

The Cost of Urban Sprawl

“Building McMansion-style suburbs on the outskirts of Sydney costs the economy and the environment twice as much as inner-city housing, according to research released this week. As the State Government prepares to make it easier for developers to build homes on Sydney’s fringe, work done by Curtin University and a planning and infrastructure consultancy, Parsons Brinckerhoff, found hundreds of millions of dollars could be saved if governments chose inner-city housing over suburban sprawl.

“Fringe development contributed to the recent financial crash in car-dependent cities around the world, said Curtin University’s Professor Peter Newman. ‘The old economy of car dependence is over; with rising oil prices and climate change, people cannot afford to live in outer suburbs and drive to work’, he said. The research comes as the Government embarks on a review of local and state levies on new homes. A levy of about \$23,000 per lot imposed on developers in Sydney’s north-west and south-west, earmarked for 181,000 new homes in the next 25 years, is expected to be cut to make new housing cheaper. But the Government has abandoned plans to build rail links to both growth centres.

“The cost of infrastructure, transport, health and greenhouse gases for new housing built on a city’s fringe is worth \$653 million for every 1000 new dwellings, compared with \$309 million for inner-city development, Professor Newman said. For every 1000 housing blocks, the Government could save \$85 million on power, water, sewerage, schools and hospital services if it built close to central business districts rather than on the city’s fringe, he said, and as much as \$250 million in transport costs could be saved over 50 years. ‘It is actually an \$85 million subsidy to developers on the fringe’, Professor Newman said. An outspoken critic of the refusal by the former NSW treasurer Michael Costa to spend money on public transport, Professor Newman said the further out of the city people lived the more they used their cars. People living on a city’s fringe also tended to earn less than inner-city dwellers. ‘Their vulnerability is now a major problem worldwide’, he said. ‘We have to convince governments and developers that changing the way cities are made will save them money.’” Ref: Wendy Frew, SMH 14/10/08

And Also ... (Strange Laws)

“In Tennessee, it is against the law to drive a car while sleeping.”

Ref: <http://www.strangefacts.com/laws.html>

The Call for Lower Speed Limits

“Roads Minister Tim Pallas has dismissed calls to cut car speeds across Melbourne that proponents say will improve road safety for pedestrians and cyclists. Research released yesterday by the Safe Speed Interest Group, a coalition of councils and the Heart Foundation, found that dropping speed limits to 30km/h on suburban streets would cut pedestrian injuries. And it would improve community health by encouraging more to walk and cycle, the research found. ‘The evidence is incontrovertible: lowering speed limits increases safety’, said Yarra councillor and the coalition’s spokeswoman, Jackie Fristacky.

“But Mr Pallas said he would not consider dropping speed limits because it would ‘lose the community in a debate that has to be had about road safety’. Although there was a 17% drop in pedestrian casualties at 19 Melbourne shopping strips where VicRoads had dropped speed limits to 40km/h, the approach would not work across the city, he said. ‘You get the best outcome if you make specific treatments to specific areas rather than put a wholesale blanket reduction in’. But international transport expert John Whitelegg, in Melbourne to help launch the research, said Mr Pallas was wrong. ‘If you only target certain areas, you end up with a badly mixed message that just confuses drivers’, said Professor Whitelegg, who has advised governments in Britain, Sweden, China and India. ‘If you want to make streets safer, you reduce speeds across entire areas’. ... There have been 51 pedestrians killed on Victoria’s roads this year, up from 37 at the same time last year. Over the past five years, the average number of pedestrians killed on Victoria’s roads each year has been 41. ...

“International experience shows that lowering speed limits reduces deaths and injuries for all road users but particularly pedestrians. Sweden’s ‘Vision Zero’ policy, which enforced speed limits of 32km/h in urban areas, aims to reduce fatalities and serious injuries to zero by 2020. London has a speed limit of 30 miles an hour (48km/h) and will reduce its speed limit to 20 miles an hour (32 km/h) next year.”

Ref: Clay Lucas, The Age, 15/11/08

Comment: Although it is counter intuitive there are in fact some very good reasons for reducing the speed limit. Done correctly, overall, very little time is lost though reducing speeds. In some cases, slowing speeds will actually speed up travel times. For example: slowing cars to 30kph = more liveable communities = more walking, cycling and public transport = less cars = less congestion = less road trauma = lower costs = lower taxes.

Seoul Cycling

"The Seoul city government has announced plans to build 207 kilometres of cycle paths over the next four years extending to all corners of the South Korean capital, according to officials. The 120-billion-won (US\$88m) plan is based on a 'road diet' program, under which the number of lanes for passenger vehicles in major roads will be cut to create new cycle paths. It calls for the construction of 17 main cycle paths totaling 200 kilometres that criss-cross the sprawling city and one downtown seven-kilometre beltway. 'Any urban areas where commuters only rely on vehicles burning fuel cannot avoid blame for global warming and traffic congestion', Seoul City Mayor Oh Se-Hoon said on Wednesday, on the city government's website. 'We will make sure that bicycles will compete with vehicles for commuting in Seoul', said Oh, who rides his bicycle to work every day. Only 1.6 percent of all commuters use bicycles in Seoul, partly due to a lack of dedicated paths. The city government wants to increase this to 4.4 percent in 2012, 7.6 percent in 2016, and 10 percent in 2020. The city will also construct bicycle parks at 16 subway stations - complete with shower rooms and lockers for cyclists before they transit to the subway."

Ref: Google News, 23/10/08

Electric Bikes & Trikes for Aust Post

"Posties have begun a trial of electric bicycles and tricycles in a plan to combat soaring fuel prices and be more environmentally friendly. Australia Post staff will take to bikes in Adelaide first but plans to roll out the trial to Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. 'We are testing electric bicycles and tricycles, which are more fuel efficient and environmentally friendly ways to deliver the mail than motorbikes', spokesman Joshua Zugajev said. 'We have no intention to replace all our motorcycles, but rising fuel costs and a need for cleaner forms of transport mean trialling these electric bikes makes perfect sense,' Mr Zugajev said. The electric bicycles and tricycles were quicker than walking, made less noise than motorcycles, were virtually pollution-free and used rechargeable ion batteries, he added. They are assisted by an electric motor, which means the rider still pedals but receives a significant boost from the motor."

Ref: Elissa Doherty, Courier Mail, 28/9/08



Postie who got a trike not a bike.

Problems with Hybrids in the US

"Before it even started selling them, Chrysler is spiking its hybrids. The troubled automaker said Tuesday that it would discontinue production of its Dodge Durango and Chrysler Aspen hybrid sport utility vehicles at year-end ... The move will leave Chrysler without an alternative powertrain model for at least a year and probably longer. No other models are in line to get hybridized, though last month Chrysler unveiled two plug-in hybrids and a pure electric car, saying it would produce one of the models ... by late 2010.

"The irony of the plant closure is that the long-awaited hybrids, Chrysler's first foray into alternative powertrains, haven't even hit dealership lots. After months of promotions and promises, they simply are nowhere to be found. The company has said it has 3,000 orders for the hybrid models nationwide. Yet Chrysler's sales report for September makes no mention of hybrids, while sales figures published by Autodata Corp. show none have sold. Dealer inventory searches on the Dodge and Chrysler websites revealed none in major metropolitan areas known to be hybrid hotbeds, including Seattle, San Francisco and L.A. Calls to local dealers were no more fruitful. A salesman at Glendale Dodge said ... there was no waiting list for the vehicles. ... With none available anywhere, Chrysler has an enticing offer for would-be buyers: The company is offering \$1,000 cash back on either one."

Ref: Ken Bessinger, LA Times 29/10/08

Problems with Parking Meters

"Victorian detectives have seized luxury cars and wads of cash after uncovering a racket involving the alleged theft of hundreds of thousands of dollars from Melbourne city parking meters. It is understood the scam may have continued undetected for at least 12 months and follows years of scandal and turmoil at the city council's \$32-million-a-year parking branch. ... In the mid to late-1990s, over \$1 million in coins were allegedly stolen from Melbourne's parking meters under a similar scam."

Ref: Royce Miller, The Age, 15/11/08

And Also ...

"A man was arrested early Monday after L.A. County Sheriff's Deputies found three parking meters in his car. Poles and signs were still attached and the meters had coins in them. What sealed their case? The industrial sized pipe cutter, deputies found in the man's vehicle. The meters were from Santa Monica." Ref: Steve Hymon, Bottleneck Blog, Los Angeles Times, 10/9/08

Cargo Bikes

"The transportation of goods and children through an urban landscape is a universal need. In Copenhagen many of our citizens choose the self-propelled transport option and cycle to work, school and on errands. ... In Copenhagen, however, we have our own version of the SUV. We call it 'ladcyklen' or 'the cargo bike'. Often there are goods too large or cumbersome for convenient bicycle transport and if you have a child or two or three, they have places to go and things to do and you are the one who has to get them there. In Denmark the three-wheeled cargo bike is the vehicle of choice for moving things about and the cargo bike market here continues to enjoy steady growth. A cargo bike is a generic term for any bicycle that is designed to carry 'stuff,' whether it has two wheels or three. ..."

"Amazingly, only about 40 percent of Copenhageners own cars, even though this is the capital city of one of the richest countries in the world. Sure, vehicles are taxed heavily but the reason is simply because we have the infrastructure in place for bicycles and we have a rather good public transport system. Even 50 percent of the citizens of Berlin do not own a vehicle, for the same reasons. Fifty eight percent of Copenhageners, when polled, say that they ride their bike because it is easy and fast. Only one percent say they do in order to help the environment. Basically, we're not environmentalists. We're just people who need to get around the city, like anywhere else. ..."

"The continued growth of our cargo bike culture has contributed to the improvement of our bicycle infrastructure. On average a separated bike lane – by that I mean separated from the sidewalk by a curb and from the traffic by another curb – measures 7.2 feet wide. The city of Copenhagen is increasing the average width to 8.2 feet. For reasons of increasing safety and to accommodate the bicycle traffic, but also because cargo bikes are so popular. And wide."

"Cargo bikes may be our version of the SUV but they are an aesthetic addition to the flow of bicycles. They glide along at a slower pace and can sometimes be difficult to pass but it's always lovely to see kids sitting in the box reading a book or munching on an apple or even having a nap. So many families in Copenhagen invest in a cargo bike when they have kids, in lieu of a car. The kids learn to ride bikes, sure, but the cargo bikes are practical for many reasons. Even many families who own a car have a cargo bike instead of a second car. ..."



Photo: Copenhagenize.com

"Cargo bikes may now be the domain of the family but new variations are constantly popping up in the city. A mobile coffee bar, a newspaper rack, fresh fruit, bike messengers, ice cream freezers, you name it. Anything you need to sell or transport can be done on a custom-designed cargo bike. Bike trailers are still seen on occasion but the cargo bike beats the trailer for so many good reasons. Heavier loads, kids seated up front where you can talk to them, more stability while cycling. But the trailer still serves the people. IKEA of Denmark found out that 20 percent of their customers arrived at their suburban big box stores by bike or public transport. They have now provided free Velorbis bikes and trailers for their carless customers who need to get home with purchases. Just leave a deposit, ride home with your stuff and return the bike. Cheaper than a taxi and easier than the bus or the train. This idea is now spreading to IKEAs in other European countries."

Ref: Mikael Colville-Andersen Full Story:
<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/bottleneck/2008/09/weve-posted-ple.html#more>

More on Roads

"Road funding by all levels of government [in Australia] has increased by 33 per cent since [2000]. Ref: Anthony Albanese, 23/10/08"

"Tolls from CityLink are funnelling \$1m a day into investors' pockets, Transurban's annual report shows. And petrol price rises are not reducing profits for Transurban from the 22-kilometre road, with drivers paying \$363m in tolls - \$33m more than the year before. That equated to 6.4 million more vehicle journeys on the toll road than in the previous year."

Ref: F R Perry & Associates Newsletter 10/10/08

Congestion Thinking - Pt. 3

“So what does happen when roads are built to relieve congestion? First let me make clear that there is nothing wrong with saving time in journeys. But what little evidence we have does not suggest that time in aggregate is being saved at all. If it were we would expect the total amount of time spent in travel to various activities to be reducing. Instead, with all the vast amounts spent on road building to ‘save time’ the amount of time spent in travel is increasing.

“There are much better figures for the UK than for Australia on time spent in travel. The British National Travel Survey provides data on travel behaviour. A recent book by transport analyst David Metz (2008) uses this data to show that the average time spent in travel in Britain has remained remarkably constant over the last 35 years despite a massive program of road building. In fact the time spent in travel has slightly increased since 1985. Data for Australia shows that very much the same pattern:

Minutes per day per person	UK: 1990 Australia: 1992	UK: 2006 Australia: 2006
UK	61	63
Australia	70	74

“Now if there is investment in the transport system such as to make journeys quicker, people always have two options, not just one: saving time in the journey or travelling a longer distance with the same time expenditure. Metz argues that instead of choosing to save time, people have instead chosen to keep their travel time constant – or even extend it a bit, and instead travel further. He shows that the distance travelled in Britain, in average miles per person per year, has increased from around 4500 miles to over 7000. There is no comparable data for Australia, but we could expect a similar outcome.

“Now I am not suggesting, and nor is Dr Metz, that facilitating travel is not a good thing, all other things being equal. If people are enabled to travel further, that extra travel is helping people to extend their range of choice of work options and other activities. But before we think about the effects of solving congestion we should also think about another point Metz makes about the typical approach to solving it.

“Back in the 1960s and 1970s transportation studies for Australian cities examined what would be required to solve congestion once and for all by building roads. The classic four step model was used to project the trip outcomes of land use and population growth. The argumentation in the documents is nearly

identical to the argumentation supporting road building today: ‘This is not a matter in which there are alternatives. Either a large-scale programme such as is recommended in the plan is instituted and maintained over a long-term period, or traffic congestion and greatly increased transport costs would become chronic features of the metropolitan road system’ (Melbourne Transportation Study [1969], Volume 3 The Transportation Plan p.47)

“Of the ‘highway plan’ the study says: ‘Without it the predicted volumes of trips by road could not occur. In the inner and middle suburbs there would be such congestion that many people owning cars would not be able to use them when they wished to. In the outer suburbs there would also be considerable congestion. Failure to provide road space would have a very serious impact on commercial goods movements and on the cost of transporting products by road’ (ibid. p. 50).

“The Eddington Report in 2008 states: ‘The evidence is clear: doing nothing is not an option. Melbourne needs better east-west transport connections to address core congestion problems within the transport network’. (Eddington, 2008, Investing in Transport, Introduction p.6).

“Like the Melbourne Transportation Study, the Eddington Report also included public transport improvements. The Melbourne Transportation Study was, however, frank and open about what relieving congestion by building roads would mean for 1980 demand conditions: a grid of motorways across the whole metropolitan area. Politically, however, that solution was untenable. The public revulsion at the proposal to destroy large swathes of inner Melbourne and compulsorily purchase large numbers of properties caused the Premier, Rupert Hamer, to declare motorway building in the inner city banned. The heart was taken out of the proposal because the public would not stand for it, and anyway the cost of the project was simply unaffordable. That solution remains unaffordable and unacceptable, as well as irrational.”

Ref: Professor Nicholas Low, Director, GAMUT, University of Melbourne, Oct 2008

To be continued. For the full paper and the references contact steve@goingsolar.com.au

And Also ...

“A hire car driver turned on to train tracks in a New York suburb after following the instructions on his GPS unit. He looked up to see a train travelling towards him, but scrambled from the car in time. The car was pushed more than 30 metres by the train.”

Ref: The Age 9/1/08