

Biofuels and Food

"Biofuels have forced global food prices up by 75 per cent – far more than previously estimated – according to a confidential World Bank report published in a British newspaper today. The assessment is based on a detailed analysis by Don Mitchell, an internationally respected economist at the global financial body, the Guardian said. The figure contradicts US Government estimates that plant-derived fuels have contributed less than 3 per cent to food-price increases, the newspaper said. It will add to pressure on governments in Washington and Europe, which have turned to biofuels to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and reduce their dependence on imported oil. The Guardian said senior development sources believed the report, completed in April, had not been published to avoid embarrassing President George W Bush. 'It would put the World Bank in a political hot-spot with the White House', said one source.

"Leaders of the G8 leading industrial countries meet next week in Japan,

where they will discuss the food crisis and come under intense lobbying from campaigners calling for a moratorium on the use of plant-derived fuels. Rising food prices have pushed 100 million people worldwide below the poverty line, according to the World Bank, and have sparked riots from Bangladesh to Egypt. Mr Bush has linked higher food prices to higher demand from India and China, but the World Bank study said: 'Rapid income growth in developing countries has not led to large increases in global grain consumption and was not a major factor responsible for the large price increases'.

"Even successive droughts in Australia have had a marginal impact. Instead, the report said the EU and US drive for biofuels has had the biggest impact on food supply and prices. 'Without the increase in biofuels, global wheat and maize stocks would not have declined appreciably and price increases due to other factors would have been moderate', the report said. ... It said production of biofuels had distorted food markets by diverting grain away from food for fuel, by encouraging farmers to set land aside for biofuels and by sparking speculation in grains, driving prices up higher."

Ref: News.com.au 4/7/08



Dammit, Tex! Tell them to eat yellowcake!

Federal Funding of Public Transport

"[Australian] Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has hinted at a new frontier for tackling climate change: a national overhaul of public transport. The introduction of emissions trading is dominating the climate change debate, with a major report ... handed down by government adviser Ross Garnaut on Friday. But Mr Rudd told reporters in Melbourne he also had other fish to fry on global warming policy. He said it was 'time to act' on public transport, and signalled the federal government would get involved. 'Ask yourself this question, how much do people waste each week sitting in unnecessary traffic queues?' he said. 'And how much ... do they put into the environment in terms of greenhouse gas emissions because we have yet to evolve a large, long-term investment into urban public transport systems, with the national government playing its role as well. I think it is time to act'. Mr Rudd also said he would take action on energy efficiency and alternative fuels."

Ref: The Australian, 1/7/08

Electric Cars in Paris

"First came self-service bicycles. Now Paris is to provide electric cars that

drivers can pick up and drop off anywhere in the city. Mayor Bertrand Delanoë has announced that, from the end of next year, 4000 electric cars will be placed around Paris and its outskirts for drivers in the scheme to help themselves for short journeys. ... In less than a year, Paris' army of cheap, on-street hire-bicycles, called Velib, has transformed transport habits. The company behind that scheme, JCDecaux, has had talks with the City of Melbourne to launch a similar scheme in Australia. The fleet of carbon-neutral hire cars, called Autolib, is the Socialist Mayor's next phase in green transport. Paris city hall said 700 Autolib pick-up points would be set up, including 200 underground. Recharging points would be scattered across Paris. 'There will be a computerised system which allows you as soon as you collect the car to announce where you'll drop it off, so there will be a parking space available', Mr Delanoë said. It would operate much like the Velib bike scheme. Users would take out an annual subscription or be able to approach a hire point on the spur of the moment or perhaps pay by using their public transport pass. One target group is young couples with children who occasionally need a car but cannot afford to run their own."

Ref: Angelique Chrisafis, The Age, 21/6/08

Increased Train Use in the UK

"Motoring organisation the AA found that more than a third of 17,500 surveyed members had made a decision to start leaving their cars at home. Many of these, it appears, are getting on the train instead - with passenger numbers up by 40% in the last decade. More people are now travelling by train than at any other time since 1946. Four in five are satisfied with the service, according to one survey, but lack of speed, overcrowding and difficulties for those not on mainline routes are regular gripes during discussions led by local authorities. Numbers are expected to grow by another 30% in the next 10 years, but people are going to have to pay more for the privilege."

Ref: Kevin Peachey, BBC News, 26/6/08

KiwiRail

"Former [NZ] Prime Minister Jim Bolger will head KiwiRail, the country's renationalised rail network. The Government took ownership of the rail and ferry assets at midnight. ... In May, the Government and Toll announced a heads of agreement for the Government to buy Toll's rail and ferry assets for \$665 million. There was another \$25m of associated costs. 'By bringing our rail system back into public ownership - following the buyback of the tracks four years ago - we will spare future generations from subsidising a private rail operator and will be able to create an integrated, sustainable transport system', [Finance Minister Michael] Cullen said. ... 'We will now be able to make the investments necessary to develop a world-class 21st century rail system for New Zealanders'. He said potential reconfigurations in Auckland and Wellington would see changes to maintenance and storage to cope with more stock for metro areas. Dr Cullen said Toll Holdings had worked to turn the company around in recent years. 'But in the end all have acknowledged that it is not possible to run an effective rail network in New Zealand without significant financial support from the New Zealand tax payer', he said."

"Prime Minister Helen Clark said government ownership would allow it to make strategic decisions and investments to help rail make New Zealand more sustainable. 'One locomotive can pull the equivalent freight of 65 trucks', she said. The Prime Minister said by 2040 the Government hoped that total freight transport movements would more than double. 'We are looking to rail - and to coastal shipping which is also fuel efficient - to carry a lot of that extra load', Helen Clark said."

Ref: The New Zealand Herald, 1/7/08

ACT Buses

"Chief Minister Jon Stanhope says the ACT Government might consider making bus travel free in Canberra if patronage of the service does not dramatically improve. Mr Stanhope says the Government considered fully subsidising the ACTION bus service in the past but the idea was rejected because of repeated advice showing price was not the main reason for low patronage of the service. He says that is why the Government has upgraded the network to improve quality and convenience. Mr Stanhope says the idea of free public transport may be worth revisiting. 'If we cannot dramatically increase patronage on our public transport, particularly in the face of climate change and having regard to the price of petrol, then I think we do have to think more laterally than perhaps we have', he said."

"Greens MLA Deb Foskey says making the service free will not be enough to get people out of their cars. She says the Government first needs to improve the bus service 'We've got to make it more efficient more reliable and more frequent', she said. 'That should be the Government's goal. Just making it free isn't a strategic enough approach to finding out about what to do to get people out of their cars and on to buses'. Dr Foskey says free bus days would also help raise awareness of the service. 'I'd like to see a 'free bus day' combined with a 'leave your car at home day' that would be used to raise awareness about how the use of transport contributes to our climate change problem and how people can save money and still live convenient lives by using our buses', she said. The Transport Workers Union says Government needs to increase the number of buses and routes."

"Union President Klaus Pinkas says it would support any move to increase the use of the service. 'People only catch a bus because they need to and they will only catch a bus if it is going where they want and when they want', he said. 'So that's more important to get the actual timetable running, rather than a cost factor'."

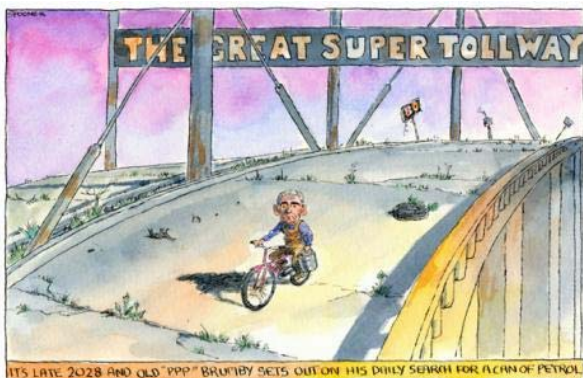
Ref: ABC News 4/7/08



A lonely bus stop close to the heart of Canberra. No shelter or timetable but an interesting seat.

Picture:
September 2006

Climate Change & Peak Oil



Cartoon Ref: Spooner's View, The Age 25/2/08
Text: "It's late 2028 and the old 'P.P.P.' Brumby sets out on his daily search for a can of petrol'."

"To put it brutally, if climate change is to be addressed so that climate catastrophe is avoided, the freeways recently built and those being planned by the Department of Infrastructure will become stranded assets well before the end of their life. In Melbourne, since the election of the Bracks/Brumby Government in 1999, about \$5 billion has been spent on freeways compared with about \$200 million on urban rail transport. Over the same time, the Government has backed away from about a billion dollars' worth of rail commitments: the South Morang extension, lines to Rowville via Monash, Melbourne Airport and Doncaster and electrification of the line to Melton."

Ref: Kenneth Davidson. The Age 25/2/08

Eddington Road Tunnel

The Melbourne City Council

"1.1. oppose the Eddington East West Road Tunnel and the use or reduction of any parkland and disruption to the community;

1.2. oppose the use of parks for any works associated with an East West Road Tunnel;

1.3. provide in principle support for the development of a sustainable transport infrastructure to reduce congestion across Eastern and Western Melbourne ...

1.4. note the redrafted submission to the EWLNA reflecting this change along with the prioritisation of all public transport initiatives including a higher priority for the Doncaster Rail ...

1.5. request a further report to the Planning Committee on redrafting its Transport Policy to reflect these changes;

1.6. state its strongest possible objection to any use of Holland Park or Royal Park or any other Park for the purposes of any road works or associated activities;

1.7. that Council call on the State Government to adequately fund public transport as an alternative transport solution to overcome the congestion on our road network; ..."

Ref: Melbourne City Council Minutes 24/6/08 and confirmed 29/6/08
Note that Lord Mayor John So voted for the above motion in contrast to the item in The Age (10/6/08) reported in Newsletter #66

"Kensington residents have welcomed Melbourne Council's decision not to support the east-west road tunnel proposed in the Eddington report. Kensington Association chairman Richard Reilly said Melbourne Council's decision on Tuesday night was a 'tremendous result for Melbourne residents'. 'The council has listened to the residents and demonstrated real leadership,' Mr Reilly said. ... Acting Lord Mayor Gary Singer said Melbourne Council acknowledged there was a significant problem with traffic using local streets to access other parts of the city. 'The council does not believe that the construction of a road tunnel to act as a city bypass, as proposed in the Eddington report, is an appropriate solution', Cr Singer said. 'We will continue to liaise with the State Government over the coming months to discuss the impact of the recommendations on the municipality'. Moonee Valley councillor Rose Iser said Flemington and Travancore residents should follow the Kensington Association's lead and voice their concerns about the proposed tunnel. 'The proposed tunnel will have a substantial impact on the area as it connects with CityLink', Cr Iser said. 'The State Government is contemplating spending billions of dollars on one road in the hope of easing congestion while keeping people in their cars, yet we are facing a public transport crisis that needs urgent funding', she said." **Ref: Cathy Nilbett, Moonee Valley Leader, 25/6/08**

"Yarra Campaign Against the Tunnel (YCAT) is a recently formed community coalition of individuals & local groups concerned about the massive impact in the Yarra area of the proposed road tunnel linking the Eastern Freeway to Melbourne's west. YCAT will also link up with the other community groups fighting the plan especially on the other side of town in Melbourne's west. It will also link up with public transport and environment groups. In times of rising fuel prices, oil supply issues, health concerns about air pollution and global warming, it seems to be bordering on an obscenity that Victoria's elected state government is prepared to listen to private enterprise rather than the real concerns of local communities. It is clear that there is a lot of community anger at the proposal in the Eddington Study." **Ref: Email 4/7/08 More Information: <http://www.ycat.org.au/>**

Congestion Charging in NSW

"The Europeans do it, the experts recommend it, and now the Herald's readers enthusiastically support a congestion tax to reduce the peak hour crush on Sydney's fragile road network. The problem, of course, is that our politicians hate it. ... But in a poll conducted by the Herald of 1609 readers, 37 per cent of respondents said they were in favour of 'a congestion tax to help reduce traffic in the centre of Sydney'. Another 32 per cent said they also supported it, 'but only to a point', while 28 per cent said no to the concept. ... By 2013, the number of car trips in Sydney in the morning peak is expected to hit 250,000, up from about 167,000 today.

"Congestion charging is widely recognised as an effective strategy in tackling worsening traffic, and is already in place in London and Stockholm. This month, the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal urged the NSW Government to adjust its vehicle taxation regime to include distances travelled by vehicles, and consider the anti-congestion measure in Sydney. The tribunal said drivers did not bear all the costs that are involved in their use of the cars, including road maintenance and the contribution of vehicle emissions to global warming."

Ref: Linton Besser, SMH, 27/6/08

And Also ...

"Prince Charles' Aston Martin is not only a vintage car, it's now running on vintage too. A nice white from a Wiltshire vineyard, to be precise. As part of cutting his carbon footprint, the prince has converted the 38-year-old classic car ... to run on 100 per cent bioethanol fuel distilled from surplus British wine. The Highgrove-based Aston Martin DB6, which clocks up just 480km a year - averaging about 4km a litre, or 4.5 bottles of wine for every mile. At over \$2 a litre, the bioethanol is only slightly cheaper than conventional petrol in Britain, but produces 85 per cent less carbon dioxide. The grapes used for the prince's fuel have been fermented into wine on an English vineyard near Swindon, Wiltshire. Its owners bottle all they can, but cannot produce more than their European Union quota. Rather than destroy the excess, the vineyard sells it to the ... biofuels supplier Green Fuels, where it is distilled."

Ref: Herald Sun, 2/7/08

"In a recent survey of passenger satisfaction, Heathrow, which processes nearly 70 million passengers a year, came an ignominious 56th out of 58 international airports."

Ref: Max Davison, Telegraph (UK), 14/6/08

Sending the Wrong Signals

"Sydney Olympic Park, once lauded as the site of the 'Green Games', could be transformed into a giant racetrack by the end of the year after the State Government gave in-principle support to a car race that could cost taxpayers \$30 million and involve pulling up hundreds of trees and kilometres of tarmac. After years of rejecting similar events, the Premier is supporting a proposal being pushed by the State Development Minister, Ian Macdonald, for a V8 Supercar race to be held at the park once a year for the next five years. The Government is considering it seriously, despite unanimous opposition from the board of the Sydney Olympic Park Authority, chaired by the former Olympics minister Michael Knight."

Ref: Wendy Frew, SMH, 3/7/08

Saved by the Bell

"Melbourne might have the race that stops a nation but Sydney has the frog that stops almost everything. The future of V8 Supercar racing in Sydney is being held to ransom by the green and golden bell frog, cementing its place as the nation's most powerful amphibian. Environmental groups have raised concerns of the effects of the proposed championship event at Olympic Park on the endangered frog."

Ref: Joe Hildebrand, Daily Telegraph, 4/7/08

**Green & Golden
Bell Frog,
Litoria aurea
Photo: Pavel German**



"It was listed as endangered under the New South Wales Threatened Species Act and is classified as vulnerable nationally. ... The Green and Golden Bell Frog has a distinctive three-part call that sounds a bit like a motor bike changing gears."

Ref: Australian Museum www.faanet.gov.au

Correction

In #65 we printed an item from Stateline Victoria ABCTV (22/2/08) with the sentence: *"The last new train line built here was the Glen Waverley Line in the 1930s."*

Dave Moyle has pointed out that there was the:

- Ashburton to Alamein in 1948 and the
- Upper Ferntree Gully to Belgrave in 1963

Footnote

Going Solar was profiled on ABCTV *Inside Business* with Alan Kohler on Sunday July 6.

The transcript is available at:

<http://www.abc.net.au/insidebusiness/content/2007/s2295709.htm>