

All Western Roads Lead to Cars

"Analysis by the Australian Conservation Foundation showed that governments across Australia are spending at least four times more on building roads and bridges than on public transport. ... [Meantime] a coalition of western suburbs mayors planned to request that the Baillieu government proceed with plans to build an alternative to the West Gate Bridge as the population in Melbourne's west booms. The mayors of Wyndham, Melton, Hobsons Bay and Maribyrnong told The Age they would sign a letter to the state government. The move came as the future of the former government's \$2.5 billion road tunnel from Footscray to Docklands looked increasingly uncertain, with Transport Minister Terry Mulder refusing to say if it would go ahead."

Ref: Letter from Melbourne #164, 23/5/11

"The mayors' [letter] will say that a population boom in the west and worsening congestion mean the alternative is vital or roads will virtually grind to a halt. ... Hobsons Bay mayor Michael Raffoul said ... 'A second river crossing is needed to free up this traffic before the liveability of the west and its attractiveness to employers is further damaged by congestion'."

Ref: Reid Sexton, The Age, 2/5/11

I have not been able to establish if the mayors' letter has been written and sent, but if it has, it reflects 1960s thinking. If the problem is congestion – and congestion is caused by traffic – building more roads, and in this case a road tunnel, will only increase congestion. Where in the world has building motorways through dense urban areas reduced congestion (or its related siblings: pollution; road trauma; road rage, and reduced amenity)? Why isn't the coalition of western suburbs mayors asking for this \$2.5 billion in road tunnel money to be used for improved local public and active transport?

Stephen Ingrouille, 27/5/11

"The massive dependence on cars as a means of transport to and from the airport was apparent on a recent visit. More than 100 taxis, engines running, queued in a temporary holding area on the way to the passenger arrivals area. The thousands of private cars in the unbelievably expensive car parks provided further evidence of this dependence. The environmental and economic costs and inefficiencies of more than 35,000 cars and trucks per day accessing the airport are so obvious that the Coalition's plan to build a railway line linking the CBD with Melbourne Airport should begin without further delay."

Ref: Peter Fagg, The Age. 28/5/11



"And this thermal dome will capture the heat of road rage on the bridge - enough to power 5,000 new homes in the west."

Road Builders' Prayer, 1956

"Oh Almighty God, who has given us this Earth, and has appointed Man to have domination over it. Who has commanded us to make straight the highways, to lift up the valleys, and to make the mountains lower. We ask thy blessing. Bless these, our nation's road builders, and their friends."

Ref: Documentary Film: Taken for a Ride, 1996

More on Melbourne's Sprawl

"A \$1 billion housing development near Werribee will cater to Melbourne's future growth. But there has been no provision made for a new train station for the suburb. Developers will carve out a 4000-home suburb on Melbourne's western fringe amid growing concern about infrastructure and traffic congestion in the city's fastest-growing areas. ... Wyndham mayor John Menegazzo said the suburb's swift growth was causing significant road congestion, exacerbated by inadequate public transport. 'Naturally [residents] are frustrated with the amount of growth that's occurred and the congestion. People who may have taken 45 minutes to go to work will now take an hour', he said. Mr Menegazzo said the two

stations on the proposed regional rail line, running just west of the development, might alleviate transport problems. But both stations, Tarneit to the north and Wyndham Vale to the south, are at least 3 kilometres from the new estate.”

Ref: Simon Johanson, The Age, 14/4/11

“A railway station will enable the developer to sell lots for higher prices. That’s the case regardless of whether the station is paid for by the developer or by the taxpayer. Let the developer pay.”

“Some government agency approved a proposal for low-cost housing without considering road and public transport infrastructure, in order to keep things affordable. If people wanted door to door public transport one wonders why the estate wasn’t designed around a tram loop that would connect [to] the station.”

Successive state governments over the last 50 years have dismally failed to deliver good public transport policy ... roads have too often been the short expensive fix – and still nobody is discussing peak oil?”

“Western burb housing is not cheap when you factor in the cost of running at least two vehicles and the value of your time stuck in traffic, waiting for late buses or missing the train due to overcrowding. Muppets are frequently seduced by ‘cheap’ land-house packages.”

“Maybe they can use all that abundant water from the Desal plant to create giant waterslides that carry us all to work. Fun and convenient.”

Ref: Readers’ Comments, The Age, 14/4/11

Should the \$1 billion urban development at Werribee be allowed to go ahead without a train station?
Yes: 9%
No: 91%
Votes: 3052
Ref: Age Poll 14/4/11

More on Shall We Dense?

“A new survey finds 52% of the city’s residents oppose having more people in their suburb, and only 11% favour it. In a survey with bleak implications for governments, planners and developers trying to create a new Melbourne by building up rather than out, a Nielsen survey for the Productivity Commission has found a clear majority oppose residential redevelopment in their suburb. The survey, of more 3000 Melbourne residents, found 53% oppose redevelopments that replace single dwellings with units or apartments. Such redevelopments have generated half of Melbourne’s building approvals in the last year. The Brumby government had planned for them to house half the city’s growth to 2030.

“The ever-widening gap between housing prices in inner, middle and outer suburbs suggests that the big unmet demand for housing in Melbourne is from people wanting to live in inner and middle suburbs. But resident opposition has blocked many redevelopment plans to house them. The survey, conducted for a commission report that benchmarks the states in planning, zoning and development assessments, suggests the resident activists reflect the views of their neighbours – not only in Melbourne, but almost everywhere. People in Sydney were even more hostile to redevelopment, while Geelong was the most hostile of all. The only place where supporters outnumbered opponents was Mount Gambier.

“Of Melbourne residents against having more people in their suburb, 86% fear it would lead to increased traffic congestion, 56% to increased noise, 48% fear loss of street appeal, 37% more crowded public transport, 35% shadows from tall buildings, and 27% fear it would lower their property’s value. Those who want more people around them say this would create more vibrant suburbs, attract more services, retailers and public transport, and lift property prices. Some oppose not just redevelopment, but any development. The survey found 29% oppose residential development in new areas – underlining how hostile Melbourne has become to population growth.”

Ref: Tim Colbatch, The Age, 18/5/11

“I think the real question is – ‘What kind of development is being built?’ I don’t think density is bad per se, but it is the kind of development that is allowed to be built that upsets me. ... Imagine if we were building beautiful high density buildings with roof-top gardens, or inner court-yards or made from materials that could stand the test of time – Melbournians might have a very different opinion of density.”

Ref: Reader’s Comments, The Age, 18/5/11

Green Cars Changing Suburbs?

"Perhaps there's a new factor about to drive over the horizon – the humble car. The green car, that is. We all know that the closer you get to a busy road, the cheaper home prices tend to be. Many buyers would prefer to be away from the traffic noise, and definitely don't want to be sucking in the fumes spewing out of thousands of exhaust pipes rumbling past. But could green cars change our view of good and bad streets? With eco cars now creeping closer to being a mainstream reality, will we see a redefining of the 'best streets' as busy roads become much quieter and not nearly as smelly?"

"We're probably not talking the next couple of years here, more like 10-15 years, perhaps even 20. Eco cars still have a way to go, particularly in price, before they become mainstream. But with all major car manufacturers now tinkering with models, they are close to being a normality on a road near you. On the downside, green cars obviously won't reduce congestion, so one the biggest turn-offs of living near a busy road will remain regardless of whether we're driving an oil guzzler or a clean sun-powered machine.

"But on the positive, and what could have a significant impact, is hybrid and electric cars definitely won't be as noisy as many of the vehicles getting about at the moment – as evidenced by the fact they are already so hush hush that some manufacturers have started adding in artificial sounds to make them heard. And green cars won't produce as much pollution – at least while they are in motion. There might still be questions around the carbon that electric cars will create while charging if they are being powered by traditional coal-fired energy, but when they are on the road, some won't produce any fumes at all. I'm not suggesting major arterial roads ... are going to suddenly match it with waterfronts for prices. But you could envisage a situation where secondary roads, which still carry a fair bit of traffic, could become far more desirable places to live once the smell and the noise of traffic dissipates, even if the volume of cars is still there. Quieter, cleaner roads still won't make them appealing to everyone.

"Families, for example, with young kids, may still avoid areas of high traffic for safety reasons. But they may not be so put off buying something just off a busy road as they would be now. Economist Saul Eslake, from think tank the Grattan Institute, says intuitively the theory makes sense. But he cautions that numbers would have to reach critical mass before there was an effect."

Ref: Carolyn Boyd. The Age, 17/5/11

Off Your Bike

"A national survey conducted by the Cycling Promotion Fund (CPF) and the National Heart Foundation of Australia has found more than 62% of Australians want to be able to ride a bike for transport, but road safety fears are keeping bikes in the shed and off the road. The data ... found that while more than 60% of Australians have access to a bike, almost 70% were not considering cycling for transport in the near future, even though more than half of those would like to. According to Stephen Hodge spokesperson for the CPF, the main reasons why people were not riding bikes were unsafe road conditions (46%); speed/ volume of traffic (42%); don't feel safe riding (41%) and a lack of bicycle lanes/ trails (35%). ... 'Being active for transport – walking and cycling – has numerous health benefits for the individual and government. Being active for 30 minutes a day can reduce the incidence of heart disease by as much as half. In addition, it improves air quality and saves costs associated with private transport', said Dr Lyn Roberts, CEO, National Heart Foundation. More than 80% of survey respondents believed that the Federal Government should be doing more to promote a cycle safe culture and 70% agreed that the Government should be doing more to encourage cycling to school. More than 60% of those surveyed wanted the Government to do more to encourage people to ride a bicycle to work and to offer incentives to get more people to use bikes for transport."

Ref: Media Release, Cycling Promotion Fund, 1/6/11

Transition Towns & Transport (Part 1)

"Transition Towns offer a cultural change at local community level to create resilience in the face of climate change and peak oil. The movement began in Totnes, England and is rapidly spreading globally. So far at Transition Banyule [in Melbourne's north-east] edible gardens and household energy have created the most community interest, however we also need to turn our attention to transport.

"If we continue 'business-as-usual' we shall be driving our own cars for most of our personal transport, usually as the only car occupant (Driver Only, Driver Owned or DODOs). We shall continue the social

alienation that results. Our huge fossil fuel dependency will just increase. We shall have to put up with increasing congestion not only in the city but also in our suburban centres. Our green-house gas pollution will continue to climb – already 8 million tonnes of CO2 for Victoria per year. We shall be vulnerable to oil shortages and the rising oil price. We are disempowering our young who are not eligible for a license and the elderly and disabled who may no longer be able to drive.

“Everyone is aware of the serious injuries and traumatic deaths caused by motorised transport. In Australia in 2008 there were 1464 deaths, equivalent to 7 per 100,000 population. This includes 197 pedestrians and 27 cyclists. There were over 50,000 serious injuries, 35 times the death rate. What people do not realise is that even more people die from car and truck pollution, over 2000 deaths per year, as well as a lot of illness including asthma, heart disease and lung cancer. Traffic pollution is a major precipitating factor in heart attacks, over 7%. It accounts for 40-90% of the air pollution in urban centres in the form of very small particles, oxides of nitrogen, volatile organic compounds, ozone and other toxins. There is increasing concern that foetal development and brain function can be affected.

An even greater detrimental effect on health is the replacement of active transport (with the exercise it gives us) by sitting in a car physically inactive. This includes obesity, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, cancer and dementia. Those people that try to be active in their personal transport by walking and cycling face intimidation by traffic volume and speed, lack of dedicated bicycle lanes and pedestrian precincts.” {Continued in #204}

Ref: John Merory, 2/5/11

And Also ...

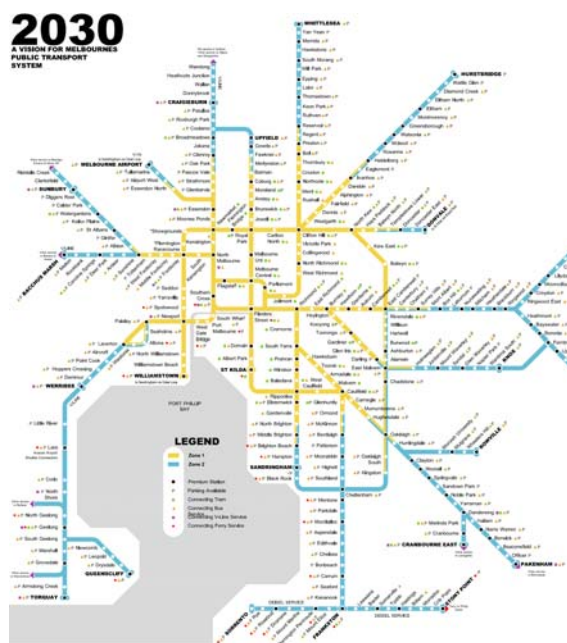
“I like public transport. It makes me feel down to earth. Like human. You know, like normal.”

Ref: Overheard, mX, 23/5/11

More on the 2030 Rail Map

“What that map [in #201] needs is peer review – to assess the ideas in it, add others and make sure the resulting effort is the best possible option for Melbourne. Specific comments:

- Rail service to Torquay – why? Except in the holiday season the traffic wouldn't justify a rail service at any reasonable frequency. An upgraded bus service would be a better solution.
- Lara-Avalon shuttle – I think it would be a better idea to divert the Geelong line to serve Avalon directly. That way Avalon could become a full service airport on par with Tullamarine, instead of being second-class status.
- Point Cook station on the Werribee line – misleading. It's not in Point Cook What's wrong with 'Williams Landing' as a name?
- Newport-Southern Cross via West Gate – in engineering terms a tunnel in that area would be very difficult (= expensive) or even impossible. The Yarra mouth is unstable so any tunnel would have to be very deep, and Fishermans Bend is old industrial land so the soil will be full of hazardous chemicals. A better option to bring a metro service to the proposed redevelopment of Fishermans Bend would be 'at grade' light rail.
- Footscray-Racecourse – again, building rail links in the vicinity of deep watercourses is very difficult. If it's worth building a tunnel under the Maribyrnong, surely it's a better idea to link the Racecourse line to Highpoint (not Footscray).
- Caroline Springs station on the Bacchus Marsh line – again, it's not in Caroline Springs so it shouldn't be called that.



Colin Mitchell's 2030 Rail Plan for Melbourne
For PDF email steve@goingsolar.com.au

- *Tullamarine Airport line via Essendon – the amount of tunnelling involved in building a rail line from Essendon would be immense, and building a junction would involve quite a lot of property acquisition. Why wasn't the government's preferred alignment selected for this map?*
- *Upfield-Coolaroo link – there's really no point making the link. Any commuters who need to take that trip can just as easily go to a Craigieburn line station instead of an Upfield line station, and the cost of building the link would be considerable (the line would have to cross over the freight line, which would mean an overpass).*
- *The south end of the Upfield line has been rerouted through Royal Park, which means Macaulay and Flemington Bridge will no longer be served. 15 years ago there would have been an advantage to this as CityLink [elevated road] could have been built at ground level instead of elevated, but today it seems pointless.*
- *Clifton Hill-North Kew – I really need more details before expressing an opinion, but again it's perilously close to the river which makes engineering difficult.*
- *Lilydale-Healesville – I would dispute the necessity of a full rail service past the Urban Growth Boundary – a bus running at train-like frequency would be a better choice for outer suburban areas.*
- *Interchange at Ferntree Gully – in engineering terms it would be much simpler to interchange at Upper Ferntree Gully (more space without property acquisition, easier to tunnel under Burwood Highway than houses), and the extra distance to travel would be negligible.*
- *Extension of the Glen Waverley line – Tunnelling under Dandenong Creek would mean gradients too steep for a railway, but building a tunnel portal and flying over the creek would mean expensive and unpopular property acquisition. The additional catchment for the public transport system could be better achieved with high capacity interurban light rail lines on Burwood Highway and Eastlink, which could be built with no tunnelling or property acquisition.*
- *Cranbourne East station – even though this was promised as part of Meeting Our Transport Challenges it will never happen, because a level crossing at Cranbourne is politically impossible, but a grade separation would mean severe operational inefficiencies. A TrainLink bus to Cranbourne East would be much cheaper and just as effective.*
- *Reopening of the South Gippsland V/Line service – the locals don't want it. The time difference between train and bus (particularly considering the lack of paths on the Dandenong line, which would mean V/Line services would run at an average of 40km/h) is insufficient to justify the expense.*
- *Interchange at Cheltenham – I'd prefer to make Southland the interchange station, as it's a more significant trip generator than the shops around Cheltenham.*
- *Diesel service to Sorrento via Mount Eliza – the gradients are too steep for a rail service, and a tunnel would be difficult as it's all rock which would need to be blasted out, which is risky in a populated area.*
- *Interchange at Ripponlea – I'd prefer to have it at Elsternwick.*

I'm happy with everything else on that map. I'd recommend to the author that he get onto Transport Textbook <http://transporttextbook.com/> and help build the body of informed debate on public transport in Victoria."

Michael Angelico, 25/5/11

Some comments on Michael's points:

Flemington Bridge becomes part of the 'middle rail loop' ie Williamstown to Sandringham. (The 'outer rail loop' Geelong – Melbourne Airport – Epping – Ringwood – Dandenong – Frankston – Port of Hastings was detailed in #202). Macaulay becomes an



Conceptual alignment drawing of the 12-kilometre route for the proposed Rowville rail line
Ref: The Age 30/5/11

orphan but could form part of a shuttle service: Royal Park – Flemington Bridge – Macaulay – E-Gate – North Melbourne.

I'd like to see a community tram on that Lilydale-Coldstream – Yarra Glenn – Healesville – Healesville Sanctuary route which would be part of the tourist attraction as well as a commuter and light freight service. The location of new stations raises an interesting point: do you try to service private shopping centres or CADs? If the station is located at a shopping centre like Highpoint, Northland, Southland or Chadstone should the owners of those private centres pay for most of it?

Obviously the construction costs of all of these new rail lines are a factor but we allow ourselves a little latitude for this exercise. The cost factor is to some extent a political argument. Can we afford not to build such infrastructure? Can we afford the cost of road congestion, road trauma, road pollution, and social exclusion? It is choice between more freeways and better public and active transport systems. What would be expected as these plans are adopted are economies of scale as engineering and construction firms switch their focus from road building to rail construction. A long term vision and commitment would give security to the private sector as projects are rolled out consecutively and companies hone their skills. Great cities have great transport systems not greatly congested roads.

Stephen Ingrouille, 25/5/11

The Old 'Outer Circle' Rail Line

"The talk of public transport upgrades, and having to travel between the eastern & northern suburbs by such transport, has made me think in circles rather than the straight lines into the city. A relatively simple upgrade of Melbourne's rail system to service some cross-suburb travel – to complement the services for the commuters going into the city each day – may be to restore the 'outer circle' rail line of the late 1800s. This rail corridor seems largely in tact as can be seen on Melbourne street directories. The 'outer circle' line can be traced from Hughesdale Station, on the Dandenong line, across to East Malvern Station, on the Glen Waverly line. It went across Gardiners Creek and then followed the still in use Alamein line up to East Camberwell station, on the Belgrave/Lilydale line. The old line then carried on up through Canterbury and swung west through Kew to cross the Yarra River at Fairfield and join the Hurstbridge line at Fairfield station.

"There seems to be only a few trouble spots. One being that the old rail bridge across the Yarra River at Fairfield is now part of the road system. (But I think that many road users would appreciate another purpose built road bridge). Another bridge would be needed across Gardiners Creek as the original wooden trestle bridge was removed after being burnt many years ago. There is also another possible link, the old 'inner circle', between the Upfield line, at Royal Park station, to the Epping line at Rushall station. I think one of the old stations, Carlton North, on this part of the line is now used as a community centre. Now it is time to act on similar projects for our new outer suburbs that are at the moment so dependent on the car for any travel. For more details on the 'outer circle' see www.vicrailstations.com"
Alan Bates, 31/5/11

Rising Oil (Part 1)

"No point in getting all pumped up over the petrol price because it's not about to fall. Especially once Americans set off in their SUVs on their summer sojourn in a couple of months. The US, despite its weakened economic state, is still the biggest buyer of oil. And it always needs extra in the northern hemisphere summer when Americans hit the road. At the same time, Asian demand, especially from China, seems insatiable. Oil prices are affected three times more by changes in demand from the developing economies than from the US and Europe, according to the International Monetary Fund, thanks to their rising production, growing car ownership as living standards improve and as farms are mechanised. Even the unlikely event of stability in the Middle East wouldn't help motorists much. The situation in Libya and Syria appears to have added about \$US15 a barrel to the oil price, or about 10¢ a litre at the pump, not so much because of supply cutbacks (which have been made up for by Saudi Arabia) as fears the unrest will spread to the big producers. But prices were going up anyway. Global demand, even with half the developed world in near recession, is rising faster than supply.

"The authoritative US Energy Information Administration says the oil market will 'continue to tighten over the next two years'. It takes special refineries to process light crude into petrol and while more are being built, they're 'running at full capacity', a recent note on the oil market by RBS says. Then there's the

problem of most oil being produced by state-owned companies, with the corruption and inefficiency you'd expect. In no small thanks to the stronger [Australian] dollar – the chief economist at CommSec, Craig James, says it's saved us 11 cents a litre so far this year – the reason petrol prices aren't higher is that stocks were built up during the GFC-induced global economic slump. These inventories are shrinking by the day.

"No, we're not running out of oil but it's getting more expensive to extract. In fact, there are more recoverable reserves in the ground than there were 10 years ago despite all the oil that's been consumed in the meantime. How can that be? Because as the price of oil has risen, it's become more profitable to tap costlier reserves. At around \$110 (or \$130 since we use Tapis oil) a barrel, there's an incentive to explore and drill for more. In case you're worried though, there is an upper limit to the price of oil, although nobody knows what it is. But it would be when it became so expensive that it would curtail economic growth. Demand, and so its price, would then fall.

"It also has more competition because gas has become a viable alternative now that it's been globalised as LNG. 'A single cargo of LNG can power the lights at the Melbourne Cricket Ground for 20 years', the resources analyst at the Intelligent Investor, Gaurav Sodhi, says. 'The major oil companies like Chevron and ExxonMobil are chasing gas because they can't get their hands on any more oil'. Yet perverse as it sounds, everything is being done to boost the demand for oil. The single most important reason for the rise in the oil price is the collapse of the US dollar. To keep their revenues in real terms, producers naturally demand a higher price to make up for the depreciating US dollars in which they're paid. But that's only the half of it. The reason the US dollar has plunged is that the Federal Reserve is printing up stores of it, deliberately pushing up asset prices just to make sure deflation doesn't take hold. Most of Europe as well as Japan are doing the same, with the result that commodity markets are very liquid. In fact, it pays traders to borrow at the ridiculously low interest rates on offer in the US and Japan to buy commodities such as oil and reap the subsequent price gains. Because oil prices are set in futures contracts, hedge funds and the like can also get in on the act, imparting a speculative side.

"Anyway, the best hope for a drop in oil prices would be the US dollar climbing again. That'll only happen if the Fed lifts interest rates, or at least is expected to, because the US is on an upswing. No sign of that yet, though it's true things can change quickly. The trouble is that once the US dollar strengthens again, our dollar would be one of the currencies falling against it. So whatever we gained from the lower oil price we'd lose on the falling [Australian] dollar. Besides, it's more likely oil would hold its own as the US economy gets back in its stride." {Continued in #204}

Ref: David Potts. The Age, 9/5/11

Apropos ...

"Apropos of not much, my wife and I have just spent a few days in Brussels, which has a population about a quarter of Melbourne's but half as many tramway route-Km; in the last few years it has built two cross-city tunnels each carrying a metro line and a number of tram routes. It offers passengers a Metcard type system and a stored value card for regular users."

John Legge, 23/5/11

"The daily commute could be a swim by the end of the century, with sea levels set to surge and extreme flooding becoming more common."

Ref: Torrey Miller, Mx, 23/5/11