2 was launched on November 4 to target transport trouble spots, with extra police and transport officers deployed across Sydney’s ferry, bus and train networks. NSW Police Minister David Campbell praised the operation, which ended on Sunday, saying the six-week blitz led to 220 arrests, 182 court attendance notices, and 5,773 infringement notices. More than 1,130 searches were also conducted, and 20 weapons seized, he said. ‘Over six weeks officers patrolled 9,210 trains, 2,395 buses and 343 ferries’, Mr Campbell said. ‘High visibility policing sends a strong message to criminals that anyone looking to cause trouble will be caught’.”*

**Ref: AAP The Age, 18/12/07**