

The Missing Link

“John Brumby and Rod Eddington, would you just abandon these fossilised ideas of cutting yet more freeways through environmentally sensitive areas? Freeways are no solution to our transport crisis, nor will they do anything for our liveability status. There are enough ‘missing links’ in Melbourne’s train network to contend with. The suburbs between the Hurstbridge and Belgrave lines spring to mind. Melbourne needs trains, not roads; sustainable public transport, not more congestion and pollution. Why can’t we have a government that is with the times?”

Elizabeth Howles, The Age, 10/7/08

“New roads might be a win for some of the big firms contributing to ALP coffers. For Melbourne’s citizens they can only mean ongoing car-dependency, spiralling emissions and endless gridlock. Until, of course, the oil runs out. Then who’s going to drive on them? Proper, European-style public transport would get many more people out of cars, and free up existing road space for those who really do have to drive. Mr Brumby should spend less time talking to the RACV and other road lobbyists, and more time talking to impartial transport experts, who all warn that cities without strong public transport face an uncertain future. He should study new public transport investments in Perth, Delhi, Beijing and elsewhere. Then he should scratch new road plans and get cracking on the long-promised, never-delivered rail lines to South Morang, Doncaster and Rowville.”

Alison Clarke, The Age, 9/7/08

“VicRoads never gives up. The new orbital freeway plan again highlights the road-dominated thinking that pervades transport planning in this state. This plan has been on VicRoads’ books for years and is trotted out whenever there is a transport crisis. Now that EastLink has been opened, the ‘missing link’ is getting smaller and more tempting. Thankfully no government has been irresponsible enough to commit to it — yet.”

John Kirk, The Age, 9/7/08

“The onus is on the [Victorian] Brumby Government to end Melburnians’ love affair with their cars by investing in large public transport projects. That’s the view of international transport

expert Sir Rod Eddington in a recorded chat with Premier John Brumby, posted online today. The Government’s challenge was to balance the demand for cars with a push for better public transport, Sir Rod said. Any decision would come at a cost, he said. ‘There’s an opportunity now to put in place infrastructure, which children will be the beneficiaries of, albeit that we’ll have to accept some short- and medium-term disruption while it’s being put in place’, he said.”

Ref: Geraldine Mitchell, Herald Sun, 8/7/08

“The missing link in Melbourne’s freeway system? I saw him last week: some Neanderthal in a Hummer straddling two lanes down Eastlink”.

Ref: James Damman, The Age, 12/7/08



‘We’re running the Rolls on Chanel No.5. So much cheaper!’

Electric Vehicles in Portugal

“Portugal will unveil details ... of a partnership with Renault and Nissan to create a national network for zero-emission electric cars produced by the Franco-Japanese alliance. ... Portugal follows Israel and Denmark in agreeing on similar plans to create a market for electric vehicles.” **Ref: Peter Wise, Financial Times, Ninemsn 8/7/08**

Ride2School – The Time is Now

“Riding and walking to school is an idea whose time has come. Schools promote it, parents support it and students love it. Ride2School builds on this momentum to get more young people walking and riding more often. Australian children lead increasingly sedentary lifestyles. How they get to school provides a good example.

“In the 1970s and 80s around 80% of children walked and rode to school. Today the state average is 20% of children who get themselves to school. Participating schools in the Ride2School program are averaging 45% of their students walking and riding. More and more schools are becoming involved – 41% of Victorian schools are registered with Ride2School. There are so many benefits to walking and riding to school – it’s good for students’ health, good for the environment and good for the family budget too. Local governments find Ride2School a successful strategy in reducing traffic congestion around schools and throughout the morning peak. Check out the Ride2School [‘Nifty Numbers’](#) for the program, and help to make walking and riding to school normal for this generation, and the ones to come.” **Thanks to Meeghan Auhl, Bicycle Victoria, for this item**

Petrol Pricing

Malaysia has raised the price of petrol by 40%. *"For all its pretensions that it is 'uniquely Asia', Malaysia is beginning to look more like a piece of middle America. It is now home to sprawling suburbs populated by people who travel by car to and from air-conditioned shopping centres stocked with goods from China and the West. Traffic jams are legendary, air quality is falling and the people are growing fatter. Cheap, subsidised petrol is a factor. Embryonic public transport doesn't help, but then it is little wonder that public transport is relatively poor. Malaysians don't want to pay for that either. Bus fares in Malaysia are incredibly cheap and each time there is an increase in fares, there is a public outcry.*

"Of course, one thing the Malaysian Government should now do with the billions it will save on a reduced subsidy is to improve public transport infrastructure. Without the increase in the fuel price, the total cost of the Government's fuel subsidies this year would have been in excess of \$US17 billion (\$A17.8 billion). That's more than four times what the Government spends annually on education, health care and defence. This ridiculous state of affairs has meant that, essentially, Malaysian children have to be poorly educated so that their parents can drive around in big cars. ...

"Rising demand for oil in Asia is the main reason world oil prices have gone through the roof. And much of this derives from the fact that, like the Malaysian Government, many Asian governments keep energy prices artificially low. Asian consumers and businesses have decided what sort of cars and plant and equipment to acquire based on these false prices. ...

"Price controls also distort incentives. Malaysia and Indonesia have big reserves of natural gas. As many vehicles as possible in both these countries should be converted to LNG, but the incentive is much reduced when petrol prices are kept artificially low."

Ref: Michael Backman, The Age, 2/7/08

"Federal Opposition Leader Brendan Nelson has dismissed suggestions that not including petrol in [an Australian] trading emissions scheme, would send the wrong signal. Economist Professor Ross Garnaut has recommended that transport fuels be included in any emissions trading scheme that the Federal Government adopts."

Ref: ABC News 5/7/08

"Is anyone else feeling that the bigger things get, the more soulless they are becoming? McMansions furnishing each newborn with their own room and ensuite. People-movers providing every passenger with their own seat and personal air-conditioning settings. ... I'm glad the price of petrol is going up and the price of food is rising. It's the only way that we're going to stop, look around and realise what things are really costing us."

Ref: Catherine Deveny, The Age, 9/7/08

Postal Freight

"The international freight industry will face increasing pressure to cut back on flights and revert to sea and rail deliveries because of environmental concerns, the head of Australia Post predicts. Australia Post's managing director, Graeme John, who will be chairman of an annual meeting this week in Queensland of nine of the world's biggest postal groups, said the problem of global warming would have an increasing influence on the way the global postal industry is run. 'One of the challenges in international logistics is going to be greenhouse [emissions]', he said. Mr John said growth in international freight from consumer goods such as electronics had been managed on a 'just in time' basis, with air travel preferred to other forms of transport because of its speed advantage. But that approach was no longer viable."

Ref: Jesse Hogan, SMH, 7/7/08

Feedback

"It was with some interest I read the correction re building of rail lines seeing Upper Ferntree Gully to Belgrave being cited. That line was built in 1901 as a narrow gauge line and in fact went through to Gembrook and was serviced by what is now known as Puffing Billy, perhaps the broad gauge was installed in 1963 but the line well and truly existed long before then!"

Cr Samantha Dunn, Shire of Yarra Ranges, 8/7/08

"On the topic of UK changing to trains and Spain using trains more, see the attitude change of Japan after the 1970's oil crisis where they had a campaign to reduce energy. If one tries to find the route via Google maps in Japan it gives you a train/bus route whereas here in Australia it chooses major Highway!"

Paul, 8/7/08

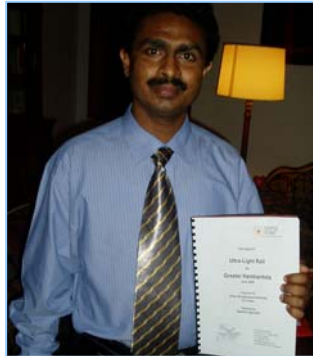
"Having just now come back from Europe, I can confirm that the Germans have indeed started to slow down on their autobahns - not sure whether it's due to their environmental consciousness or the damage the 240kph currently does to their wallets ..."

Eva Oberender, 10/7/08

Ultra Light Rail - Report for Sri Lanka

In 2007 I visited Sri Lanka and met with M.L. Mohamed Yehiya, the Assistant Director of the Urban Development Authority in Hambantota on the far south coast of the island. On December 26, 2004, Hambantota was severely damaged by a tsunami, and the short term solution was to relocate the residents a few kilometres inland. Presently, much grander plans are in preparation to develop the region into a second capital, with the extension of the heavy rail and the creation of a seaport and international airport. Greater Hambantota is being planned for a population of around three million people.

Sri Lanka is particularly dependent on imported oil and dirty, noisy and crowded buses. A cursory glance at the plans for Greater Hambantota indicated the potential for a tram system running from renewable sources of energy and so I offered to prepare a report on the potential for cost-effective 'Light Trams'. The report was completed by mid-2008 in time for a visiting delegation of planners from Sri Lanka as part of the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) Tsunami Reconstruction Project.



Mr Yehiya in Melbourne with the report

I would particularly like to thank PIA for their assistance in preparing the report and facilitating meetings. Follow is an extract from the Executive Summary:

- ◆ New cities, such as Greater Hambantota, offer a rare opportunity to implement sustainable design at the planning stage. A key component of good urban design is the inclusion of sustainable modes of transport. This report puts the case for one mode, known as 'Light Tram' or 'Ultra Light Rail'.
- ◆ Rising fuel prices, greenhouse gases, air pollution, demographic changes and rising expectations for increased mobility provide the imperative to consider innovative and cost-effective transit modes.
- ◆ Purchase of Light Tram vehicles is only part of the solution. The tram routes must be carefully considered

to ensure they cater for both current and future demand.

- ◆ It is essential to make sure that all building and tourist development relates to the transit systems. The best way to achieve this is through clusters of urban villages connected by sustainable transport corridors – a concept known as 'Pearls-on-a-String' (where the 'pearls' are the urban villages and the 'string' represents the transit corridors.)
- ◆ The key reasons for considering good transport planning include: mobility; safety; sustainability; sociability; amenity; economics; and equity.
- ◆ Like many countries, Sri Lanka has a precedent of tram usage (in Colombo).
- ◆ Greater Hambantota lends itself to the utilisation of a tram system particularly given the establishment of the new sea port, the new airport, and the railway line extension. Also, with the establishment of a new town centre, it is important to maintain the connection to the existing township along with the amenities and commercial activities that the coast provides.
- ◆ The tram system could be used for commuters, incidental travellers, tourists, and for the movement of freight.
- ◆ A 'Light Tram' system is more cost effective than a conventional tram or light rail system, being less significantly expensive to install and operate.
- ◆ A 'Light Tram' system could be run from renewable forms of power (such as hydro, wind, solar and/or bio fuel) providing the most ecologically responsible way of facilitating people to move around Greater Hambantota.
- ◆ Light trams are commercially available from England but they must be designed and constructed to suit Sri Lankan conditions.



Artists Impression: Tram, Bus, Took-Took Interchange
Sketch Acknowledgement: Jenny Donovan

The American Dream

"It is known as the Inland Empire: a vast stretch of land tucked in the high desert valleys east of Los Angeles. Once home to fruit trees and Indians, it is now a concrete sprawl of jammed freeways, endless suburbs and shopping malls. But here, in the heartland of the four-wheel drive, a revolution is under way. What was once unthinkable is becoming a shocking reality: America's all-consuming love affair with the car is fading. Surging petrol prices have worked where environmental arguments have failed. Many Americans have long been told to cut back on car use. Now, facing \$4-a-gallon fuel, they have no choice. ... Recent figures showed the steepest monthly drop in miles driven by Americans since 1942. At the same time car sales are collapsing, led by huge SUVs.

"General Motors, once the very image of American industrial might, is in deep trouble. Cities are now investing in mass transit, hoping to tempt people back into town centres from far-flung commuter belts where they are now stranded by high petrol prices. ... GM has now closed SUV production at four plants. Its Hummer brand is up for sale, or might even be closed. GM is ploughing huge resources into its 2010 launch of the Chevy Volt, a hybrid car that may get up to 150 miles a gallon. It needs to. GM's share price recently hit a 54-year low, prompting one top investment bank to warn that the firm could go bankrupt.

"But America's changing relationship with the car is just part of the story of how the most powerful nation is changing in the face of the oil price rise. America has been built on an oil-based economy, from its office workers in the suburbs to its farmers in the fields. Since the 1950s and the building of the pioneering car-orientated suburb of Levittown in Long Island, the American city has been designed for the convenience of the car as much as its human inhabitants. People live miles away from jobs, shops or entertainment. If you take away cars, the entire suburban way of life collapses. To some, that development is long overdue. ...

"The suburbs are already being hit. As cars become more expensive, the justification for suburbs seems to disappear. Some commentators have even suggested that suburbs - once the archetype of an ideal American life - will become the new slums. In the face of expensive fuel and crashing property prices, the one-time embodiment of a certain American dream will become crime-ridden,

dotted by empty lots and home to the poor and unemployed. That is already happening as crime and gang violence has risen in many suburban areas and tens of thousands of homes have been repossessed because of the mortgage crisis. In effect, suburbs will become the new inner cities, even as once-abandoned American downtowns are undergoing a remarkable renaissance. Even malls, the ultimate symbol of American life since the war, are undergoing a crisis as consumers start to stay away.

"But there are even deeper changes going on. The car, the freeway system and cheap air travel made America smaller. Everywhere was easily accessible. That, too, is ending. Higher fuel prices have dealt a terrible blow to America's airlines. They are slashing flights, raising costs and abandoning routes. Some small cities are now losing their air connections. In effect, America is becoming larger again. That will lead to a more localised economy. To many environmentalists that is a blessing, not a curse. They point out that cheap fuel for industrial transport has meant the average packaged salad has travelled 1,500 miles before it gets to a supermarket shelf. ... Even farmers are not immune. They might not need a car to get to their fields but their fertilisers use oil-based products whose prices have gone through the roof. A handful have started using horses again for some tasks, saving petrol on farm vehicles. The American dream of the last half century is thus changing. The car and its culture is now under a pressure unimaginable even a few years ago."

Ref: Paul Harris, The [UK] Observer. 6/7/08



**Dividing Cities: The Downtown Connector
Atlanta, Georgia, USA**

Ref: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Downtown_Connector