

Henry Tax Review

Correct me if I'm wrong but it appears that, in a time of Peak Oil, Road Congestion and Climate Change, the government has so far failed to adopt any of the tax review recommendations:

"9 (a): *The current formula for valuing car fringe benefits should be replaced with a single statutory rate of 20 per cent, regardless of the kilometres travelled."*

"61: *Governments should analyse the potential network-wide benefits and costs of introducing variable congestion pricing on existing tolled roads (or lanes), and consider extending existing technology across heavily congested parts of the road network. Beyond that, new technologies may further enable wider application of road pricing if proven cost-effective. In general, congestion charges should apply to all registered vehicles using congested roads. The use of revenues should be transparent to the community and subject to further institutional reform."*

"62: *The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) should accelerate the development of mass-distance-location pricing for heavy vehicles, to ensure that heavy vehicles pay for their specific marginal road-wear costs. Revenue from road-wear charges should be allocated to the owner of the affected road, which should be maintained in accordance with an asset management plan. Differentiated compliance regimes to enforce this pricing policy may need to be considered to balance efficiency benefits from pricing against the costs of administration and compliance for some road users."*

"63: *States should improve compulsory third party insurance to better reflect individual risks."*

"64: *On routes where road freight is in direct competition with rail that is required to recover its capital costs, heavy vehicles should face an additional charge on a comparable basis, where this improves the efficient allocation of freight between transport modes."*

"65: *Revenue from fuel tax imposed for general government purposes should be replaced over time with revenue from more efficient broad-based taxes. If a decision were made to recover costs of roads from road users through fuel tax, it should be linked to the cost of efficiently financing the road network, less costs that can be charged directly to road users or collected through a network access charge. Fuel tax should apply to all fuels used in road transport on the basis of energy content, and be indexed to the CPI. Heavy vehicles should be exempt*

from fuel tax and the network access component of registration fees if full replacement charges are introduced."

"66: *The revenue-raising component of State taxes on motor vehicle ownership and use should be made explicit, and over time only be used to recover those costs related to road provision. The administrative costs of providing government services should be recovered through user charges where applicable. Quantity limits on taxi licences should be phased out."*

"67: *Governments should continue to reform road infrastructure provision, applying economic assessment to investments comparable to that for other forms of infrastructure."*

"68: *COAG should develop a National Road Transport Agreement to establish objectives, outcomes, outputs and incentives to guide governments in the use and supply of road infrastructure. COAG should nominate a single institution to lead road tax reform, and ensure implementation of this agreement."*

Ref: Australia's Future Tax System, Final Report: Overview, May 2010

http://taxreview.treasury.gov.au/content/FinalReport.aspx?doc=html/publications/papers/Final_Report_Part_1/chapter_12.htm

"Experts and commentators have called it a missed chance to fix the country's tax system."

Ref: Chelsea Mes, News.com, 3/5/10

So Much for Customer Service

A packed #96 Bumblebee (long tram) was delayed behind a broken tram at Albert Park on Wednesday night. I can accept that breakdowns occur – although some would argue this should not happen in a well maintained system – but what was not acceptable was the driver disappearing for about 15 minutes without telling the passengers that the front door was open or making any other announcement. In fact most, if not all of the doors, were at the tram platform and should have been opened for those alighting at that stop and to allow in cool air. Then on Friday evening a signalled driver of a southbound #1 sailed past the Melbourne Baths stop around 7pm presumably because the tram was packed. The problem is that many of those passengers are making a short trip from the university to the city centre. Overloading the trams at the university means that people on route and travelling to the end of the line are left stranded. Simple fixes would be to ensure an empty (shunting) tram immediately precedes the #1 & #8 or use a minibus to collect the stranded travellers. And then there are the delays created by shunting trams in Swanston St (see Page 3). I counted 10 trams being delayed one morning.

The Coburg Plan

"The Coburg Initiative [is the Moreland] council's grand vision to transform 35 hectares around the Sydney Road and Bell Street intersection into a vibrant hub of 1500 new townhouses and apartments, of which one-fifth would be affordable housing. ... The massive sea of car parking that dominates central Coburg would also be banished underground and replaced with a piazza and myriad green spaces for people to gather - in short, a reversal of what Joni Mitchell once sang about paving paradise and putting up a parking lot. ...



Sydney Road, Coburg Photo: John Woudstra

"Coburg, eight kilometres from the city, has lost much of its traditional manufacturing industry. ... The aim is not to gentrify the suburb, but to retain its diversity and there is much talk of preserving the character of the area ... Late last year, a delegation of Moreland councillors and officers and the developer toured urban renewal projects in Europe, including Barcelona, Bordeaux, London, Manchester and Sheffield, with a particular interest in how they were implemented. ... The European redevelopments all featured vibrant pedestrian-focused streets with limited on-street parking and where cars magically vanished into underground car parks. Mayor Kariofyllidis [said] 'We do have it the wrong way here - overseas, the priority is pedestrians, public transport and cars third. To make a thing like this successful, we've got to do it this way and prioritise differently'.

"That could be a sticking point in motorised Melbourne. While Europeans are accustomed to car-free spaces in their cities, Australia has largely adopted America's car culture and it would require a significant shift for residents to forgo their vehicles and warm to a trouble-plagued public transport system as a viable alternative. The Traders Association's Roger Smith warns that while businesses support the initiative, they would like to see more car parking rather than less. 'We want more car parks,

not any taken away - we still want the on-street and additional underground or high-rise car parks'. But the popularity of Coburg's Victoria Street mall is an indication of how car-free areas would bring more people into the streets, [CEO Peter] Brown says. 'This is not a philosophical pick on motor

cars, but the bottom line is that motor cars can actually ruin the amenity of an area and in Coburg that is exactly what they are doing. Around Melbourne at the moment, a lot of roads are almost at gridlock and that's because people are commuting huge distances, whereas if you could get jobs

closer to them, it would give them choice so they could either work locally, or if they want to commute that's their call'. Whether the Moreland council can translate its leafy futuristic vision into reality remains to be seen, but it is well aware of what is at stake as Melbourne wrestles with its future."

Ref: Lorna Edwards, The Age, 18/10/10

More on Melbourne

"The missing rail link to Doncaster is one of the biggest 'gaps' in Melbourne's transport infrastructure and one of the local issues being surveyed. Public transport continues to struggle with the pressure of an increasing population and greater patronage, so with the state election

coming up in November, now is a crucial time to raise public transport issues."

Ref: Cr Charles Pick, City of Manningham, PT4me2 Media Release, 16/4/10

"Many people are happy with V/line (feel safe as there is a conductor) but the services and trains are so outdated. Two to Three trains an hour in peak hour is ridiculous and the fact that Melton is growing faster than China and the population is due to double in 10 years time means that something needs to be done quickly."

Ref: 'Kylie', PT4me2 Website, 21/4/10



'It's the Great Wall of Melton. Supposed to contain the population sprawl.'

Transport Nirvana (Part 1)

“At our behest, successive state governments have been pursuing a magnificent dream, to make Sydney a place fit for cars to be driven on all occasions. Now the Herald-commissioned independent inquiry headed by Ron Christie has exposed that dream for what it is: the wrong tram (forgive me). It's not just a dream incapable of being realised, it's one that's made our present transport problems worse rather than better and offers no answer to the looming worsening of those problems. You and I, our parents and our children, are the car-driving generations. Young people long to get a driver's licence (and a car) at the earliest possible moment; elderly people fight hard to keep their licences. As our affluence has grown we've got closer to our nirvana: one car per adult. We'd like to drive our cars everywhere we go - even to work. This preference is constrained only by the time it takes (the congestion we encounter) and the difficulties we face finding or affording a place to park - although there was a surge in the use of public transport the last time petrol prices shot up.

“For years we've pressured our politicians to reduce travel times and congestion by building more and wider expressways. And for years they've obliged without it doing any lasting good. Why not? Because of our insatiable preference to drive. As soon as the new highway has cut the time it takes to get from A to B, more people decide to drive rather than use public transport, thus forcing travel times back up. Studies suggest that motorists keep piling in until travel times are pretty much back to where they were. But the inquiry's report advises that our pursuit of a world fit for universal motoring is unattainable for another reason: a big city's sheer lack of space in the main places we want to drive to. The streets of the denser centres of Sydney simply don't have room for everyone to claim 12 to 15 square metres of road space so they can travel in a separate vehicle, nor the same amount of space so they can park their vehicle at their destination. ‘The sheer limits of urban space - quite apart from other cost and sustainability issues - mean that urban centres must rely on a suite of transport options in which the private car will play a diminishing role as densities rise’ the Christie report says. There's more. Successive governments' pursuit of road-based solutions to Sydney's growing mobility problems has come at the expense of the expansion, improvement and even adequate maintenance of public transport systems, which has worsened the problems.” { Cont. in #155}

Ref: Ross Gittins, SMH, 17/10/10

Tasmanian Election

“There was a historic swearing-in of the new Labor-Green Cabinet yesterday. Premier David Bartlett revealed his long awaited ministerial line-up yesterday, including appointing Tasmanian Greens leader Nick McKim to the roles of Minister for Human Services, Corrections, Climate Change & Sustainable Transport and Alternative Energy.”

Ref: Michael Stedman, The Mercury, 22/4/10

“Considering Sustainable Transport and Healthy Transport produce the same outcomes I am overjoyed to see that the Tasmanian State Government has had the intelligence to add a Sustainable Transport Folio to Nick McKim's portfolio. This can surely only have positive impact on steering the government to begin proactively developing a realistic supportive environment for cycling, walking and public transport in the near future. Good luck.” Ref: ‘Liam.C’, Healthy Transport Hobart website, 22/4/10

Interview with Oz Kayak (Part 23)

SI: Another issue is that the trams used to turn into and shunt [turn around] in Victoria Street. Now [if they are not going up to Melbourne University] they shunt in Swanston Street ...

OK: ... at Queensbury Street ...

SI: ... and block the other trams. Very inefficient! Why don't those trams that are not going up to the University shunt out of the way in Victoria Street?

OK: ... The history is that two people were killed in Victoria Street. That's what changed the game play. So you will find the administration will have it on their records that this was the incident that changed the plan.

SI: Surely you could do other things like calm the traffic in Victoria Street?

OK: What also happens is that there is no more car traffic doing that left turn [in the tram corridor at Victoria Street] and they have widened the footpath there so it would be a lot safer.

SI: It is interesting isn't it? A procedure was changed and then the circumstances have altered but nobody has gone back to rectify it. I actually think that Victoria Street, being the gateway to the whole northern edge of the CBD should not be a traffic sewer but rather should be turned into a boulevard with trams and calmed traffic. Run trams from North Melbourne Station via Victoria Market to St Vincent's Place (tram interchange).

OK: I agree. There is a lot of road space that is poorly used. {Continued in # 154}

Solar Powered Boat

"The biggest boat to be powered by solar energy has been displayed in Germany before it begins preparations to circumnavigate the globe. The 31m by 15m catamaran, Planet Solar, has been developed to be silent and clean, its Swiss-based maker said. The ship will be able to travel at a top speed of 15 knots (17mph) and carry 50 people. The Planet Solar, which was built in Kiel, Germany, will be launched in March and will be part of celebrations at Hamburg port in May. A crew of two plan to begin the world tour, which will cover about 40,000km (24,850 miles) along the equator, from April next year. Its maker, which is also called Planet Solar, wants to use the voyage to promote solar power and other non-polluting sources of energy."



Ref: Times Online, 26/2/10

More info: www.planetsolar.org/bateau.en.php

Municipal Waste to Jet Fuel

"British Airways will start sourcing a small portion of its jet fuel from municipal waste from 2014, under a deal with U.S.-based biofuel company Solena Group ... British Airways, one of the top three airlines in Europe, said it had signed a deal to purchase all the 'sustainable jet fuel' that Solena could make from a plant expected to be sited in London and operational from 2014. The plant would convert 500,000 tonnes of waste annually into 16 million gallons of green jet fuel, which the two companies calculated would reduce greenhouse gas emissions compared with burning normal jet fuel, also called kerosene. ... British Airways [said] that the volume of biofuel used would be equivalent to 2% of the airline's operation now at Heathrow British Airways aimed to obtain 10% of all its jet fuel from this waste-to-energy process by 2050."

Ref: Reuters UK, 15/2/10

"The BA Solena project will help tackle the UK's rubbish mountain by helping to divert huge amounts of waste from landfill."

Ref: Evening Gazette, 15/2/10

Feedback on Life-Blood of a City

"I have been fascinated by the meticulous systems approach to PT in the extracts from Louis Fouvry ... Pity the Victorian Department of Transport doesn't have a similar approach!"

Ref: Name Supplied, 28/4/10

On the NZ Rail Network Closures (Pt 2)

"Integrated freight co-operatives investing in rail, working together to run it, requires transport policy and funding processes to be the same for roads and rail. Imbalanced funding assistance rates for state highways distort transport development, investment signals, land use activity, and under-prices road transport. No commercial return requirement for funds given to NZTA (billions per year) compared to historical pittances given to rail infrastructure- which is required to make a commercial return- is inequitable. Funding processes for rail are also made more difficult than road infrastructure. Assessing economic viability of each mode without using equal considerations prejudices an effective economy. Today's transport policy has an extremely favourable bias to road transport sourced from the late 1970s. It is so imbalanced the only conclusion is that it was intentionally designed to make rail fail, creating a policy and funding monopoly for road transport feather-bedding the interests of a few at the expense of the whole country. As a result, rail on its own competing with the rest can never be sustainably successful in any format, and taxpayers are paying increasing amounts of the costs the road transport sector creates. Rail co-operating with the rest is much smarter for improved economic performance." {Cont. in #154}

Ref: Kevin Sharp, 5/3/10

NZ Rail Future (Part 1)

"Rail has a bright future both [in NZ] and overseas. Here's why: Recent press from overseas saw Australian trucking magnate, Lindsay Fox, publicly support a campaign to move more freight by rail. In a rare show of non-partisan honesty, Fox said, 'I'm talking against myself when I'm talking about putting things on rail. We're only here for a short time...I'd certainly like to see some of these things [done] that are in the interests of the nation'. In the same week, the world's richest man, Warren Buffett, announced an investment of \$US34 billion in rail. Buffet said, 'Our country's future prosperity depends on its having an efficient and well-maintained rail system'. Our own Minister of Transport has remained sceptical about rail's likely future. Joyce has retreated from a key target in the NZ Transport Strategy to grow rail's share of the freight task from 18 to 25% by 2040. He's funded the bare minimum of essential investment to keep the network operational. And he's placed an unfair expectation on rail that 'all investments in the national rail network [will] provide a commercial rate of return'. (Investments in roads have no such similar requirement)." {Continued in #154}

Ref: Gareth Hughes, Frogblog, 2/3/10

PT: Life-Blood of a City (Part 3)

“Melbourne, founded as a European-style city in 1835, has since grown, sometimes according to well designed town and transport plans, but sometimes through haphazard ad hoc growth. In more recent times, the plans of the Metropolitan Town Planning Commission of 1929 (including the 1923 General Scheme of Tramway Development), the Planning Scheme for Melbourne of 1954, the Melbourne & Metropolitan Transportation Study of 1964-69, and Melbourne 2030 are among the most significant.

“Cities need much space for commercial, educational, industrial, recreational, residential and transport land uses. Their passenger and goods transport systems provide these uses with the required accessibility, and comprise public trunk suburban rail (also ferry) and local-feeder tram and bus services for person movement, railways for goods movement, and roads for passenger and goods commercial vehicles and private car travel. These transport services, though necessary as utilities, are an industry which is only indirectly productive and needs to be minimized. Through its various advantages and efficiencies, public transport is ‘the life-blood of a city’.

“Until the 1920s, Melbourne’s trunk and local-feeder public transport systems grew with the population and were more or less adequate for the then developed urban area. More recent plans have been implemented only in part [mostly roads but very few public transport projects], such that Melbourne, though a most liveable city, is now severely sprawled, of low population density, and no longer operating efficiently. The area within 21 km of the city centre can accommodate a population of not 2 but 6 million. The trunk suburban rail system now serves only 20% of urban Melbourne, and needs to be greatly extended throughout the whole urban area.

“Melbourne’s transport congestion (from excessive road traffic) is estimated as having an economic disbenefit of -\$4000 million annually. By contrast, its public transport system is estimated to result in an economic benefit of +\$2000 million annually. Public transport as the life-blood of a city has numerous significant advantages over private car travel.

“First, public transport aims to take people where and when they want to go, economically, efficiently, reliably and safely, and is almost universally available, provided that both its trunk

and local-feeder services are extended throughout the whole of the city’s developed urban areas. Private car travel is limited to those with a driving licence and a car available. Failure to extend a city’s public transport services is therefore seriously discriminatory.

“Secondly, a well planned system of comprehensive trunk routes, efficiently co-ordinated with its local-feeder routes, guides and greatly aids the work of town planners by providing clear focal points for the Major, Suburban and Local Business Districts, and commercial, residential, etc centres beyond the CBD.

“Thirdly, urban public transport has the fourfold advantage over private car travel of being:

- *less costly overall to build and operate,*
- *a significantly more efficient user of space,*
- *a more efficient user of energy,*
- *and of having a superior safety record.*

“Fourthly, the combination of its trunk and local-feeder services, when comprehensively co-ordinated, amply provides for the needs of all those making either longer or shorter trips. But only the trunk routes can provide, at schedule speeds of 40 km/h or more, the viable, fast alternative to private car travel.

“Fifthly, their efficient use of space, as well as allowing more room for residential, commercial, industrial and recreational land uses, provides the additional advantages of enabling more compact urban areas and, on average, shorter trips overall, with greater opportunity for walking and bicycling. Compact public transport-oriented urban areas are both financially and transport efficient, with minimum road traffic congestion.

“Sixthly, electrically-operated public transport vehicles, when using electricity generated from hydro, solar, tidal and wind, etc power, are both eminently energy-efficient (eg, through regenerative braking) and environmentally sustainable.

“Finally, a thoroughly researched and well organized urban public transport system:

- *encompasses within the one transit authority with its unified aim, all necessary operating, maintenance and planning departments,*
- *is both reliable, and positively balances its city’s triple (environmental, financial and social) bottom line, and*
- *is a system of which its citizens can be proud.”*

Ref: Louis Fouvry, 3/2/10

The Tragedy of Suburbia (Part 1)

"The immersive ugliness of our everyday environments in America is 'entropy made visible'. We can't overestimate the amount of despair that we are generating with places like this, and mostly I want to persuade you that we are going to have to do better, if we are going to continue the project of civilisation in America. ... I like to call it the 'national automobile slum', you can call it 'suburban sprawl', I think it's appropriate to call it the greatest misallocation of resources in the history of the world. ... And it's a tremendous problem for us. The salient problem about this for is that these are places that are not worth caring about. ..."

"The public realm in America has two roles, it is the dwelling place of our civilisation and our civic life and it is the physical manifestation of the public good. And when you degrade the public realm you will automatically degrade the quality of your civic life and the character of all ... that takes place there."

"The public realm comes mostly in the form of a street in America because we don't have the thousand-year old cathedral plazas and market square of older cultures and your ability to define space and to create places that are worth caring about, all comes from a body of culture that we call 'the culture of civic design'. This is a body of knowledge, method, skill and principle that we threw in the garbage after WW2 and decided that we don't need that any more, were not going to use it, and consequently we can see the results all around us."

"The public realm has to inform us not only where we are geographically but it has to inform us where we are in our culture, where we have come from, what kind of people we are and by doing that it has to afford us a glimpse to where we are going, in order to allow us to dwell in a 'hopeful present'. And if there is one great catastrophe about the places that we have built, the human environments that we have made for ourselves in the last fifty years, it is that it has deprived us from living in a 'hopeful present'. ..."

"Remember that to create a place of character and quality, you have to be able to define space ... If you stand in the apron of a Wal-Mart ... and try to look at the Target Store ... you can't see it because of the curvature of the Earth! That's Nature's way of telling you that you are doing a poor job of defining space. Consequently, these will be places that nobody wants to be in, these will be places that are not worth caring about. ..."

"In [good public] places in other cultures, people just go there voluntarily, because they like them. [They] don't have to have a craft fair to get people to [go] there. ... People just go, because it is pleasurable to be there. But this is how we do it in the United States – [Boston City Hall Plaza] – probably the most significant public place failure in America designed by the leading architects of the day ... a public place so dismal that the winos don't even want to go there and we can't fix it because [the architect] is still alive, and every year Harvard and MIT have a joint committee to repair it and every year they fail to because they don't want to hurt [the architect's] feelings. ..."

"[As for] the other side of the building [in a street that was] the winner of an international design award (I think in 1966) ... There's not enough Prozac in the world to make people feel OK about going down this block! This is the back of Boston City Hall, the most significant civic building in Boston and what is the message ... it's a despotic building and it wants us to feel like termites."

{Continued in #154}

Ref: James Howard Kunstler, TED Talks, Monterey, California, February 2004

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1ZeXnmDZMQ&feature=player_embedded#



City Hall Plaza, Boston, Massachusetts

Photo: Wikipedia, 15/5/09

"The [Boston] City Hall Plaza has long been cited as a failure in terms of design and urban planning. In 2004 the Project for Public Spaces identified it as the worst single public plaza worldwide, out of hundreds of contenders. Some efforts have been made to liven up City Hall Plaza, but these have been met with mixed reactions."

Ref: Wikipedia

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boston_City_Hall