

Bicycle Helmet Debate

"A group of Australian academics believe they have finally answered the question of whether bicycle helmets reduce head injuries. Researchers say they have evidence which shows mandatory helmet laws in New South Wales have worked, slashing head injuries by almost one third. Australia was the first country to introduce mandatory helmet legislation in 1991, and ever since it has been the subject of fierce debate. The issue flared last year when Professor Chris Rissel from the University of Sydney found a decline in cyclist head injuries in New South Wales was not due to mandatory helmet legislation, but other factors, like general road safety improvements. The paper was later retracted by the journal that published it after other academics pointed out errors in the data. Now those academics have released their own research.

"Dr Jake Olivier led researchers from the University of New South Wales and the Sax Institute. They found that from just before to just after the mandatory helmet law came into effect in NSW, head injuries among cyclists fell by up to 29%. 'The mandatory helmet law apparently did its job. It was set in motion to reduce bicycle head injuries and it accomplished that', says Olivier. 'We were able to isolate a definitive benefit in the mandatory helmet law to the reduction of the bicycle-related head injury'. The researchers looked at the ratio of injuries to cyclists' heads and injuries to arms and legs from the period before the law came in and compared that to the ratio of injuries in the period after. They also examined pedestrian injuries over that time. 'In those two analyses, the ratio was flat for both, indicating it's not due to road safety improvements', says Olivier. But Professor Chris Rissel disputes the findings and argues helmet laws should be repealed because they 'do more harm than good'. Whether forcing people to wear helmets deters them from cycling is disputed, but Rissel maintains the number of people riding bikes has dropped since the introduction of helmet laws. 'The health benefits to physical activity through more people cycling really outweigh the injury risk that there is', he says."

Ref: Lexi Metherell, ABC Science, 23/6/11
www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2011/06/23/3251338.htm



Brain damaged academics

Grand Prix Bill

"An independent economic impact report has found that overall, the 2011 Grand Prix increased Victoria's gross state product by between \$32 million and \$39 million. However, the government subsidised the event by more than \$50 million."

Ref: AAP, The Age, 22/7/11

"This business should be taxed. It's not transport, it's entertainment that pollutes heavily. About time companies realised that companies have to start paying all the costs of doing business ... and it's about time people realised that we can no longer ignore the pollution processes in the goods and services we consume just because it makes things cheaper."

Ref: Comment, The Age, 22/7/11

Is the \$50 million cost to taxpayers for the F1 worth it?

Yes: 34%

No: 66%

Votes: 4354

Ref: Age Poll 25/7/11

More on Carmageddon in LA

"The greater L.A. area has nearly 18 million people spread over almost 5,000 square miles; its five counties are connected by a sprawling network of freeways, and public transportation plays a relatively minor role, thanks to the area's size and car culture. So the open road is the nerve centre of the Southland's commerce and lifestyle. The problem is that the open road isn't very open. Los Angeles is perennially ranked as having the worst traffic in the nation and that automotive sluggishness costs nearly \$12 billion a year, according to

estimates from the Texas Transportation Institute. So when the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transit Authority announced that it would close a ten-mile stretch of Interstate 405 to tear down a bridge over the freeway, local pundits dubbed the weekend of July 15-17 'Carmageddon'. A ten-mile shutdown may seem like small change in less car-conscious markets, but in Los Angeles it's potentially crippling. ... Closing it represented an automotive amputation. ... Local television personality Sam Rubin cited the event as proof that Los Angeles would be better off with fewer cars. 'This weekend ... proved something that I hope transportation planners, city leaders, and local citizens will keep in mind', Rubin blogged. 'It is as simple as it is true. Fewer cars on the road equal less traffic. Less traffic means better quality of life. So what is the real way to put fewer cars on the road, wider freeways and more high-occupancy vehicle lanes? Of course not. We keep trying that solution and it fails again and again.'"

Ref: Troy Senik, City Journal, 20/7/11

Changes in NSW Transport Admin

“A new agency, Roads and Maritime, will be created in [place of the RTA and NSW Maritime], the Transport Minister Gladys Berejiklian and Roads Minister Duncan Gay announced. Also, the NSW Department of Transport will be renamed Transport for NSW as part of a state government restructure. ... The merging of agencies into one will see 350 positions go, amounting to about 100 job losses, [Ms Berejiklian] said. ‘Most of them were duplicating work’, she said. The Public Transport Ticketing Authority, the Country Rail Infrastructure Authority and the Transport Construction Authority will all cease to exist as independent entities. Their functions will be subsumed within Transport for NSW. ...

“The overhaul was announced to staff by the Director General of Transport NSW Les Wielinga: ... ‘Transport for NSW will be responsible for improving the customer experience, planning, program administration, policy, regulation, procuring transport services, infrastructure and freight. The operating agencies are going to be solely focused on service delivery, which means that some functions or areas currently in the operating agencies and the Department of Transport will move to Transport for NSW. The focus for the integrated transport authority is the customer, be it a public transport user, a motorist, pedestrian or producer such as a farmer or manufacturer. The customer will be at the centre of everything we do.’” Ref: Jacob Saulwick, SMH, 15/7/11

NZ Transport Costs

“Green Party MP and transport spokesperson Gareth Hughes said the 11% upward spike in New Zealand transport costs over the last year was just a taste of things to come. ‘Oil prices will rise and fall, but the long-term trend is up. We need smarter Government strategies to protect us from a future where NZ families won’t be able to afford to get about. Unfortunately, the Government’s pro-motorway transport strategy locks us into oil-dependency. Instead, we should focus on further developing an efficient public transport system that everyone can use’. Statistics NZ today released the Consumer Price Index for the last financial year which showed a 21-year-high increase to the cost of living of 5.3%. It included an 11% increase to the transport costs and a 20.1% increase in fuel costs. Mr Hughes said the Government needed to rethink its transport strategy if it seriously wanted to protect future generations. ‘We asked the New Zealand Transport Agency what oil

price assumptions they use in their latest models for the Roads of National Significance, and were told oil prices weren’t taken into account. It’s amazing that while fuel costs are skyrocketing, the Government still has its head in the sand on the role of oil prices in transport planning. Using woefully out of date assumptions about the price of oil is not a smart way for the Government to run the economy’.”

Ref: Gareth Hughes, Media Release, 18/7/11

Comparing Cities (Part 1)

“While American cities are synchronizing green lights to improve traffic flow and offering apps to help drivers find parking, many European cities are doing the opposite: creating environments openly hostile to cars. The methods vary, but the mission is clear – to make car use expensive and just plain miserable enough to tilt drivers toward more environmentally friendly modes of transportation. Cities including Vienna to Munich and Copenhagen have closed vast swaths of streets to car traffic. Barcelona and Paris have had car lanes eroded by popular bike-sharing programs. Drivers in London and Stockholm pay hefty congestion charges just for entering the heart of the city. And over the past two years, dozens of German cities have joined a national network of environmental zones where only cars with low carbon dioxide emissions may enter.

“Likeminded cities welcome new shopping malls and apartment buildings but severely restrict the allowable number of parking spaces. On-street parking is vanishing. In recent years, even former car capitals like Munich have evolved into ‘walkers’ paradises’, said Lee Schipper, a senior research engineer at Stanford University who specializes in sustainable transportation. ‘In the United States, there has been much more of a tendency to adapt cities to accommodate driving’, said Peder Jensen, head of the Energy and Transport Group at the European Environment Agency. ‘Here there has been more movement to make cities more liveable for people, to get cities relatively free of cars’. To that end, the municipal Traffic Planning Department here in Zurich has been working overtime in recent years to torment drivers. Closely spaced red lights have been added on roads into town, causing delays and angst for commuters. Pedestrian underpasses that once allowed traffic to flow freely across major intersections have been removed. Operators in the city’s ever expanding tram system can turn traffic lights in their favour as they approach, forcing cars to halt.” {Continued in #210}

Ref: Elisabeth Rosenthal, NY Times, 26/6/11

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/27/science/earth/27traffic.html?src=ISMR_AP_LO_MST_FB

Peak Cars (Part 1)

“Australian and world peak car ownership per capita was in 2004 and since has shown a slow decline. It marks an end to car dependence. Teenage car ownership has dropped markedly. Figures suggest a big cultural shift as well as structural change within cities. Some very large cities such as Beijing and Shanghai have made it almost impossible to buy a new car. Car transport has reached a limit. Shanghai built a metro system in 10 years, which covers 80% of the city and carries 8 million passengers each day. Metros are being built in 82 Chinese cities and 14 Indian cities. Peter Newman compares the cost of constructing roads and railways and says both cost about \$50million per kilometre. But rail carries 8-20 times the passengers carried by road. With the price of gasoline heading north, people are moving back into cities and not wanting to be as dependant on cars as they were.

“Robyn Williams: After a century, is that great love affair [with the motor car] coming to an end?

“Chris Paine: What's at stake is the car itself. In a lot of the developing world, in China, in India, what have you, the car is still seen as the unquestioned status symbol. But in the West, in Europe, in the States, in Australia, the car isn't the sexy thing it was when I was a kid. The electric car has a promise of making the car sexy again because it is like an iPad or something, it's electronic, it's not nearly as dirty – it's the future.

“Robyn Williams: That was Chris Paine who makes films about electric cars and he says that's the future. But could it be that, electric or oil, the car's days are over? That's the gist of a paper just published by Professor Peter Newman of Curtin University in Perth. He's one of the world's experts on the real future of cities. And his conclusions are amazing, even for Sydney.

“Peter Newman: Well, Sydney's has not increased for five years. That's the change we are seeing. It's a bit like peak oil; we are not noticing the big impacts yet but we have gone over the top. And that peak in car use per capita began in 2004 across the world. I don't know what was in the water that year but it started then. And US cities are now showing absolute declines in many cases, but the per capita peak happened in 2004 in Australian cities as well. Our data, which we've only recently put together, shows that there were major increases in the '60s of around 40%, and the '70s around 20% to 30%, and the '80s the early 20s%. It now dropped to 5% increase between '95 and 2005,

so we were beginning to pick it up as well. And then we saw that a number of cities, like London, Stockholm, Zurich, Vienna have all declined. Atlanta has gone down 10%, Houston 15%, LA, San Francisco. These are major changes and quite historic. It's not as though the car is disappearing but there is an end to the car dependence that we began to build from the Second World War where we essentially expanded our cities outwards, making car use absolutely necessary and increasing amounts of it every year. That has changed, that's stopped.

“Robyn Williams: And in America they traditionally have two or three cars per family. Is that decreasing as well?

“Peter Newman: Yes, and teenage car use has dropped out almost totally. There used to be 20 million teenagers who had cars between the ages of 15 and 20, and now there is only five million. It's a big cultural shift that's going on as well as I think structural change in the cities.

“Robyn Williams: Let's look at the global situation elsewhere. India and China, the numbers are so large that in China quite recently I thought the figures were that they were having something like 200 deaths per day because of car crashes, which gives you some idea of the incredible scale of car ownership increase. What's the figure like for countries like that?

“Peter Newman: India and China are certainly not showing any indications of this, except in their big cities. So you see the changes now in Shanghai a Beijing where they are actually making it difficult to buy a car because they have hit the wall.

“Robyn Williams: Yes, China has just changed the rules, hasn't it?

“Peter Newman: Yes, and India is doing it in their own way in the sense that the cities are so chaotic and now you can hardly move. That's one way to stop car use growth.

“Robyn Williams: Yes, I remember there being a traffic jam that lasted a week!

“Peter Newman: Yes, if you can't get into the road then it does tend to motivate you not to have a car. And in many ways that is what is happening in these big megacities, they are grinding to a halt in their traffic. So in many ways the car is reaching its limits in the cities of the world. That's the key message.” {Continued in #210}

Ref: ABC Radio National, Science Show, 5/5/11
www.abc.net.au/rn/scienceshow/stories/2011/3206293.htm

Wayfinding in London

"If you've walked through Covent Garden, Southbank or Oxford Street recently, the chances are you will have stumbled across the funky new Legible London pedestrian signs installed by Transport for London (TfL). These sleek, stylish 'monoliths' have been sprouting up all over the capital during the last year. Each monolith is strategically placed and has:

- *An easy-to-read map that is orientated to the users point of view;*
- *5 and 15 minute walking distances;*
- *3D drawings of key shops and buildings in the area.*

"The thinking behind the new system is to encourage more people to walk around London instead of driving or using already overcrowded public transport. By catching people at key decision points – such as tube stations – and providing them with the right information on walking times and local attractions, it is hoped that they will choose to walk. According to TfL, information really is key in achieving modal shift. Research found that most Londoners mental map of London is based on the tube map which is geographically distorted and can be very misleading. For instance there are over 100 connections on the underground where its quicker to walk than take the tube! Legible London maps will often show users that their destination is closer and more walkable than they think.

"To provide Londoners with a coherent wayfinding system, the Legible London designers have broken the city down into three key spatial hierarchies:

- *Areas: 'broad areas of the city' such as the West End;*
- *Villages: 'commonly used names' which Londoners use to quickly connect one part of the city to another;*
- *Neighbourhoods: there are several neighbourhoods in each village.*

"TfL believe that this process of breaking places down, helps pedestrians to explore and find their way around the city: 'As you become more familiar with a particular place, the more you can keep sub-dividing it into smaller, linked pieces, creating a more detailed mental map'.

"The Legible London wayfinding system is a step change from the usual 'clunky', oversized and traffic-orientated pedestrian signage that we've

been used to in UK. TfL have achieved this by investing significantly in the idea and not being afraid to bring in brand marketing, graphic designers and geographers rather than engineers.

"But the key question is: does it get more people walking? Research following the prototype system in Bond Street found that on average, walking journeys in the area were 16% quicker. More recent assessments of the new pilots found that the number of people getting lost in the area fell by 65%. Overall this has contributed to a 5% increase in people walking in these areas of London."

Ref: This Big City, 04/11



Photo: Martin Deutsch, Flickr, This Big City

"The mental images of the subway map really does shape your sense of distance. When I lived in Boston, I used to make two transfers to get where I was going, until I finally found a street map and realized it was a three block walk."

"How can you measure the number of people getting lost? Wouldn't you necessarily miss the people so lost they are outside the neighbourhood they want to be in?"

Ref: Readers' Comments, This Big City, 04/11

<http://thisbigcity.net/will-londons-new-wayfinding-system-get-more-people-walking/>

'Last Mile' Freight Deliveries

"London-based Hubbub lets customers place online grocery orders with multiple local shops and receive a single, aggregated delivery to the door. Consumers in most parts of Highbury, Islington, Finsbury Park, Stoke Newington, Tufnell Park and Kentish Town begin by creating an account with Hubbub and then shopping online at their favourite greengrocers, butchers, fishmongers, bakers and more. Shopping can be conducted online shop by shop, or consumers can search for a particular product. Either way, prices are the same as those charged in the shops themselves, and consumers can even choose when their order will be delivered. When that time comes, Hubbub visits the shops in question, picks up the items ordered and delivers them in a single delivery to the consumer's door. Delivery takes place only on weekdays, and it's free on the consumer's first order and for all orders over GBP 75. Otherwise, it costs GBP 3.50, regardless of the order's size."

Ref: Springwise, 15/4/11

www.springwise.com/food_beverage/hubbub/

A World Without Oil

“How would we live in a world without oil? First, there's transportation. With the overwhelming majority of the oil we produce devoted to powering our cars, motorcycles, trucks, trains and planes, the impact on getting around would be most dramatic. Price-gouging would begin right away, and long lines would form at petrol stations. The lines wouldn't last, though, because the supply would soon be gone. Within a month, every fuel tank would be dry, all our gauge needles would point to 'E' and the roads, rails and skies would be virtually empty. How far is it to the nearest supermarket? How long does it take to walk – or cycle, or skate – to work? Finally confronting our dependence on motor vehicles, we'd reach for whatever solutions we could find. Soon, we'd all be looking for an electric car (but there are precious few of those for sale) or converting our vehicles to run on natural gas. But we'd be waiting for some time to secure adequate natural gas supplies.

“Our enslavement to black gold goes much further than the problem of getting from point A to point B. We also need to keep the lights on. And this would be possible for a while, but brownouts and blackouts would soon begin – sure, our electricity is generated mostly from coal, but how would the coal be extracted without those diesel-guzzling yellow trucks? How would it be hauled to the power plants? (Remember, freight trains all run on diesel, too.)

“Heating and cooling our homes would suddenly get a lot more complicated, and our televisions and laptops would be just a few weeks away from shutting off forever. Forget even trying to get to work any more; we now have another set of problems to solve, especially if it's winter and our houses are getting cold. Can we quickly put together some solar panels and batteries? A wind turbine? What do we have growing in the backyard that can burn? Environmentalists have been nudging us to insulate our homes and generate electricity from renewable resources for a while now; this might be the time to start paying attention. It gets much worse, of course, because a world without oil would quickly become a world without all the products made from petroleum that we have come to know, love and depend upon. The list of essentials that we'd soon be doing without is prodigious: nearly all plastics, paints, medicines, hospital machines that go 'beep', Barbie dolls, ballpoint pens, breast implants, golf balls. Eating would get tougher, too. If no one can truck in fresh vegies from across the country, we might be inclined to go back to basics and grow our own food. Local

farmers would become a necessity, not just people who sell us honey at the school fete. That said, make sure to keep the food coming, fresh and fast, because it's going to be awfully difficult to refrigerate. Fishing might work, so you'd need to get a new rod while supplies last. Alas, most of them are made of plastic ... so is fishing line.

“It's an interesting thought experiment to picture a world suddenly without oil. Taken to its logical conclusion, it encompasses so much more: a complete and rapid breakdown of society, leading to desperation, lawlessness, wars and untold suffering. The scenario is unreal, of course, because we could never shut off our oil supply in a day, and, in any case, there are trillions of barrels of the stuff still in the ground, right? Yet, in a simpler sense, it's not so unrealistic, because even if it will happen more gradually than laid out here, we will indeed run out of oil. Output has already peaked in the majority of countries. A handful of countries are still increasing production, but not enough to offset even bigger declines elsewhere. There is lots of oil still in the ground (we've used about half of the planet's generous endowment), but while the end of oil may be many decades away, the beginning of the end is now. It's not just at the drip of the final drop that the oil crisis begins. It is when production stagnates and begins its inexorable fall. That perilous moment, alas, is now. Our oil supplies are about to begin to fail us. As oil becomes more scarce, we have to get serious about finding new solutions to power our world. We have time to plan – but not that much time. And so far, we've done very little to prepare for a world without oil.” Ref: Steve Hallett & John Wright, Washington Post, The Age, 27/4/11

“Our whole food industry is ridiculously oil dependent. It takes between 5 and 10 calories of energy to produce 1 calorie of food... and this is reportedly before the food is transported or distributed. That is the definition of unsustainable. I wonder if people realise that the pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers that make modern agriculture possible are all fossil fuel based. And let's not forget the large machinery that is now necessary to till / sow / harvest.”

“Where are our governments' contingency plans for peak oil? Nothing at all! They are simply ignoring the any holistic picture of our finite planet. It's 'business as usual' of a past era of growth, growth and damned the cost for future generations.

“You cannot 'fuel' infinite growth with a finite resource.”

Ref: Readers' Comments, The Age, 27/4/11

More on Melbourne Transport Map

"It was quite refreshing to see these sorts of ideas published openly, as I had been thinking along similar lines for some years – back to when I worked in Melbourne public transport. Whilst there were some omissions (many of which have been commented on by others), there was quite a lot of promise, particularly in the concept of ring railways, a significant portion of which would be along existing and previously utilised easements. However, overall the planning for a network must take into account two factors, which most previous commentators have touched on indirectly. The first is the capability of the network, which can be summed up as the ability to get people/goods from where they are to where they need/want to be efficiently, quickly, and safely, and the second is the capacity of the network, which relates to how much can be moved through that network in all directions. Any planning for the network in the future must consider the likely requirements to achieve these two goals, bearing in mind that crystal balls are only so accurate and land use, social changes, technological improvements, etc will all have a bearing on how movement is achieved. One of the major failings (in my opinion) is the radial approach Melbourne currently has with rail lines, which reduces the capability of the network to cater for the varied transport patterns that are required within a large city and this relatively densely populated state.

"As such, I suggest the following:

- *reopening the Outer Circle rail line (of which the current Alamein line is a part);*
- *the Inner Circle (the alignment of which could be part of the Melbourne metro tunnel);*
- *an eastern radial line effectively following the path of Eastlink between Ringwood and Frankston, with interchanges to an extended (through to Ferntree Gully) Glen Waverley line in Scoresby/Knoxville and the Rowville line;*
- *extension of the Sandringham line through Black Rock to meet the Frankston line;*
- *A western radial line from Werribee to Melton to Sunbury to Craigieburn to Epping;*
- *Electrification and/or line extensions to Stony Point, Mornington, Geelong, Warburton, Healesville;*
- *Reconnection of the Upfield line to the Craigieburn line;*
- *Investigate the Rosstown railway as a cross-town route;*
- *Convert the St Kilda/Port Melbourne light rail to heavy rail, which goes underground at Southbank, then follows the proposed Metro tunnel alignment north, before joining the Upfield line near Royal Park.*

"While further afield:

- *Extension of Metlink zoned tickets to cover Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo (with connecting rail services between), Seymour/Shepparton, and Traralgon;*
- *Extension of the RFR concept (ie 160km/h running) to Echuca, Swan Hill, Warrnambool, Shepparton, Albury (The Spirit of Progress in the 1930s was faster than current services) and Bairnsdale;*
- *New or reintroduced passenger services to Horsham, Corowa/Tocumwal, Portland/Mt Gambier, and potentially south Gippsland (Phillip Island/Wonthaggi/Korumburra);*
- *Conversion to standard gauge (probably the cheapest and easiest to achieve, and should be done first).*

"I'm sure you've seen the news {in #208} about Carmageddon in Los Angeles over the weekend, with a fairly large segment of the I-405 freeway closed down for demolition works related to widening the freeway. Perhaps the funniest aside to this, about probably the most car-dependent city in the world, was the airlines offering \$4 fares to fly from one side of the city to the other!"

Alex Pout, 18/7/11

"The Bourke Road tram should extend in the north to La Trobe Uni via Ivanhoe and Waterdale Road and to the south straight through to Caulfield (and beyond) and its Monash Uni campus, inserting a sorely needed north south link into the inner middle suburban region.

"The 75 tram should run straight up Burwood Road from Hawthorn past Swinburne Uni to Camberwell Road and follow Camberwell Road to the junction where it would resume its current route. This would provide a viable service to students and workers in the Glenferrie Road precinct without the need to change services along the way. Service transfers mean possible delays and an inconvenience so people drive instead, adding to the traffic mess in this area.

"Also, it's a shame that the government and V/Line could not have purchased Velocity trains for the Albury line services that are gradually being reinstated after the gauge conversion and line upgrade fiasco. Instead, services will be provided by 30 year old locomotives and refurbished carriages ranging from 30 to 50+ years of age. A Velocity service running at up to 160 kph for most this trip would be in Albury in about 2.5 hours - saving fuel, time and be vastly safer than the battle of the Hume [Highway]."

Graeme Lamb, 18/7/11