

Presidential Leadership

"I would like for us to invest in mass transit because potentially that's energy efficient. And I think people are a lot more open now to thinking regionally... The days where we're just building sprawl forever, those days are over. I think that Republicans, Democrats, everybody... recognizes that's not a smart way to design communities. So we should be using this money to help spur this sort of innovative thinking when it comes to transportation. That will make a big difference."

Ref: Barack Obama, 11/2/09



The future of highways?

Urban Sprawl & Parking

"Urban sprawl is actually not a result of free choice, market forces, or the 'convenience' or the motor vehicle. Convenience must be measured in terms of cost effectiveness, and since users haven't faced the full costs directly, they haven't been able to make their trade offs in a way that is efficient. What we term 'urban sprawl' was largely caused by urban planning regulations that stipulate that each new development provide for the 85th percentile demand for unpriced parking. (Further planning regulations that enforced low density and single use development also contributed). Each site has to provide for their own peak, even if neighbouring sites have complimentary peaks. (Think of all the empty office car parks that are next to shopping centres.)"

"Minimum parking requirements thus created an oversupply of parking in most urban areas, and made development in areas where land has a high value much more expensive and less profitable, because parking in and of itself is not an economically productive activity. The oversupply of parking means that hardly anyone ever pays directly for the land resources it requires. This is a subsidy for car drivers that (in most urban/suburban areas) actually halves the cost per trip. All the evidence points to the conclusion that urban sprawl is inefficient in terms of energy and land use. Many people have not realised that the inefficiency is caused by land and transport market distortions - which are created by urban planning regulations. If we change those regulations, we have some hope of developing cities and towns that use resources efficiently, and this will flow through to increased economic productivity. ... Car parks are not free, but they appear to be free to people who use them. ... the cost is bundled with the

development. That's why it is a subsidy to car drivers - consumers cannot choose to pay less for not using a car park, even though they should be able to". **Ref: 'Julie', Frogblog, 12/2/09**

Ghost Ships

"A ship regarded as too toxic to be broken up in India has docked in Hartlepool, northern England, where it will be dismantled and its toxic asbestos contents sent for burial. Hull Q760, once the pride of the French fleet as the aircraft carrier Le Clemenceau ... has spent the past five years at the centre of an embarrassing saga, as it was towed around the globe in the search for a place to dispose of

its toxic hull. ... Able UK chief executive Peter Stephenson said the operation would be the largest 'ship recycling' project carried out in Europe and would provide about 200 jobs. 'This is a very important day for ourselves, our French partners and the ship recycling industry because it underlines the growing recognition of the need for high-quality facilities to meet the increasing demand for responsible ship recycling', he said. The vessel will join other so-called 'toxic ghost ships', which were sent from the US for dismantling."

Ref: The Australian (AFP, The Times), 10/2/09

Heat Stressed Rail Sorted

"Extreme heat conditions no longer hold their sway over rail infrastructure on the majority of the line between Sydney and the Queensland border thanks to the introduction of concrete sleepers, Australian Rail Track Corporation CEO David Marchant announced today. 'As the mercury pushes toward 40 degrees, ARTC would, in the past, often have to implement temporary speed restrictions on numerous sections of the North South corridor particularly in NSW. This was due to the potential for high summer temperatures to cause the steel rail to buckle. In the past ARTC could issue temporary speed restrictions on 50 days every summer which significantly increased transit time between the major capitals. Thanks to the \$400 million project to replace 2.2 million wooden sleepers with concrete sleepers on the North South corridor, temporary speed restrictions due to heat are for the most part a thing of the past', Mr Marchant said. 'By introducing concrete sleepers, ARTC has significantly increased the track infrastructure strength. The sheer weight of the concrete sleepers holds the track firmly in place and helps prevent heat related buckling'."

Ref: Media Release, ARTC, 2/2/09

The US Highway System

"2006 marks the anniversary of the Interstate Highway System. While many of us have come to take the highway system for granted, it's good to remember how controversial the building of this system was. Many neighbourhoods, often lower-income and minority ones, were displaced, if not destroyed entirely, by roads that cut right through the heart of so many cities. While Lewis Mumford's prediction that interstate highways would create 'a tomb of concrete roads and ramps covering the dead corpse of the city' perhaps was a bit overstated, many agree that the highway system facilitated white flight and the development of suburbia and urban sprawl. As highways reach the end of their natural lives - or succumb to natural disasters, as was the case in San Francisco - the country is now being given a second chance to decide if the highway infrastructure it has is actually what it wants. Over the last two decades, New York City, Portland, San Francisco and Milwaukee have all chosen to tear down their elevated urban highways and replace them with boulevards, newly reconfigured to reconnect back to the urban grid." Ref: Centre for Neighbourhood Technology (CET), March, 2006
www.cnt.org/news/2006/03/27/tear-it-down/

The Future of Car Ownership

"In the next two decades, vehicle ownership is expected to double worldwide. Can the planet sustain two billion vehicles? No - at least not as they exist today. Today's billion vehicles are pumping extraordinary quantities of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, are draining the world's conventional petroleum supplies, are inciting political skirmishes over oil, and are overwhelming city roads. Even in the most conservative view, conventional motorization, vehicles, and fuels threaten an economic and environmental cataclysm. ... The key to change is greater choice for travellers. Wide-scale use of information and wireless technologies in the transportation sector is imperative. These are needed to facilitate innovations such as smart paratransit, intelligent carsharing, dynamic ridesharing, and the use of telecommunications to rationalize and even replace trip making. Choices can be expanded through better land use management, neighbourhood cars, and enhanced mass transit. ... To reduce high-carbon vehicle travel, policies must encourage better choices and more effective integration of land use, conventional mass transit, and transportation planning." Ref: Daniel Sperling & Deborah Gordon, TR News, Nov/Dec 08
<http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/trnews/trnews259billioncars.pdf>

Transportation for America Campaign

"Eight U.S. cities, including Chicago, [and] a coalition of community and business leaders announced the release of 'Build for America: A Five-Point Plan to get our Economy Moving'. On the heels of the Wall Street bailout ... community and business leaders joined together to call on the next President and Congress to strengthen our local and national economies by building a 21st Century transportation system. CNT joined the Transportation for America Campaign (T4) to put forth this bold economic agenda which has the potential to create millions of good, green jobs nationally, save Americans thousands of dollars per year, and reduce America's dependence on oil once and for all. As CNT President Scott Bernstein put it, 'We're too exposed to the rising price of gasoline and the need to own too many cars. This region's households are spending over \$40 billion annually for transportation, dwarfing what's invested publicly. Working families now pay as much or more for transportation as they do for housing'. The Plan calls for investment in public transit, high-speed and intercity rail, neighbourhoods that are less car-dependent, more walkable and more affordable, and restoring the thousands of roads and bridges in failing condition across the United States. ...

"Build for America is a project of the Transportation for America organization, a national consortium of environmental, consumer advocacy, business, and governmental groups preparing for the 2009 re-authorization of national transportation legislation. The speakers from the various organizations explained and reinforced the arguments for increasing investment in American public infrastructure. 'Amtrak ridership in Illinois continues to break records. We've shown that if you build it, they will come', said Kevin Brubaker, Deputy Director of the Environmental Law & Policy Centre. 'When people have a transit option, they use it. Who wouldn't?' As Scott Bernstein noted, 'owning one less car per household raises income by 10 to 20 percent'. Providing a transit option is the single best way to increase the income of individual households of all socio-economic classes while simultaneously providing access to jobs, stores, and other essential services. Higher investments in public transit will not only create jobs, but will also increase the mobility of all people. Ultimately, 'investment in transit will produce the best returns for our economy, our pocketbooks and our communities', explained Brian Imus, the Director of Illinois PIRG."

Ref: Centre for Neighbourhood Technology (CET), October, 2008
www.cnt.org/news/2008/10/15/coalition-releases-plan-for-economic-security-through-transportation/#more-704

On Algae

"The race is now on to find economic ways to turn algae, one of the planet's oldest life forms, into vegetable oil that can be made into biodiesel, jet fuel, other fuels and plastic products. 'So we are harvesting sunshine directly using algae, then we are extracting that stored energy in the form of oil from the alga and then using that to make fuels and other non-petroleum based products', [biochemist Steve] Skill said. He predicted that industry will be cultivating algae in viable quantities for commercial oil production with a decade. Such fuels are considered to be net carbon neutral because the algae absorb greenhouse gases when they grow. ...

"Plymouth Marine Laboratory says it is taking what we know about algae in the world's oceans and applying it to biotechnology, an approach which differs from much of the commercial research underway, where some claims about the possibilities of algal biofuels are overstated, according to Carole Llewellyn, a marine chemist. 'They (algae) do have a lot of positive attributes but there are a lot of hurdles that have to be overcome before this becomes a commercial reality', Llewellyn said. Cultivating crops on prime farmland to produce bio-diesel has been widely criticized for helping sustain higher food prices. But many strains of algae grow in sites otherwise uninhabited, from salt-water marshland to deserts. They can grow 20 to 30 times faster than food crops. Research in Plymouth includes identifying which strains of algae will produce the most oil or absorb the most CO2 in differing growing mediums. Algae's requirement of a source of carbon dioxide has also stimulated interest from industrial plants which see the possibility of feeding algal beds with carbon-rich exhaust fumes from their power plants."

Ref: SBS World News, 11/2/09

Problems with Palm Oil

"Australia is contributing directly to the widespread destruction of tropical rainforests in Indonesia and Malaysia by importing millions of tonnes of taxpayer-subsidised biodiesel made from palm oil. Imports of the fuel are rising, undermining the Rudd Government's \$200 million commitment to reduce deforestation in the region - a problem that globally contributes to 20 per cent of the world's carbon emissions. The bulldozing of rainforests to make way for palm oil plantations is also putting further pressure on orang-utans and other endangered wildlife throughout Southeast Asia. And the Australian biofuels industry says it is struggling to compete

with the cheap imports from Asia, which are touted as an environmentally friendly alternative to diesel.

"Without action, the problem will only get worse, with demand for biodiesel imports likely to rise sharply when NSW legislates to introduce Australia's first biodiesel mandate - 2 per cent this year, rising to 5 per cent when sufficient supplies become available. But the Rudd Government is likely to come under pressure to follow the lead of other Western nations in banning imports of palm oil-based biodiesel. Biodiesel manufacturers in Australia use primarily tallow from abattoirs and recycled cooking oil. Caltex, the biggest biodiesel customer in Australia, refuses to use palm oil-based fuel on environmental grounds, but it is being imported by independent operators. ...

"Rex Wallace, the chief financial officer of the Adelaide-based Environmentally Friendly Fuels, said his company had purchased five million litres of palm oil-based biodiesel in recent years. 'We would not need to import it if people could produce a quality product on a regular basis in Australia', he said. 'We would love to buy more local produce but it's just not there'. Mr Wallace said his company imported from certified plantations in Malaysia that had been developed on land cleared historically for other purposes such as rubber plantations. Australian Biodiesel Group chief executive Bevan Dooley said the industry estimated that 10million litres of palm oil-based biodiesel was imported a year. 'Europe and the US are closing the gates on this product, but Australian taxpayers are subsidising its import', Mr Dooley said. He said it was difficult to establish if certified plantations were environmentally friendly, and Australian imports were helping to fuel demand worldwide for 'environmentally destructive' biodiesel from Malaysia and Indonesia. ... 'Australia is seen as a dumping ground for palm oil-based biodiesel as there is no requirement for the fuel to be derived from sustainable resources'. He said there was ample capacity in Australia to meet demand.

"The Australian industry produces about 50million litres of biodiesel a year, but has the capacity to produce much more. About 80 million litres will be needed annually to meet a 2 per cent mandate in NSW. Indonesia has about 6 million hectares of palm oil plantation and Malaysia 4.5 million ha. Indonesia plans to double palm oil production by 2025 and is developing a plantation of 1.8 million ha in east Kalimantan. To make way for the plantation, the largest remaining area of lowland rainforest in Kalimantan is being bulldozed, with the loss of habitat for orang-utans, clouded leopards and other rare animals."

Ref: Greg Roberts, The Australian, 27/1/09

Automobile Apartheid (Part 1)

"The [suburban] sprawl culture has bred automobile apartheid: first class citizens are in motor vehicles; second class Americans are pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit passengers who certainly include poor people, but also millions of middle class Americans. When emergency plans and government officials running preparedness and response activities largely ignore the plight of second class citizens no one should be surprised.

"The answer is not that more people should have and depend on automobiles as some right-wing pro-sprawl and pro-car activists have claimed. After all, the number of vehicles already exceeds the number of licensed drivers and excessive car use produces our petroleum dependency that threatens our economy. Be clear. Automobile apartheid means that anyone who wants mobility through walking, bicycling or public transportation suffers discrimination by a built environment and government structure designed for automobiles. In the past 20 years, when sprawl has run rampant, the number of trips people take by walking has decreased by more than 42 percent. Walking to school has also decreased by a similar amount. And, yes, overweight and obesity have climbed as automobile addiction has increased.

"Personal freedom and independence should mean more than the ability to go where and when one wants. Americans should also have the freedom to travel how they want. When cars are the only option and people are car slaves, freedom is diminished. As Americans drive more miles to do just about everything, and spend more time stuck in traffic congestion, especially on weekends, they lose precious time, personal energy, and money. And after the New Orleans fiasco, now they must worry about becoming stranded in some kind of natural disaster or act of terrorism.

"Even in normal times, government has largely ignored public safety for second class citizens. In the past 25 years some 175,000 pedestrians have been killed on America's roadways. Though Americans make less than 5 percent of their trips on foot, 12 percent of all traffic fatalities are pedestrians, and some 60 percent of those deaths occur in places where no crosswalk is available. Though few students walk to school, in 1999 nearly 900 children

ages 14 and under were killed and 25,000 injured in pedestrian accidents with vehicles. Each year about 175 children are killed by vehicles in between school and home. There is also bad news at the other end of the age spectrum. The highest rate of pedestrian fatalities is for Americans age 70 and over. Sprawl-intense Sunbelt areas are the most dangerous for pedestrians. Atlanta's pedestrian fatality rate increased 13 percent from 1994 to 1998, and the 1998 rate was over twice that in Portland, Oregon, New York City, and Philadelphia. Automobile apartheid also has a social justice dimension. The Atlanta rate was 4 per 100,000 for African-Americans, 10 for Hispanics and less than 2 for Caucasians.

"While the [Hurricane Katrina] New Orleans illustration of automobile apartheid stands out, government officials have long behaved badly. The traffic studies chief of Prince George's County, Maryland once said: 'The street should be strictly for cars'. New York City's Department of Transportation deactivated 77 percent of the pedestrian walk push buttons at intersections and left the signs telling pedestrians to use them. For 25 years cars whizzed by hapless pedestrians waiting for a useless walk button to stop traffic. In early 2003 Georgia's Department of Transportation disclosed it was against having trees between sidewalks and streets, because sidewalks are 'auto recovery zones'. The Commissioner said: 'the protection of intermittent foot traffic should not come at the expense of a motorist's life'. Apparently, air bags and seat belts are not good enough for first class citizens."

{To be continued in #99}

Ref: Joel Hirschhorn, American Chronicle, 26/10/05 See the full transcript at: www.americanchronicle.com/articles/view/3216



Interesting Signs #1

How do we account for this bus sign down on Glen Eira Road? It was installed so as to virtually obliterate the cycling sign. Methinks that it could have been installed a metre away or perhaps the cycling sign could have been moved first as it can't easily be moved now.

Is this a case of closely integrated transport or are the power poles quietly moving in the middle of the night?

Picture: 1/1/09