

Trams for George Street, Sydney

"The [NSW] O'Farrell government will soon be asked to approve a sweeping overhaul of Sydney's central business district, including plans for light rail down George Street and significant changes to bus routes. Transport bureaucrats and consultants are close to finishing two studies that have the potential to reshape the way residents move about the CBD. The studies, commissioned by the former Labor government, have identified George Street as the best route to run a tram line. It would go from Central Station to Alfred Street near Circular Quay. But the government would also need to be prepared to redirect cars and buses to accommodate the trams."

"The Premier, Barry O'Farrell, has nominated transport as his first priority in government. If Mr O'Farrell and his transport minister, Gladys Berejiklian, moved fast on CBD light rail, the project could be finished before the 2015 election. ... The lord mayor of Sydney, Clover Moore, has argued for a pedestrian boulevard, free of all cars and buses,



Artist's impression of the light rail in George Street

Ref: SMH 31/3/11

on George Street near the Town Hall. ... A spokesman for Mr O'Farrell said: 'We are committed to light rail in the CBD, but the government will be seeking briefings from Transport NSW on the current status of the plans'. The main advantage of light rail in the CBD is that, running regularly, it could transport up to twice as many people as buses without the congestion. Travelling from Central to Circular Quay by bus takes 35 minutes in peak hour, the City of Sydney estimates. But traffic-calming measures alongside light rail could cut the trip to 17 minutes."

Ref: Jacob Saulwick, SMH, 31/3/11

Property Values and Public Transport

"A new paper from the lobby group the Tourism and Transport Forum, supporting the extension of Sydney's limited light rail network, cites examples in the United States where land values within 800 metres of mass transit have risen by as much as 120%. 'Light rail is also seen to have a positive effect on property values', the forum's paper says. It refers to increases in house prices of 32% near the Metrolink lines in St Louis, Missouri; 45% increases in the value of apartments along the line in Santa Clara, California; a 120% increase in the value of office space along the same line; and a 30% rise in retail space values along the light rail system in Dallas, Texas. 'This premium value', the forum paper says, 'paves the way for transit-oriented development strategies, which increase both density along light rail corridors and increase patronage, improving the cost benefit of the system'. ...

"A study found that after dedicated bus transit-ways opened in Brisbane, 'median property values for suburbs adjacent to the transit-way increased by between 3.9% and 20.86% within a few months of opening, compared with a value change of between minus 4.35% and 6.63% for non-adjacent suburbs'. But housing advocates warn the government would need to zone some of the precincts near light rail for accommodation for low and middle earners. ... One of the world's leading urban planners, Professor Ed Blakely, said the introduction of permanent infrastructure – such as light rail or even a simple overhead wire for a trolley bus – encouraged better development. You get a better result than with an ordinary bus route because people fear that the bus can move away."

Ref: Andrew West, SMH, 13/3/11

Airline News

“A second US air-traffic controller who slept on an overnight shift, this time on purpose, is in the process of being fired, Federal Aviation Administration chief Randy Babbitt said. ‘It wasn’t fatigue-related, this is someone who, in our investigation, just went in and prepared to go to sleep, take a nap, and that’s absolutely not acceptable’. ... The possibility of controllers sleeping became a concern after a lone worker on duty at the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport tower told investigators he dozed off March 23 after midnight, before two planes carrying a combined 154 people landed.”

Ref: Bloomberg, The Age, 7/4/11



The sound if men at work

UK Freight Shift from Road to Rail

"A £70m upgrade of the rail route between Southampton docks and the Midlands has been completed after two years of work, £10m under budget. The route between Southampton and Nuneaton, via Reading, Didcot, Oxford and Banbury, will take up to 50,000 lorry journeys a year off roads. It will mean trains can distribute freight more quickly and economically. Network Rail has said much of the traffic on the A34 is caused by lorries taking goods to and from the port. The aim is to get 40% of containers going through Southampton Port on to rail, rather than road. During the work, Southampton tunnel was made deeper and more than 20 bridges were rebuilt. ... But the way the owner of Southampton Port plans to recover its share of the cost is causing controversy. Shipping companies have complained to the Office of Fair Trading about plans by ABP to levy a surcharge of £3 on every container for the next eight years. From this week, the levy will also apply to road freight as well as containers going by rail."

Ref: BBC, 4/4/11

Regional Rail Link in Victoria

“[Victorian] Transport Minister Terry Mulder said on Monday that the proposed Regional Rail Link would proceed despite a two-year delay in its completion, and a huge increase in costs. The move comes as the government weighs up whether to give up \$1 billion in revenue from a controversial plan to ‘tax’ freight entering the Port of Melbourne. ... The toll, set to start in the second half of this year, was to contribute \$1 billion over 12 years to the then Labor government’s \$38 billion transport plan, and would have charged for each truck visit to Swanson Dock.”

Ref: Clay Lucas/David Rood, The Age, 6/4/11

Road Reform and Local Government

"The Metropolitan Transport Forum (MTF)" ... welcomes acknowledgement of the substantial cost shifts to local government of heavy vehicle use of local government roads with adverse impacts on communities in terms of congestion, safety, amenity and noise. This cost shifting distorts local government budgets undermining local government capacity to adequately fund community infrastructure and services. MTF thus welcomes pricing and funding mechanisms to offset heavy vehicle use cost shifting. MTF submissions are as follows:

- *“As freight movements grow, capacity for already stretched road infrastructure to meet the freight task is limited. Primacy should be given to expanding the freight task by rail, including off peak and at night. This should not be an afterthought or token, but given priority;*
- *“Heavy vehicle use should be properly costed including for externalities of environmental impacts, emissions, noise, accidents, road and bridge construction and maintenance, and other costs such as land use:*

¹ The MTF represents 21 Melbourne metropolitan local governments. It also has associate members from government, industry and not-for-profit sectors. When the MTF presents a submission on behalf of its local government members, the views presented are independent of the views of associate members.

- *"Heavy vehicle road use charges should reflect the above costs and revenue should be applied not only to road maintenance costs across all levels of government, but also directed to other transport needs such as rail infrastructure, filtering of vent stack/clean air measures, and road safety;*
- *"Although arterial roads are maintained by State authorities, some costs of heavy vehicle use of arterial roads are nevertheless, still passed on to local governments. These include repair of damage to kerb and channel, drains, traffic treatments, signs, footpaths, footpath furniture, trees and other vegetation. These need to be included in costs of heavy vehicle use;*
- *"There is particular concern re heavy vehicle use of both arterial and local roads through activity centres, given adverse amenity impacts and conflicts with other road users;*
- *"The need to distribute funds derived from vehicle and heavy vehicle charges, to local government based on use of both arterial and local roads to deal with vertical fiscal imbalance and cost shifting to local government;*
- *"Engaging local government to facilitate heavy vehicle use in return for payment of road charges, creates conflicts of interest and should be structured in a way which minimises such conflict;*
- *"Consideration in any GPS system applied to heavy vehicle use, to be integrated with current extensive work undertaken on vehicle GPS systems providing early warning systems for vehicle safety and accident avoidance;*
- *"Ensuring that logistic systems for heavy vehicles apply technology which overcomes inefficiencies in their loading and empty running;*
- *"Local government be represented on any task force or industry panel to overview heavy vehicle standards on the basis of its responsibility for 80% of roads in the nation."*

Ref: Jackie Fristacky, MTF, 11/4/11

Road vs Rail Investment

One of my challenges is getting information on the comparative spending between roads and rail from the federal and state governments. Either nobody quite knows or they are not so keen to make the information available. However I have gleaned the following from a blog contribution by the Federal Infrastructure Minister, Anthony Albanese: *"We have doubled the national roads budget to more than \$27.7 billion. ... We have invested more than \$1.2 billion into 17 projects across the interstate freight rail network."*

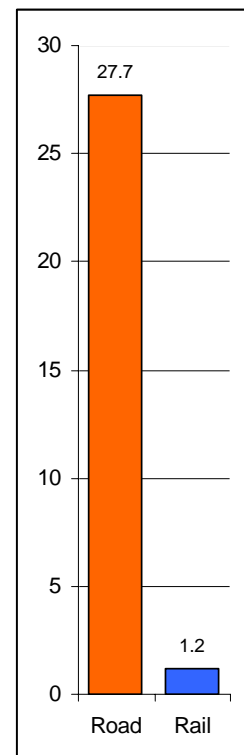
The problem, apart from the massive discrepancy, is that after 3.5 years of Federal Labor government, we are seeing lots of roads being built but nothing to show off as completed in urban public transport. Sure there has been some money committed to major transit studies, and these take time, but what about supporting smaller projects like federally funded trams for regional cities or ferries for maritime areas?

I acknowledge the importance of spending on the rail freight projects and as this Minister says: *"We have invested more in rail over the past 12 months than our predecessors did in 12 years. ... The jobs created to support this activity are considerable. Manufacturing 1.2 million concrete rail sleepers has given work to factories in five towns in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia. This has employed hundreds of workers with flow-on effects right throughout their communities."*

Meantime much of the urban public transport is underfunded, congestion is costly, obesity is increasing, and there are lots of unhappy commuters out there who not only vote but give a very high priority to public/active transport.

Stephen Ingrouille, 31/3/11

> We welcome contributions on this subject, particularly cost breakdowns of comparisons for both federal and state spending.



**Comparative
Spending
for 12 months,
A\$ Billion**
Ref: ALP Website
21/3/11

Melbourne's North East Link Road

"The proposed North East Link was promised \$15.4 million for a study into the controversial freeway by the previous government."

Ref: Hannah Donnellan, Heidelberg Leader, 22/3/11

"Why is [state Labor MP] Anthony Carbines pushing for a \$15 million study into a proposed NE link? Why not push to have the money allocated to actually make a difference to traffic now in his electorate by asking for public transport upgrades? And how come Mr Carbines is suddenly a supporter of the link? It is just madness to think that this is a useful way to spend money when we need something to happen now, we need to get the trucks out of Banyule by forcing them to use the already funded routes to the east and we need to protect what wildlife corridors have been left to us. Money for schools, money for hospitals, money for libraries, go ahead, but for a link that will destroy a precious commodity with no real benefit to the community? What are you thinking Mr Carbines?"

"The proposed North East Link needs to be officially killed off ASAP. There is no justification for destroying the Banyule wetlands. Logic must take precedence - there are two issues - (1) public transport can deal with the transport problems in Banyule suburbs and (2) all the traffic using Heidelberg as a shortcut (particularly trucks) need to be rerouted to the ring road via a connection between it and the Eastern Freeway as was originally intended before this proposed route. Bringing all this unnecessary traffic, noise and pollution through Banyule and closer to the centre of Melbourne is unnecessary and backward."

Ref: Comments, Heidelberg Leader, 23/3/11

> Can anyone explain / justify how such a study can cost \$15.4 million?

What's in a Name: \$25 million?

"Victorians paid \$25 million to erase the Connex brand from Melbourne and replace it with the logo of the ... successor Metro. Figures sought by The Age and released by the Baillieu government show Victorians paid \$20.4 million for stickers and artwork to remove more than 11,000 references to Connex on the city's rail network. The new operator got \$3.4 million for an ad campaign to launch the Metro brand name and marketing events. Metro also received \$1.1 million for the 'creative development' work behind the design of new uniforms for staff, a website makeover, and new electronic announcements. ... The figures show Metro also has a public relations budget of \$10 million over its eight-year contract."

Ref: Clay Lucas & Royce Miller, The Age, 4/4/11

Get Out of the Car (Part 1)

Geraldine Doogue: *"Statistical evidence recently released in America indicates that young people are driving less and fewer own a car. Young people are opting to catch public transport and Richard Florida believes that this shift away from driving is a positive sign of innovative change. ... I'd like to go to the statistics because they are incredible. I'd like you to flesh them out, because certainly I was unaware, and by the sound of your writing a lot of people who ought to know are not aware of this quite dramatic change in behaviour by young people in America."*

Richard Florida: *"Well especially from me. You know, I was born in the '50s and in America, but I think much like Australia, [we] grew up totally in a car culture. ... Having a car was not only a rite of passage, it was part of becoming a teenager, young adult, or having freedom. ... Well the reason we wanted to come to Toronto is because there's a great transit system and there are bikeways and even though it's cold in the winter, we don't have to own a car. And instead of seeing it as personal freedom, [my students] saw just the opposite; they saw the cars enslaving them to debt and financial – spending too much money. So I began to see it and lo and behold when I looked into the statistics, ... and when this young fellow, this great statistician named Nate Silva looked into the statistics, yes, you could see the beginnings of a drop-off in this long vaunted car culture."*

Geraldine Doogue: *"So what is the drop in fact, what is it in the last 10 to 15 years in particular?"*

Richard Florida: *"No I think it's been trending for a while, ... but I think it's the shift in what's happening, particularly when times have gotten a little tough, when credit is harder to get, and when people are being smarter about their money. ... And this is a really interesting thing for folks listening in:"*

There was a big study done in Canada, of people who were able to save money and people who spend too much and really go into debt, and get behind in their finances. The distinguishing characteristic of the spenders versus the savers was that they were owning not only one, but two or three cars. The house – they got into trouble – don't get me wrong, people get into trouble by buying too much house but it was those long commutes in the multiple cars, and I heard a statistic yesterday from a woman from Georgia Tech. who said, 'In the Atlantic area, people were spending about 25% of their income for their homes, and 30% to 35% of their income for their cars and their gasoline'. And so it's this combination that the auto-housing energy complex that I think has distorted our economy and pushed so many folks into financial ruin. So I think as folks are now getting a little bit more realistic with their finances, the first thing that they're saying they do is live closer to the city, live closer to transit and get rid of that big expense, the car.

Geraldine Doogue: *"Well in fact it is interesting. The stats are pretty telling. The amount of money the average American family spent on housing and cars went from 22% in 1950 to 44% in the '80s, to more than 50% today. Now I know you want to see that people have decided this is unsustainable, but what evidence is it that people are making this transition to deciding it's unsustainable?"*

Richard Florida: *"Well I think this is a longer-term shift, and I think we're only at the very beginning of it. You know, one of the things we realise is that over-spending on these material goods ... puts people in financial hardship ... and certainly the best psychologists have found this, that material possessions don't bring an individual a lot of happiness or subjective wellbeing. And a car is great when you first get it. ... When my Dad got a new Chevrolet, an Arrow, which was his car choice, boy oh boy, as a guy who worked in a factory, he was beaming with pride. But I tell you, the first dent and the first ding and the first couple of scratches, he wasn't so happy any more, and when he drove it off the lot, you know, it lost 20% or 30% of its value. ..."*

Geraldine Doogue: *"But aren't there issues of fairness, regrettably, in the midst of this too. A lot of people have to drive to get to their work, so it's not a case of choice, especially if they don't have good public transit systems ..."*

Richard Florida: *"I think lots of people now ... saying, if I've got to move somewhere, I'd better go somewhere where there's a better transit system, where there's abundant rental housing that's somewhat affordable and where I don't have to buy a big house out in the proverbial boondocks, and I don't have to buy a car. ... I can get by without a car or by using these car share services, ... when we need to, and what we're finding is that instead of enduring that, people are saying, 'The heck with living in the city sprawl, we're going to move to a city that has that transit system' and the cities that have transit and options are in fact attracting lots more young people, whether those are Boston or Washington D.C., San Francisco, New York or even Toronto where I live." {Cont.}*

Saturday Extra, ABC Radio National, 22/1/11 www.abc.net.au/rn/saturdayextra/stories/2011/3081342.htm

Co-Housing

"Several big [co-housing] projects around Melbourne are in the works where like-minded environmentalists can create their own sustainable communities. The concept ... has the backing of the State Government. Urban Coup wants to build a green multi-storey estate within 8km of the city, backed with more than \$13 million of members' money. ... Each dwelling will be self-contained, but residents will share laundries, cars, meal areas, gardens and other amenities."

Ref Paul Tatnell, Herald Sun, 24/3/11

This story generated at least 50 negative responses including: *"I'll stick to my half acre block and share it with no one!"*; *"Just so long as they don't come near my neighbourhood!"* and *"I wonder where the shared cars stand in terms of insurance cover? Should they even be driving?"* But consider this: Instead of buying into an estate or apartment block, you get together with a developer and – for about the same price – you end up with your own more comfortable, more efficient home. This means your running costs are less. You get to know your neighbours and if you choose you can have dinner with them. They can look after your property if you go away. They can help you in the garden. You can share things, like books (had they never been to a library?), or washing machines (never been to a Laundromat?) or cars (never hired a car?). The difference is that these are all handy. And yes, there is a preference to use public transport or cycle. Co-housing works well overseas, but we are clearly a little behind the times here. **Stephen Ingrouille, 24/3/11**

Connecting Communities

Alan Saunders: *"It's interesting isn't it that there should be urban design reasons why [social capital] is working relatively well in Canberra ..."*

Andrew Leigh: *"Canberra is fundamentally a suburban city with a lot of public parks dotted through the city and so that means that people have their quarter acre blocks but it does also mean that they congregate together in little neighbourhoods. So when I go down to my local café for a weekend brunch it's a good bet that I am going to run into a couple of neighbours ... and the informal social capital that comes from that is tremendously important in ensuring that Canberrans trust their neighbours.."*

Alan: *"And the houses don't hide behind large fences or tall hedges."*

Andrew: *"That's absolutely right. So the banning of front fences I think is important in opening up that public space in the front yard for play ..."*

Alan: *"You have several suggestions about how we ourselves can increase social capital. The first one is a bit of a surprise: you think that we should hold a street party."*

Andrew: *"Absolutely ... well I'm an economist, ... I think in terms of cost benefit analysis. The benefits of a street party are so high and the costs of organising it are so low. ..."*

Alan: *"Then there are a couple of suggestions that relate directly to urban planning or to urban life. You think that we should reclaim the footpaths. ..."*

Andrew: *"Well I think the footpaths have been traduced, ironically by the technology that has done most to reduce social capital in Australia. Car commuting has risen substantially over the past few decades and solo car commuting has gone up a lot – I think that is one of the reasons why social capital in Australia has fallen. But to add insult to injury, many car owners come home and park their cars on the footpaths. ..."*

Alan: *"And you say that if we have a local store, we should use it."*

Andrew: *"Absolutely. It's not just the café in which you are likely to meet a neighbour it's also a local store and those ... catch-ups are part of social glue that holds a neighbour together. ... Their prices are a little more expensive but they do repay in social capital."*

Ref: By Design, ABC Radio National, 26/1/11

www.abc.net.au/rn/bydesign/stories/2011/3116676.htm

On Ferries

"Ferries are an alternative to land-based modes of transportation such as buses and private vehicles, with potentially faster and more reliable journey times, as they do not compete for road space on congested road networks. An effective ferry service has the potential to reduce traffic congestion on roads by taking people off the road through modal shift to ferry services. ... The development of new passenger transport routes is sometimes the result of political decisions or in preparation for expected increases in land use development or population growth."

Ref: Avishai Ceder and Jenson Varghes, Analysis of Passenger-Ferry Routes Using Connectivity Measures, Journal of Public Transportation, April, 2011

www.nctr.usf.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/JPT14-1Ceder.pdf



**Bike Rack on Auckland Ferry
June, 2008**

More on the Grand Prix

"In November 2010 Save Albert Park commissioned an RMIT student to survey hotels/motels across Melbourne's CBD. This sample survey confirmed the evidence on hotel booking websites showing plenty of vacancies in our best hotels on grand prix weekend and confirmed by The Age today – grand prix Saturday. ... (The Victorian Auditor-General's independent report in 2007 found no evidence that extra tourists come to Melbourne because a grand prix is held here). Of Melbourne's major events the Australian Formula One Grand Prix was voted least popular by Victorian hotels and motels. ... Save Albert Park has written evidence from the airline industry that 'there doesn't seem to be any increase in the number of passengers travelling...when the grand prix is on, compared to...when the grand prix was not held here'. There has been no reporting of additional flights into and out of Melbourne carrying 'thousands' of GP tourists. An overwhelming majority of local businesses surveyed in 1996, 1998 and 2005 either suffered a decrease in trade or experienced no change during the grand prix period."

Ref: Save Albert Park Media Release, 26/3/11

"Each year Ecclestone's company flies six jumbo jets filled with cars and equipment to Melbourne to put on the race. Each of those planes costs \$900,000 in fuel and charter costs [not to mention the emissions]. ... [Australian Grand Prix Corporation head Ron] Walker is eager to negotiate a new contract that would allow Albert Park to host the race for another five years, with a five-year option, locking in the event until 2025."

Ref: Mark Hawthorne, The Age, 26/3/11

"Despite [Bruce Guthrie – see #193] finding the grand prix boring, unbearably noisy and devoid of sporting character, he offers a supposed case for its retention. It makes 'remote' Melbourne feel more connected to the outside world, and a government audit of this year's race will no doubt show benefits to every Melbourne hotel, restaurant and taxi-driver. Mr Guthrie then effectively mocks his own case by referring to the persuasive 'Ron Walker factor'. This means, he concludes, that whatever the evidence, 'reasons will be found to keep the race'. Indeed they will, and better ones continue to be found to dump it."

Ref: Keith Wiltshire, The Age, 3/4/11

"If Guthrie is right and a car race makes Melburnians feel connected to the rest of the world then we are seriously deluded."

Ref: Rael Martell, The Age, 3/4/11

Biofuels, Arid Land and Seawater

"Masdar Institute of Science and Technology, the Boeing Company, Etihad Airways, & Honeywell's UOP announced today the completion of a Sustainability Assessment of the Integrated Seawater Agriculture System (ISAS) for production of aviation biofuels and other bioresources. This study makes a significant contribution to current knowledge on the viability of using salt-tolerant plants irrigated with seawater as a sustainable feedstock for biofuels. The researchers confirmed the potential of ISAS to yield high value fuels and resources, including aviation fuel, biodiesel, electricity, aquaculture products, and others, without competing for freshwater resources and arable land used by conventional agriculture.

*"The research which commenced a year ago also entails basic agronomic research on the halophyte *Salicornia bigelovii*, which is still currently in progress. ... ISAS combines aquaculture, *Salicornia* cultivation, and mangrove silviculture into an integrated low-impact system for biofuel production that relies on seawater irrigation and does not compete for arable land. ... The larger issues of economics and sustainability will be the predominant forces surrounding the overall future of biofuels, and their penetration into the aviation market."*

Ref: Eco Voice #82, 3/2/11

The Direction of Biofuels in the US

"The world is on the brink of an energy crisis ... but perhaps one of the greatest hopes – especially in the transportation and diesel machinery industries – is biofuels. ... However, the [US] EPA has released the first draft of their report: Biofuels and the Environment: The First Triennial Report to Congress [which] finds that biofuel production in the US has not proven to be environmentally sound, particularly

corn ethanol production. Water contamination through chemical runoff, the destruction of natural habitats, and concerns over invasive species through the increased demand for feed stocks are just a few of the major concerns put forth in the EPA's findings. ...

"Biofuels have been held up as one of the best alternatives to fossil fuels due to their similar combustible nature and compatibility with already existing combustion engines [and] the EPA makes a point of stating that this report is still in draft form and should not be quoted or used for official analysis just yet, but its findings should give investors and policymakers a heads-up as to what may be on the horizon for the biofuels market in the United States."

Ref: John Shimkus, Energy Digital. 31/1/11

See the Report at: <http://cfpub.epa.gov/ncea/cfm/recordisplay.cfm?deid=217443#Download>