

Victorian Road Obesity

"The Southern and Eastern Integrated Transport Authority (SEITA) claims that it is too difficult to estimate the level of 'induced demand' from building a new road. Having spent billions of our money on new roads in the past decade there has, to my knowledge, never been a study in Victoria to assess whether the predicted benefits from a major road construction project were, in practice, any where near as large as those forecast in the 'pre-build' study.

"It would not be difficult to go back to the original forecasts for a new road that was built and see if the road actually delivered what was promised – How long did congestion relief last? Did the road attract more traffic than was forecast? Did it induce development that created more traffic? How accurate was the original cost-benefit forecast? Road proponents don't want to know the answers to these questions – because they suspect their models will be proven wrong. We have known for decades that no city has ever built it way out of congestion and that the more roads you build the worse it gets. They just don't want us to know this and that is why no post-build assessments have ever been undertaken."

Thanks to John Grant for this item. 12/11/08

Road Diets

"The [Moreland] transport strategy, if adopted, would ... implement 'road diets' by creating and widening pedestrian and bicycle access throughout the municipality."

Ref: Kate Lahey, The Age 22/8/08



Cross Roads

And Also ...

"A US cyclist was knocked down by a car and, six hours later, by a train. Robert Evans, 46, of Boulder, Colorado, was first hit by a car, taken to hospital and released. He was on his way back to town when he was hit by a train while walking his bicycle across a bridge. He survived."

Ref: The Age 30/9/08

NSW Road Obesity

"The \$162 million upgrade of Victoria Road [in Sydney] will expose pedestrians to danger, encourage traffic to use the already clogged artery and has so little economic benefit it 'would not normally be considered sufficient to justify construction', an independent review of the project says. Not only will the project increase local traffic by 30 per cent in the morning peak period, but the State Government's objectives can be met far more cheaply by building a single-lane bridge for the exclusive use of buses, the report finds. The ARUP consulting report, commissioned by Leichhardt Council, calls 'highly implausible' the Government's claim that the project will not lead to increased traffic, and 'highly illusory' the claim that it carries benefits for pedestrians. 'The relatively poor predicted future economic performance of the project (marginally below "break even" with a future discounted benefit-to-cost ratio of 0.94) would not normally be considered sufficient to justify construction of a road project'...

"The ratio of benefits over costs published by the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] - \$153 million in benefits and \$162 million in costs - is far lower than the 2 or 3 ratio normally required of road projects in NSW. In the project's lengthy environmental assessment document, the RTA has acknowledged the benefits are a 'marginal economic outcome' but says the project has broader benefits as part of a network of bus routes. The ARUP review of this document says: 'This conveniently overlooks the situation where a major part of the project is actually "excess road capacity" whereby a new four-lane bridge is proposed to be constructed at Iron Cove where only one additional lane is actually required to meet the project objectives'. ... The RTA document said the project would lead to more 'sustainable travel patterns' through changes to urban form, but the council-commissioned report says this claim cannot be made in 'any rational analysis'. 'The only identifiable changes to urban form ... are the loss of and further significant encroachment on local public reserves and recreation facilities, the loss of kerbside car parking for local shops and consequently increased vehicular traffic usage, potentially at much higher speeds in the kerbside traffic lanes'.

"The review also questions the RTA claim that the project carries safety benefits. 'These benefits are likely to be highly illusory as the proposed removal of the fixed central median in the roadway and the removal of kerbside parking will leave pedestrians generally 'more exposed' to traffic than is the situation currently'."

Ref: Linton Besser, SMH 25/11/08

The Car as a Modern Nightmare

"Offering a type of adventure, the motor car is violent. Whatever images may recur in modern nightmares, the real contact individuals have with objects and situations powerful enough to maim them will almost entirely involve motor cars. They may turn pale when their jumbo jet takes off, or swim with trepidation because of the thought of sharks. But if they die violently, it will almost certainly be in a car. If they see seriously injured bodies in the flesh, it will be near car wreckage. As a consequence, the important civic discussion of how, and in which situations, the law ought to protect citizens against violence ought to take a special interest in automobile traffic and its movement. ... Drivers imagine that they are insulated from the potential violence that surrounds them. Their car shields them, and this shielding is one of the factors contributing to the relaxation they experience at the wheel, in their air-conditioned cabin, listening to music."

Ref: John Carroll, The Age 18/10/08

Extract from 'Ego & Soul' published by Scribner

And Also ...

"Motor cars are the new wombs – perhaps explaining why people retreat to them."

Ref: Frank Fisher, 14/10/08

Road Trauma Statistics

*"Road trauma imposes a huge burden on the community and research is crucial if we are to reduce the number of Australians killed or injured on our roads. Last year alone over 1,600 Australians died on our roads. ... Australia still ranks 13th amongst the world's 30 developed countries when it comes to road fatality rates. According to the International Road Safety Comparisons: The 2006 Report Australia's road fatality rate was 7.7 deaths per 100,000 population – lower than the OECD median (8.8), but significantly above the world's best performing nations such as the Netherlands (4.5) and Sweden (4.9)." **Ref: Federal Ministerial Media Release 14/11/08***

*"Annual statistics show that more than 1,500 people are killed and more than 30,000 hospitalised as a result of road crashes. The cost to the Australian economy is conservatively estimated at \$18 billion." See the National Road Safety Action Plan for 2009 and 2010 at: www.atcouncil.gov.au **Ref: Federal Ministerial Media Release, 7/11/08***

"Eight new cars were crashed before logging a single km on the clock this morning, when the truck carrying them overturned."

Ref: Anne Wright, Herald-Sun, 19/11/08

Shipping News

"Solar-powered sails the size of a jumbo jet's wings will be fitted to cargo ships, after a Sydney renewable energy company signed a deal with China's biggest shipping line. The Chatswood-based Solar Sailor group has designed the sails, which can be retro-fitted to existing tankers. The aluminium sails, 30 metres long and covered with photovoltaic panels, harness the wind to cut fuel costs by between 20 and 40 per cent, and use the sun to meet five per cent of a ship's energy needs. China's COSCO bulk carrier will fit the wings to a tanker ship and a bulker ship under a memorandum of understanding with the Australian company, which demonstrates the technology on a Sydney Harbour cruise boat. 'It's hard to predict a time line but at some point in the future, I can see all ships using solar sails - it's inevitable', said the company's chief executive, Dr Robert Dane. Once fitted, the sails can pay for themselves in fuel savings within four years, Dr Dane said. They don't require special training to operate, with a computer linked in to a ship's existing navigation system, and sensors automatically angling the sails to catch a breeze and help vessels along."

Ref: Ben Cubby, SMH, 28/10/08

"The British Government has agreed to include aviation and shipping in a law setting targets to cut greenhouse gases. An amendment to climate change legislation tabled by ministers will compel the independent Climate Change Committee to take emissions from planes and tankers into account when it calculates carbon budgets, after more than 50 Labor MPs demanded the legislation be changed."

Ref: ABC News, 29/10/08

And Also ...

"A Belfast newspaper once reported the launching of an aircraft carrier and recorded: 'The Duchess smashed the bottle against the bow and amid the applause of the crowd she slid on her greasy bottom into the sea'."

Ref: www.myirelandonline.com/jokearc2.htm



Picture: Nicole Garmston, Herald-Sun

Rail News

“As Australia edges closer toward the introduction of an emissions trading scheme, it is high time for a serious discussion about the climate debate's poor third cousin: transport. The transport industry is the third largest emitter of carbon in Australia, behind manufacturing and agriculture. While all the talk has been about manufacturing and clean coal technology and how the government will offset the costs to business, there has been little serious talk of the need to address our increasing reliance on road transport. There are immediate opportunities available to federal and state governments to reduce carbon emissions in the short term.

“The first is the greater utilisation of rail for long distance freight. Rail freight is one of the most carbon-efficient methods for transporting freight long distances. Road accounts for 89 per cent of greenhouse gases from the freight transport sector. Rail accounts for 6 per cent. One intermodal freight train travelling between Sydney and Melbourne replaces 150 trucks and saves 45,000 litres of fuel and 44 tonnes of greenhouse gases. Shifting 20 per cent of Australia's articulated truck task to rail would save 400 million tonnes of fuel each year. Yet on current trends, road freight is set to increase by at least 118 per cent by 2020. This equates to an additional 50,000 trucks thundering along Australian highways by 2020. Rail freight is on track to increase by only half of that. Unfortunately, the Federal Government's discussion paper on its Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) advocates road freight transport be protected from any cost increase on fuel. No such protection is proposed for rail freight.

“Greater use of rail freight is limited by current infrastructure. Significant investment is needed to boost capacity. In fact, some \$5 billion worth of work is needed to upgrade rail links between Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne. It's a lot of money, but just half the amount the NSW Government has requested from the Federal Government to upgrade the Pacific Highway. More investment in public transport is equally vital to cutting carbon emissions. Public transport systems in all states are experiencing large increases in patronage, largely due to the spiralling cost of fuel. But in many Australian cities it has become apparent that public transport systems have been pushed beyond their capacity. Australians are willing to utilise public transport, if it is available and efficient. However state administrations are struggling to find the funds for important projects - like public

transport links reaching out to the mortgage belts of our major cities, which would reduce reliance on cars. Australia is one of the few countries in the world where the Federal Government does not assist in funding public transport infrastructure. It's time for that to change. These are difficult economic times. That makes it more important than ever that the Federal Government give top priority to transport projects and assist the states in reaching their transport planning goals.

“The science tells us we that we need to act fast to mitigate the effects of climate change. Transport initiatives that enable us to get cars off the road could significantly reduce carbon emissions, fast. There is an economic cost to build and upgrade the necessary infrastructure but when compared to the alternative, it pales into insignificance. The benefits of smarter transport investment will be there for all to enjoy, immediately – less congestion, better cities, fewer road accidents, less expensive road maintenance and most important, reduced carbon emissions. I welcome the Federal Government's determination to press ahead with its climate change targets, but let's face up to the challenge of cutting transport pollution, for our future's sake.”

Ref: Greg Harvey, ABC News, 12/11/08

“Since franchising began [in Victoria] in 1999 both trains and trams have seen significant increases in services, the introduction of new rolling stock and a more customer-focused attitude. Also, commuters no longer experience the sort of industrial action that produced the 55-day rail strike in 1950, or the six-week tram blockade in 1990. Most of the problems that do arise in the Melbourne system are the result of either decades of under-investment in the maintenance of infrastructure during the time when it was fully government operated, or from the problems of overcrowding resulting from the success of the operators in attracting more customers. The Government has also been slow to respond to the demands on the system of more commuters. If, as [Paul] Mees asserts, there are more efficient ways to deliver extra capacity on the rail system than the \$9 billion Eddington rail tunnel from Footscray to Caulfield, then competitive tendering provides the opportunity for one of Connex's bidding rivals to provide a better alternative. The Victorian Government would no doubt welcome any operator that said it could deliver more services without huge capital expenditure. By contrast the NSW Government has no capacity to replace, and no will to reform, its poorly performing government operator.” **Ref: Richard Allsop, The Age, 14/11/08** (Richard was chief of staff to the transport ministers in the Kennett government.)

Congestion Thinking - Pt. 4

"In Melbourne the road builders shifted their strategy, but without abandoning their long term plan. The new strategy is to focus on specific bottlenecks and argue for more modest links to be built as the popular pressure of demand to 'relieve congestion' arose.

"This strategy will probably result in the Victorian Government adopting part of the Eddington road tunnel proposal to link a new motorway from the West with the City Link motorway. Once that is done the pressure of demand 'to relieve congestion' will eventually see to it that the rest of the link is constructed via a tunnel to the Eastern Freeway. Whether this is built under a Labor Government or a future Liberal one is immaterial to Vic Roads. In fact if any part of the road tunnel is built, the Labor Government will probably lose the next election or the one after.

"David Metz, however, has a different view about bottlenecks. He argues that building roads to relieve bottlenecks transfers congestion to another place downstream, and encourages further traffic build-up over time on the 'decongested' stretches of road: 'Many bottlenecks perform a metering function, by reducing the flow at one point to a level that can be sustained in downstream sections of roadway. Removal of the bottleneck in one location may simply result in transferring the bottleneck to another point downstream. In many cases the newly formed downstream bottleneck may result in worse traffic conditions than maintaining the original bottleneck. Thus, bottlenecks may often play a useful and important function in regulating flows and controlling the level of congestion that occurs on a road network' (Metz, 2008, p.54)

"The only way to solve congestion by building roads is to do what the Transportation Studies of the 1960s and '70s proposed. Filling in gaps piecemeal simply transfers congestion but does not solve it. In fact congestion can have a positive function, by inhibiting travel. Congestion is an automatic travel demand management measure, which plays an important role in keeping cities liveable.

"Congestion pricing is also a travel demand management measure designed to have identical results in

inhibiting travel. It simply monetises and socialises the cost of congestion paid by the motorist. The difference is in that money collected by road pricing is invested socially. If it is invested in infrastructure improvement it will simply increase distance travelled unless there are complementary measures to inhibit travel such as car parking restrictions and land use controls."

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



Late Night Seniors Moment

Above: Southern Cross Station (in Melbourne) around 11.30pm on a Saturday night in mid November after a concert at the local stadium. Of interest is that the passengers were mostly 50+. The picture was taken just after the train that was on the right hand platform cleared away some of the patrons. The nearby tram platforms were also packed (see below). Good to see that the public transport is so well patronised out of peak times.



Footnote: Spencer Street (that runs alongside the station) is usually closed to cars during large events at the stadium. It was fun to watch the seniors gather at the kerb obeying the 'don't walk' sign, until one or two ventured across, which generated a mass surge. Reminiscent of wildebeest gathering before a crocodile invested river that they must cross.