

US Federal Transport Policy

"US Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood told a conference of bicycle advocates in Washington, DC, that President Obama's national transportation plan will continue to de-emphasize private vehicles. LaHood has faced opposition from some governors over spending on high speed rail and support for biking and walking paths. But he said those priorities come from 'his boss', the president, and the transportation budget that the president has put before Congress. 'It's about the next generation of transportation', he said of Obama's agenda. 'It's about high speed rail. It's about streetcars [trams]. It's about transit. It's about liveable and sustainable communities where you can live in a community and you don't have to own a car.'"

"He began by calling New York Department of Transportation Commissioner Janette Sadik Kahn 'a quite extraordinary lady' for re-engineering part of the city's streetscape to allow more room for buses, bikes and pedestrians. 'She has really put New York on the map when it comes to making New York a liveable, sustainable community', he said. 'And you can live in New York and not own a motor vehicle. ... His remarks come as Sadik-Khan has faced noisy protests from some quarters for making life less convenient for some motorists."



US Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood
Photo: US DoT Website

"LaHood also defended President Obama's high speed rail initiative, even though Florida Governor Rick Scott last week became the latest governor to turn down federal transportation funds for a high speed rail project – in his case, \$2.4 billion. 'There's a lot more governors that have accepted money', LaHood said to reporters ... 'Only three governors have turned back money. I've got people lined up out my door ready to take the more than \$2 billion that's coming back from Florida'. He said the Obama administration has already spent \$11 billion on high speed rail and is proposing in the current budget to spend \$50 billion more. 'There's a lot of enthusiasm for high speed rail in America'."

Ref: Jim O'Grady, Transportation Nation, 9/3/11

"Today, bicycles continue to provide mobility and freedom to many people in the U.S. who don't have driver's licenses, don't own a car, don't have access to public transit, or simply don't want to drive. President Obama understands that. And when cycling advocates see me exhibiting my enthusiasm for more bicycling and pedestrian options, it's out of this Administration's desire to give people more flexible, convenient, and affordable options when it comes to getting around. Now, the transportation budget President Obama proposed to Congress is a big, bold vision for the next generation of American transportation. And walkable, bikeable, liveable communities are a central part of that vision. The President's 2012 budget would boost funding for pedestrian and bike-friendly communities to \$4.1 billion. And the Administration would like to see these essential resources included in the next six-year transportation legislation. ... There will always be cars and trucks, and Department of Transport will always be committed to keeping America's roadways the safest and most efficient in the world. But those roads belong to all of us, including those who get where they're going on two wheels instead of four."

Ref: Ray LaHood, US DoT Website, 9/3/11



President Obama's vision – and the reality?

The Lion's Share

"Melburnians want the lion's share of transport funding to be spent on improving the public transport network rather than on building more roads. A survey of attitudes to transport found that 94% of respondents believed more money should be spent on public transport, while just 68% said the government did not spend enough on roads. ... The survey, commissioned by Metlink – the marketing agency owned by Metro Trains and Yarra Trams – asked 1000 Melburnians about their use of and attitudes towards transport in 2010. ... Public Transport Users' Association secretary Tony Morton said

... 'There is a feeling in Melbourne that there is more money spent on roads than is rationally necessary. The transport growth has been in the public transport side'."

Ref: Deborah Gough, *The Age*, 10/4/11

An Efficient Form of Transport (Pt 1)

"The humble bicycle is the most energy efficient transport ever devised, yet government funds to support it in Australia are running dry. Susan Anthony, a prominent 19th Century anti-slavery and women rights advocate once decreed the bicycle had 'done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world'. What Susan would make of humankind's current enslavement by the automobile?

"We are ensnared by cars. Australia ranks fourth in the world by motor vehicles per capita, 619 vehicles per 1,000 people. Last year, the Australian Bureau of Statistics said we had 16 million registered motor vehicles, including motor cycles. Roughly a motor vehicle available for every Australian able to sit a driver's licence test. In a society so saturated with cars, one may wonder how we might ever unshackle ourselves from the addiction. Withdrawal symptoms are imminent. Without the magical elixir of petroleum most of us would grind to a sudden halt. Yet oil is a finite fossil fuel and global production of the stuff has been in decline for the past 15 years, whilst demand increases. Some studies suggest demand will outstrip supply by about 2015.

"The World Resources Institute calculated just shy of 10% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions result from road transport, a figure that mostly tallies with the Australian experience, where, for example, Queensland estimates that road travel in that state accounts for 12% of their greenhouse gas total. Nationally, the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics conclude that our 'passenger car fleet will remain the single largest contributor to total sector emissions', predicting it will be around 47% of 2020 domestic transport output.



The Stig on Public Transport (Photo: BBC)

"Riding steadfastly into these storm clouds is the unassuming bicycle. Not that folk such as the environmental Think Tank, the Sightline Institute, see the push bike as really so humble. In their view, the bicycle is, 'the most energy-efficient form of travel ever devised'. They reckon that: 'Pound for pound, a person on a bicycle expends less energy than any creature or machine covering the same distance'. Not only is the treading mankind's most effective means of transport, it's also often the swiftest. In commuter races held across the globe, where all modes of transport compete against one another: car, bicycle, train, bus, even helicopter, often the first person to arrive across the metropolis at Point B is the bod aboard the bike. Even TV presenter Jeremy Clarkson had to lament, 'You've killed Top Gear', when a bicycle ridden by one of the program's fellow presenters finished a London commuter race 15 minutes ahead of all other transport modes, including a speedboat. With so much going for it, why is the bicycle so commonly dismissed as a form of personal transport?

"Well, there is the issue of propulsion. Someone has to push those pedals, and for many that is simply too much exercise. Although as Minna, in the ABC's TV drama, *Bed of Roses*, discovered, electric bikes help solve this concern. But is a little exercise really such a big ask, when well over half of our citizens are classified as overweight or obese? A study by Melbourne University found that due to increased health of cyclists, the Australian public health service was spared an estimated \$227 million annually. Getting 'on ya bike' might just save your life." {Cont. in 197}

Ref: Warren McLaren, *ABC*, 17/3/11

www.abc.net.au/environment/articles/2011/03/17/3164607.htm

"In an attempt to find the quickest means to negotiate the virtually gridlocked streets of the capital, we [Top Gear] organised a race. Starting in West London, with London City Airport the target destination, our presenters introduced their weapons of choice:

- "James made ... for the car. Unfortunately, the car in question was the massive new Mercedes GL500, which, at 17ft long and 6.5ft wide, is surely the king of the Chelsea tractors.
- "Next ... was a Lycra-clad Hammond, who would be travelling by bicycle – a state-of-the-art, £1,700 bicycle, ... but a bicycle none the less.
- "Next, we wheeled in the Stig, armed him with an Oyster card & told him to use public transport.
- "Finally, Jeremy ... announced he would be using the river – and a 225bhp racing speedboat.

"In a shock result that could spell the end of Top Gear as we know it, the bicycle came first, then the speedboat, then the Oyster card, and finally the car. Ahem."

Ref: Top Gear, BBC, 11/11/07 www.bbc.co.uk/topgear/show/episodes/series10episode5.shtml

Electric Vehicle Emissions

"Tesla recently announced it has set off to break the record in Australia for the longest road trip by an electric vehicle, travelling from Melbourne to Brisbane in a Tesla Roadster consuming zero petrol.

However, [Clive] Matthew-Wilson is saying the car isn't going to be as much of an environmentally friendly showcase as it seems. He says, 'Claims that electric cars like the Tesla are "emissions-free" are simply a lie; electric cars merely transfer the pollution from the road to the power station. The vast majority of Australia's electricity is produced using dirty fuels like coal'.

.... According to recent research by the Electric Power Research Institute, Tesla says electric cars are less pollutant than the petrol-powered equivalents, saying, 'Even in predominantly coal-burning regions, electric cars produce 35%-60% less CO2 than comparable conventional cars'.

.... 'In areas with eco-friendly power mixes, emissions associated with EVs are up to 75% lower [compared with petrol cars]'. ... Tesla says that not only do electric vehicles produce zero tailpipe emissions, the specific emissions released into the atmosphere by petrol-burning cars are highly damaging to the Earth. Emissions such as HC (hydrocarbons), CO (carbon monoxide) and NOx (nitrogen oxides), are all produced by internal combustion engines. The company added, citing recent research, that EVs and power plants are more than twice as efficient at converting fossil fuel energy into mechanical force compared with car engines. Almost 75% of the energy in [3.8L of petrol] is wasted as heat', Tesla said. ... 'Citing the material costs of EVs doesn't strengthen Matthew-Wilson's argument. It is far more expensive and damaging to extract, refine and deliver gasoline than it is to distribute domestic electricity or create EV battery packs. Look no further than last year's BP oil spill.'

Ref: Brett Davis, Car Advice, 21/3/11



Tesla Roadster in Australia

Photo: Car Advice

"Also check out the 2011 March edition of the Choice magazine. Unleaded is ahead of Diesel, Electric and LPG in terms pollution per kilometre, except in Tasmania where they have Hydro Electric generation, there the electric car wins hands down."

Ref: Reader's Comment, Car Advice, 21/3/11

Pollution Risk to Cyclists Study

"Cyclists are being sought for a world-first study into how much damage is done to their health by riding on polluted roadways. Queensland University of Technology PhD student Thomas Cole-Hunter (t.cole-hunter@qut.edu.au) wants to find out how much air particle pollution is being ingested by cyclists and what harm it causes. 'It's something that needs to be looked at', he said. People are trying to do the right thing for their health and reduce congestion but are they putting themselves at risk of chronic disease by doing so?'

"Paul French from the CBD Bicycle User's Group (BUG) welcomed the study but said of more concern to cyclists was being hit by a car or a truck on busy roads. ... 'We'd just like to see more road space dedicated to cyclists and more cycleways built'."

Ref: Robyn Ironside, Courier Mail, 29/3/11

"The issue with exercising near pollution sources is that pollutants are sucked into the depths of the lungs where they can become lodged and are unable to be removed by the body naturally. This is especially so with diesel particulates. However it's unproven as to whether this leads to lung disease, hence this study. As a commuting cyclist who lived in London for many years, Brisbane is a dream, but by no means perfect and the more cycleways we build, the more people will commute by bike and reduce both pollution and road congestion for those who choose not to cycle, so everyone wins."

"This has already been studied, in Holland. And, as you would expect, riding a bike is good for you."

<http://ehp03.niehs.nih.gov/article/info:doi/10.1289/ehp.0901747>

"I used to regularly cycle to work beside the Centenary Highway. When the cars were backed up you could feel the air was thick with pollution. As a result I used to regularly have respiratory problems including one case of bronchitis. Now I drive a little car to work but I've also put on 20 kg but my lungs are much better."

Ref: Readers' Comments, Courier Mail, 29/3/11

Getting to School (Part 1)

"Early this month, and quite suddenly, our roads got busy. The reason was simple: school went back and overnight once-quiet streets were invaded by vast, urgent fleets of cars delivering children to class in the morning and picking them up again in the afternoon. This twice-daily school-gate rush hour is now the norm but it wasn't always. Forty years ago 80% of Australian children walked or rode a bike to school, and felt comfortable doing it. But in little more than a generation we've seen a precipitous decline so that today it is thought that less than 20% of children get to school under their own steam. All this despite the fact that most kids still live within two kilometres of school: they are not travelling further, just covering the same distance in the back of a car. Sadly, it has become absolutely normal for children to be driven short distances to school, many every day."

"Putting aside the congestion and pollution issues, the impact of an increasingly sedentary lifestyle on these children – our children – is profound. Visit any schoolyard and it's not hard to see first-hand that obesity is no longer the exception. Type 2 diabetes in children, once almost unheard of, is also on the rise. Spot the connection? Our children aren't moving as much, aren't burning up as many kilojoules, and it's making some of them sick. Health experts say children need at least one hour of physical activity each day for good health and many just aren't getting it. And it turns out that it's not just their young bodies that are affected by the way they are being allowed to live their lives. Research completed by the Australian Council for Education Research found that children who travelled to school by car had a remarkably narrow view of their community."



Photo: Dean Osland, The Age, 14/3/11

"When researchers asked car-borne kids to draw pictures of the way they saw their world they drew abstract, isolated images of neighbour-hoods where the car and the road were the central theme. Traffic lights, road signs, office buildings, shopping centres and fast food outlets dominated. Researchers contrasted this alarmingly stunted vision with that of children who rode or walked to school. Their drawings were dominated by green spaces and people doing things; trees, grass, people playing sport, riding bikes, walking dogs. It is hard to image a more contrasting world view. And from this springs the obvious question of why, why are we allowing many of our children to become increasingly (alarmingly) inactive? It's a complex question with as many potential answers as there are flabby kids and the irony is that at least part of the remedy might be very simple; we need to encourage kids to walk, ride or scoot to school."

"Assuredly it is parents who will ultimately make this decision and no doubt a key factor will be an assessment of risk. Parents deal everyday with risks and fears for and about their children (risks both real and perceived) and nobody should ever needlessly dismiss worries about road safety, abduction, injury, no matter how rare. But easing kids out the front door and onto their bikes or feet for the journey to school is certainly worth considering for the simple reason that it's good for them – good for their bodies and good for their minds.

"While exercise participation rates are alarmingly low (and on a downward trajectory) there are still plenty of parents who allow their children to ride or walk to school. The message is that it is not unusual and you are not a bad parent for allowing it. Many parents start by completing the journey with their kids, helping them to understand their neighbourhood and the sometimes-complex challenges that even short journeys can have. Done properly these new skills will hold children in good stead for when they inevitably complete a journey alone. It is also good together time, walking and talking. So, parents and carers, give it a try and ride or walk with your child to school and give them the skills to complete the journey independently. ... If we want to get more kids more active more often we need more people to do it. It is certainly good for them and it might just be more fun than you thought."

Ref: Scott Whiffin, The Age, 14/3/11

"Unfortunately it is one of those vicious cycles. The prevalence of more and more motor cars on congested roads with speeding, impatient and inattentive drivers scares the living daylights out of parents contemplating allowing their children to ride to school. To right this wrong, we must confront the issue of Australia's car culture. I recognise that the congestion is mostly caused by parents driving their kids to school but includes buses and B-double trucks hurtling down urban main roads."

Ref: Reader's Comment, The Age, 15/3/11

{Comments continued in #197}

Get Out of the Car (Part 2)

Geraldine Doogue: *"Richard Florida is my guest in Saturday Extra. He's the author, his latest work, a very interesting article in The Atlantic about the drop in young people driving in America, but also the author of a new book called The Great Reset which we'll come to in just a moment. Some people ... have suggested that the internet is actually a much under-recognised factor in this, that the internet has freed people up to experience life in a different way, and that in fact they don't see the need for a liberation, if you know what I mean, that the baby boomers did, that the car represented. ...*

Richard Florida: *"One of the things that a number of people have pointed out is that ... the internet and e-commerce ... really it's freed people from having to need a car. So I think the internet has enabled particularly urbanites, who would rather not use a car, it's not like you need the car so much to go to the supermarket or go and re-stock on toiletries and toilet paper, you can do all that stuff with a click of the mouse, and I think in that sense, e-commerce has enabled people to live a life that isn't as dependent on a car. ...*

Geraldine Doogue: *"And they depreciate very fast.*

Richard Florida: *"And there's a lot of upkeep. ... I think people are saying, 'You know, if I can get away from the car, I'll not only have a little bit more money and a little more time, but the internet is an important part of it.'*

Geraldine Doogue: *"Well that was the other aspect of this particular commentary I saw, that a lot of young people actually love their internet toy so much that trains mean you can for instance sit and text or sit and read the way you can't in a car. So that it's changing subtly, people's mental geography.*

Richard Florida: *"Well I think there's two big things going on that underpin this more epi-phenomenal change in our culture and buying habits. The first is the optimisation of the human being. The fact that a knowledge worker is on 24 x 7 and if you're a knowledge worker in a competitive field, whether that's banking or technology or even media, certainly in media, if you're in an information area, boy oh boy, what are you going to do sitting in a car for half an hour or an hour, wasting time? So I think people are very conscious and young people in particular, are conscious of optimising their time. The second thing is if we're going to grow an economy that's going to produce technologies and new internet devices ...*

we've got to get away from consuming cars and housing so that we have enough money as countries and as an economy, to support the growth of the new industries that'll power our growth in the future. ...

Geraldine Doogue: *"You argue that incredible opportunities arise during times of economic crisis, and that they have before. What do you say is on offer that we maybe haven't highlighted enough from all of these troubles we're living through?"*

Richard Florida: *"Well the first thing I want to people to understand is the book says these are generational events. Anyone who thinks this is going to be over tomorrow or next week has their head screwed on wrong. These are generational events; ... and I think [that as for a] new way of life that's more urban and denser and more compact and more about experiences, we're at the front end of reinventing as we speak."*

Ref: Saturday Extra, ABC Radio National, 22/1/11

www.abc.net.au/rn/saturdayextra/stories/2011/3081342.htm

Rare Earths

"Hyundai, South Korea's top carmaker, said that it was seeking to secure rare earth metals used in electric and hybrid cars, as the industry braces for a possible shortage of the minerals. Rare earth metals like neodymium are used in the powerful magnets in motors that are a key component for electric and hybrid cars. China produces 97% of the world's rare earth metals, but Beijing set 2010 export quotas 40% lower than 2009 levels, raising alarm among buyer nations."

Ref: Reuters, SMH, 21/2/11

"China has tightened its grip over the rare earths industry by setting tough emission limits on miners producing the lucrative metals, which are indispensable to many high-tech products. The emission caps on about 15 pollutants will apply to all industry players including miners and smelters of rare earth alloys, the Ministry of Environmental Protection said on Monday in a statement. ... The rules will take effect from October 1 for new projects. Existing players have until the beginning of 2014 to comply with the new standards. Experts said previously the regulations would likely increase production costs and push up export prices of the metals – a collection of 17 elements that have become vital ingredients in products ranging from iPods to wind turbines to missiles. ... The country is building strategic reserves of the metals and has brought 11 rare earth mines under state control as it consolidated the industry – another move analysts said could drive up prices."

Ref: AFP, SMH, 2/3/11

Transport Canada is Not Amused

"Officials with the [Canadian] federal ministry have banned a series of gag luggage decals that depict realistic images of suitcases stuffed with U.S. greenbacks, bags of cocaine, sex toys and even a bound and gagged flight attendant. The stickers are intended to raise a giggle and make the bags easier to spot as they spin round and round on the luggage carousel. But a spokes-person for Transport Minister John Baird says they're just 'not funny' ... and the government will use the full force of the law to ensure Canadians who travel by air are safe'.

"The 40-cm by 30-cm decals, which depict a suitcase with the side torn open to expose the bag's gag contents, were sold in Canada ... for \$15 each. ... They were intended to 'draw attention to your bag and make them easily identifiable'. ...

"The stickers have proven to be big sellers in Europe, where about 1,000 have been snapped up since they hit the worldwide market. ... A company spokesperson ... said the decals violate Section 11 of the Canadian Aviation Security Regulations, which expressly forbids anyone from making false declarations that they are carrying weapons or any other item that could be used to jeopardise the security of an aerodrome or aircraft. But the



[company] website quotes a U.K. Border Agency official, who told the Daily Mail newspaper, 'our officers see a lot of joke stickers on suitcases and it doesn't affect their professional approach to tackling smuggling of illegal goods'.

Ref: Gail Swainson, The Star, 30/7/10

Problems with Uninsured Motorists

"It is estimated that [in the UK] uninsured and untraced drivers kill 160 people and injure 23,000 every year. Latest estimates are that around 4% (approximately 1.4 million) of UK motorists drive uninsured, while around 242,000 offenders are convicted for uninsured driving every year. In 2009, over 180,000 vehicles were seized by police. ... More than 400 uninsured vehicles are already being seized by the police every day, but it is simply not possible to catch every uninsured driver in this way."

Ref: Traffic Technology Today, 13/1/11

WhipCar in the UK

"At WhipCar you can find cars available to rent right outside your door. If you already own a car you can use WhipCar to make money whenever it's not being used. WhipCar is free to join and we take care of all the hassle like insurance, breakdown cover and payments."

"The average car in the UK is only ever used for an average of 1 hour each day. WhipCar offers car owners to make money whenever they are not using their cars. For drivers needing a car to use WhipCar enables you to get access to a car that is close by and affordable. ... There are now WhipCars available to rent in over 450 towns and cities across the UK. ... WhipCar makes money by charging WhipCar Owners a success fee (15% + VAT of the rental price) and Drivers a transaction fee (£3.00) when placing a booking."

"Drivers can search WhipCar and book their desired car for a specific duration of time (hours, days or weeks). Drivers can search for locations and specific criteria such as Fuel, Transmission, Make, Model and Body Type via the advanced search feature. Drivers can also arrange their search results by Price, Distance and Rating."

Ref: WhipCar website, 12/1/11 More info: <http://www.whipcar.com/>

Petrochemical Smog

"During the initial century of the industrial revolution, smog was almost always caused by the emissions from coal-fired plants. However, since the 1950s, smog is more commonly found as petrochemical smog, most often containing a mixture of nitrogen oxides and a whole collection of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that are both emitted by the burning of fossil fuels, chiefly automobiles. If these chemicals remained as they were, they'd be problematic enough. However, once released into the atmosphere, they react with sunlight to form many noxious compounds including carbon monoxide, particulate matter, ground-level (or tropospheric) ozone, sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide. All of these substances are known to cause respiratory disorder and premature death."

Ref: Pollution Prevention Guide, 12/1/11

www.controllingpollution.com/what-is-smog/

Roll Out the Ferries

"Heavy overnight rain has caused major disruptions on Melbourne's rail network today, with one line partially closed and at least two others suffering delays. ... Services on the Sandringham line had been suspended between Elsternwick and South Yarra after Windsor station flooded."

Ref: Thomas Hunter, The Age, 12/4/11