

Well off the Track

Sadly Wayne Kaylor-Thomson is well off track on almost every point that he raises (“Let’s get our transport back on track”, *The Age*, 5/12/08). As CEO of the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce he perhaps would better service his members by focusing on the enormous potential for business opportunities and ‘green-collar’ jobs in the sustainability sector. [Germany created 76,000 new Green Jobs in renewable energy (to reach a total of 236,000) in just two years between 2004 and 2006. Ref: ACF]. That Victorians can’t squeeze onto trams and trains is an indictment against our governments, our planners and industry rather than an indication that travellers are not choosing by preference to travel by public transport.

Only in Wayne’s mind are any of the sustainable transport advocates trying to force “people out of their vehicles.” Australians are too in love with their cars for that to happen. All we need to do is provide quality public transport and safe walking and cycling paths. People will then choose to use these facilities and the more enjoyable community spaces while those that need – or want – to drive will have much less congested travel without the need to build more roads. A win for everyone! Of course the sustainable goal would be to make new cars much less polluting and more efficient. Again a win for everyone, particularly as we enter the age of oil decline! I’m surprised that only 80% of those polled in the RACV survey wanted more freeways. But what would the percentage be if the question was phrased: ‘Do you want more roads if you personally had to pay the true cost of emissions, pollution, road trauma, etc?’

The public only *thinks* that building more roads reduces congestion. This build-more-roads-solve-the-problem hypothesis can easily be tested: Given the hundreds of billions of dollars that we have poured into the road system over the past fifty years why do we presently have so much congestion? The reality is that if you build more roads you attract more cars. For example: “When the South Eastern Arterial was opened in the 80’s, VicRoads predicted that it would take 15 years for traffic to reach congestion levels. In fact it took only three months, and the new road reached peak hour capacity in just six months.” [Machin & Stone].

On the other hand, if you build good sustainable transit systems, they would in turn be used. And by putting roads on ‘diets’ you can in fact reduce traffic snarls and improve urban amenity. Park-and-ride, while sounding like a good idea, is a

seriously flawed concept, particularly where they are constructed around railway stations and/or where the parking is free. The cost of establishing parking spots is enormous and it can take decades to return the investment against transit tickets. The other major problem is social – mass car parking creates ‘deserts’ around railway stations that are either unsafe or perceived as not being safe. A far better idea is to create vibrant communities within walking and cycling distance of stations. Even kiss-and-ride is better than park-and-ride.

Wayne has apparently fallen into the trap of assuming that everybody does own a car and/or can drive to the railway station. Many people are too young, too old, infirm, or simply choose not to drive. We have to provide good transit interconnections (train /tram /bus /ferry /taxi /carshare /etc) so why not improve the service and in the process leave the existing parking at railway stations for those that really want or need it.

Wayne is right however in saying that in “a democratic society citizens ultimately will make choices that suit themselves”. They also vote, and once they fully understand the true situation, without the spin and misinformation, they will make their choice at the ballot box. Climate Change and public transport is already high on the public’s agenda. The ramifications of Peak Oil won’t take long to be felt. Governments at all levels can provide inspiring leadership towards a more sustainable society. So too can organisations like the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce.

And Also ...

“The trouble is, successive governments have focused almost solely on new roads, all these fabulous M2s and M5s and tunnels designed to make journeys quicker but in reality rarely doing so. Not to mention the greenhouse gas emissions. And while roads have long been the great god, public transport has played poor cousin.”

Ref: Jennie Curtin, SMH, 11/6/08

“Why should we drive less? There is absolutely no reason why we should sacrifice our lifestyle because China and India want to rehabilitate 2 billion people into a middle class. Australian’s need to stand up and force the Government to protect our way of life ... and not sacrifice it for the benefit of others. We work hard in this country to enjoy a good life.”

Ref: James Tsolakis, SMH, 17/6/08

“Umm, okay James. I really enjoy our lifestyle - sitting in bumper to bumper traffic. It’s great. Darn Chinese and Indian drivers trying to take that away from me.” **Ref: Winston, SMH, 17/6/08**

Japanese Cycling Culture

"Tokyo is the most transit-rich city in the world with metro rail services to most areas at headways of a few minutes. Cycling in Tokyo is a form of 'faster walking'. Huge bicycle parks accommodate commuter cycles around stations, the cyclist/pedestrian activity around station precincts promotes retail and cultural activity in the streets with a character unique to each locality. If Tokyo is a city of cyclist/ pedestrians then Sydney is, at best, a city of walking motorists and because of this, Australians have a primitive experience of the benefits of density."

"I'm often told (usually as an excuse) that Japan is different for cultural reasons. Perhaps this is true, but culture is surely manufactured as we go along through time. It would be sad indeed to think that we are manufacturing a culture permanently around cars. While we, in Australia, strap our kids into baby seats in the back of cars and throw computer games and food at them to keep them quiet, Japanese kids enjoy a pilot's view of their neighbourhood from the front of moving bicycles. A lifetime affinity with cycles is formed in this way, an affinity that benefits everybody in terms of healthy bodies as well as healthy public domains." Ref: (including photo) Bob Perry, *The Flyer*, December 08 www.scapestrategy.com.au



Californian Complete Streets Act

"The California Complete Streets Act of 2008 ... requires cities and counties to include complete streets policies as part of their general plans so that roadways are designed to safely accommodate all users, including bicyclists, pedestrians, transit riders, children, older people, and disabled people, as well as motorists. ... The new law will complement an existing policy, which directs Caltrans to 'fully consider the needs of non-motorized travelers in all programming, planning, maintenance, construction, operations and project development activities and products' To date, more than 70 jurisdictions have adopted complete streets measures, and many others are considering them. In addition to California, five other states have complete streets legislation."

Ref: Media Release, 3/10/08 www.completestreets.org

New Zealand Walking & Cycling Guide

"Raising the profile of walking and cycling in New Zealand – a guide for decision-makers highlights the range of benefits that can be gained from creating safe and convenient walking and cycling networks in our towns and cities. The guide discusses the benefits that walking and cycling bring about, looks at the current state of affairs for these modes in New Zealand, and considers the initiatives that could be implemented to increase the number of people walking and cycling as a means of transport and for enjoyment. The main audiences for this guide are decision-makers and key influencers in government, particularly at the regional and local level."

Ref: NZ Govt Ministry of Transport website: www.transport.govt.nz/raising-the-profile-of-walking-and-cycling-in-new-zealand-1/

Roads are for People



Road closed to traffic, Wellington, NZ, 14/12/08

Speed & Safety

"The faster that people drive, the more difficult it is for them to avoid hitting a cyclist or pedestrian in their path. An alert driver travelling at 50 km/h will travel 37 metres before stopping. The same driver travelling 100 km/h will move five metres further than this before they can even react. Even once they start braking, they will travel a further 69 metres before coming to a full stop. The speed at which a cyclist or pedestrian is hit strongly determines how seriously they will be injured. A cyclist/pedestrian hit at 32 km/h has a 95 percent chance of survival. If they are hit at 48 km/h, their survival chance decreases to 55 percent. Once the impact speed reaches 70 km/h, the survival chance is virtually zero. The risks speed pose to the elderly and children is likely to be even higher due to their natural fragility."

Ref: Extract from *Raising the Profile of Walking and Cycling in New Zealand* (see above)

Cycling and Real Estate in the US

"The number of people who use bicycles to commute to work [in the US] grew 28% from 2000 to 2006, when 623,039 Americans said they did so, according to the latest Census Bureau data. The U.S. bicycle industry also has been growing, with sales totaling \$5.4 billion in 2007, up from \$4.7 billion in 2001, according to research funded by the National Sporting Goods Association.

"Targeting the cycling community is a new marketing tool for the struggling real-estate industry. In June, sales of existing homes fell 15.5% from the same month last year, according to the National Association of Realtors. Riding down streets with prospective buyers attracts attention that could result in more business, these agents say. Some Realtors also attend cycling shows and 'ride to work' days to boost their client bases.

"One recent Saturday, agent Tammee Ryan of ERA Landmark in Bozeman, Mont., was out riding when she got a call from a client, Matt Kemmer. She met him on her bicycle, dressed in Lycra, and apologized profusely. Mr. Kemmer, a 34-year-old software consultant who also is a cyclist, had looked at 25 other properties, but he says he bought the one Ms. Ryan showed in part because they bonded over their interest in cycling and after she pointed out a bike path near the condo. 'That's what was important to me', says Mr. Kemmer, who travels extensively for work and likes to ride everywhere when he is home. As a result, Ms. Ryan has started offering bike tours to other clients.

"In New York City, Danny Davis, a top producer for Citi Habitats, regularly rolls up to client meetings looking like a bike messenger. Lately, he says, more customers are riding with him. "It's no secret that biking is the most efficient way to apartment hunt in this city," he says. ...

"Matt Kolb in Bolder, Colo., started his bike-focused agency, Pedal To Properties, 16 months ago after he saw how much enthusiasm showing houses by bike generated when he was at another agency in town, Benchmark Realty. He now has a fleet of 48 Electra cruiser bikes (upright bikes with coaster brakes that are easy to ride). Every Wednesday evening, he and two

other agents from his firm take out four to eight couples to see at least six houses. The clients tend to be in their late 30s and early 40s and include both hard-core bike commuters and weekend riders. After the tour, they go to a restaurant to discuss the houses. Sales at Pedal To Properties have risen 40% over the past year, half of which Mr. Kolb attributes to the bike showings.



Picture: Daniel Root for The Wall Street Journal

"It was Mr. Kolb's willingness to go by bike that attracted Kelly Stroker, a 34-year-old research scientist who lived 15 miles outside Boulder and wanted to move closer to town, primarily so she could bike to work. She thought peddling from house to house would be a great way to judge how bike-friendly each

home was. One Sunday last month, Ms. Stroker and her husband spent about three hours with Mr. Kolb, seeing seven houses. They eventually chose a \$434,000, 2,100-square-foot house less than two miles from Ms. Stroker's job and commutable entirely by bike paths." Ref: Nancy Keates, The Wall Street Journal, 22/8/08

Cycling and Real Estate in Australia

"Commuting by bike is becoming the norm for many Melburnians, leading to a rise in the number of potential home owners citing bike paths and secure lock-up facilities as part of their buying wish-list. Stephen Brown, property consultant with Thomson in Essendon, says the interest in bikes has been the biggest shift he has noticed in real estate, particularly in the past 18 months. 'It used to be people wanting space for a second car, now it's bike storage', he says. ... Mr Brown says being close to the bike path is definitely something he promotes during a selling campaign. 'It's a big plus and probably adds value although it's hard to quantify - it does make a property more desirable'. ... [And] ... 'Given each car park for a home or a business can cost \$30,000 in the inner city, there's considerable value in having parking for bikes and reducing the need for people to either own a car at all or own more than one car in the case of a family', Cr [Jackie] Fristacky [City of Yarra] says." Ref: Kate Robinson, Domain, The Age, 18/10/08

And Also: Model Train Gift Idea

"The German version of this timeless classic avoids frustration from the outset: Our high tech model trains are never late!" Ref: www.german-jokes.com/getorganized_presents.html

Parkways

Parkways are the nice name for motorways that cut a swathe through otherwise pristine wilderness such as the Wakehurst Parkway to the north of Sydney. Natural vegetation is replaced with hard surface bitumen and the local flora and fauna cops the petrol and diesel pollutants of the passing vehicles. Often weeds are introduced along the verges and the hinterland can become a dumping place for rubbish.

“During the early 20th century, the meaning of the word was expanded to include limited-access highways designed for recreational driving of automobiles. New parkways provided scenic places to race motor cars outside the city without stopping for pedestrian traffic and slower vehicles. These parkways led to more development outside the city, which eventually limited their usefulness for recreation. Some of these parkways have become major local or interstate traffic routes, however they retained the name ‘parkway’. Many opponents of increased road construction in the United States claim that the use of the term ‘parkway’ in any sense other than as a scenic route through parkland, is deceptive. It is claimed by such advocates that many existing and proposed parkways are functionally indistinguishable from freeways and/or expressways, and the ‘parkway’ label is used to make construction of such routes seem more palatable to the public (who might otherwise stage a freeway revolt, especially if their neighborhood is affected).”

Ref: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parkway>

Problems with Bull Bars

“On average at least 29 pedestrians are killed each year in collisions with bull bar equipped vehicles. The current Australian Vehicle Standards Rule (AVSR) 30 requires a bull bar – or other ‘objects’ such as driving lights or winches – to be designed and fitted in a way which ‘minimises the likelihood of injury to a person in contact with the vehicle’.” Ref: **Australasian College of Road Safety, 2008**

And Also...



Seasons Greetings

We wish all our readers safe transit over the festive season. Thank you for all the articles, contributions, links and ideas. An extra special thankyou to Andrew McKay for his cartoons.

Sydney's Transport

“Sydney has been ranked at the bottom of a list of the world's most important 20 cities for the quality of its transport infrastructure, behind Mumbai, Sao Paulo and Mexico City. With no underground metro, a shortage of taxis and worsening congestion, Sydney fell short of its international peers according to the Cities of Opportunity report, compiled by the NY Chamber of Commerce.”

Ref: **Linton Besser, The Examiner, 11/12/08**

Car Share Moves West

At the end of November 2008, a car share company established cars in the inner western suburbs of Melbourne.

“The car share scheme is one of several ways that parking and traffic congestion will be tackled in the West over the coming years. This Flexicar joins a fleet of 60+ cars in Melbourne, with other inner-west locations due in the next few months to include Footscray and Yarraville after the Maribyrnong Council voted this week to approve two spaces for Flexicars. ... Flexicar launched in Melbourne 2005. There will be close to seventy Flexicar locations around Melbourne after these launches. Flexicar operates in partnership with local Councils, including the Cities of Melbourne, Maribyrnong, Moreland, Port Phillip and Yarra.”

Ref: **Flexicar Media Release, 20/11/08**

More on Air Bags

“The Dutch Cycling Federation in the Netherlands is boldly approaching car manufacturers and requesting hood-mounted external airbags on all vehicles. It's either that or they're going to have to stop running into cyclists (which will never happen). ... The group says that 60 lives could be saved and 1,500 serious injuries could be prevented annually in the Netherlands alone with hood-mounted air bags. Luckily for those peddlers, the technology is already available. Nissan and Jaguar have both developed pop-up bonnets that help absorb impact from hitting pedestrians and cyclists. Also, Swedish auto part maker, Autolive Inc., has developed an external airbag that deploys from the bottom on the windshield.”

Ref: **Japonik, NJection, 23/4/08**

<http://njection.com/blogs/jalopnik/archive/tags/Airbags/default.aspx>