

Government's Behaving Badly

"It's back to the 1960s, with the Brumby government and the opposition supporting new freeways slicing through our urban landscape. The latest waste of public funds is the plan submitted to the federal government, with the support of ministers Tim Pallas and Martin Pakula, to drive 12 kilometres of concrete and steel through Bulleen, Heidelberg, and Greensborough. Meanwhile, many overseas cities are pulling down their cross-town freeways and motorways, because they induce more traffic and eventually create more congestion, collisions, injuries, oil dependency, pollution, and emissions. A recent study for the Australasian Railways Association found that the national cost of road fatalities and trauma is \$35 billion a year. Rail, by comparison, is 50 times safer than road transport."

Ref: Brian Buckley, The Age, 2/9/10

"The TV advertisements for Victoria's transport plan only show public transport projects, while the majority of our state transport budget is spent encouraging people to drive on ever bigger roads. The ads have no imaginable public benefit that could justify their very real public cost."

Ref: Chris Goodman, The Age, 2/9/10

"When it comes to the inner city, Labor also knows that growing numbers of young, tertiary-educated residents have changed the demographics and redefined the political landscape. Meanwhile, discontent over public transport, planning, road congestion and the Myki debacle is being cleverly exploited by the Greens, whose policies include a \$14 billion public transport plan to cope with demand ..."

Ref: Farrah Tomazin, The Age, 8/9/10

"[Victorian Premier] John Brumby claims that 'I've always tried to be an evidence-based politician'. If only that were true! Take the WestLink road tunnel and elevated road project, which we find, through a Freedom of Expression application, has a benefit-cost ratio of only 0.5. This means, in ordinary language, that the benefits are only half the costs. When confronted with this important fact, Mr Brumby claims the benefit-cost ratio cannot be used to capture the long-term benefits of such an important project. Economists know that that's what this assessment technique is used for. When it comes to road building, evidence-based decisions seem to go out the window."

Ref: John McPherson, The Age, 5/6/10



Comparing Melbourne's Bike Share

"The low uptake of Melbourne's bicycle share scheme ... makes an interesting contrast with London. Barclays Cycle Hire, better known as Boris Biking after the city's colourful mayor, Boris Johnson, launched on July 30 and within two weeks 100,000 rides had been logged. By the end of the first month, 62,000 Londoners (and visitors like me) had signed up as members, so many that they have had to delay extending Boris Biking to casual users. London's 7000 rides a day is a sad contrast to Melbourne's 140. The bikes, docking stations and technology are, presumably, identical, since both cities use Montreal's BIXI bikes."

Ref: Tony Wheeler, The Age, 5/9/10

Thinking about Sustainable Canberra

"Ripping up roads and replacing them with trams, increasing high-density living in Civic and ending urban sprawl in greenfield developments would make Canberra a 'sustainable' city. The biophilic city design, which would move the city from car dependence, was suggested yesterday as a way to deal with threats from climate change, pollution and peak food, water and oil. It was one of many featured on the first day of the International Design Conference held at the National Convention Centre. Environment and sustainability expert Darren Bilsborough said the ACT Government needed to make

clear decisions about planning as it approached the challenges of increasing traffic congestion, poor public transport and affordable housing. The adjunct professor from Curtin University said his research showed fringe developments were not sustainable as a diminishing supply of oil would make daily car travel too expensive. The hidden cost of these developments also made them more expensive than urban infill. Professor Bilsborough's research found people who commuted more than one hour to work each way experienced negative health impacts. He said Canberra was at a tipping point.

'There is obesity issues, there is also the issues of stress and depression of feeling isolated', Professor Bilsborough said. The hour commute to city centres would become a reality as congestion made travel more time consuming. The solution was to rip up roads and use that space for trams and additional housing in city centres."

Ref: Ewa Kretowicz, Canberra Times, 31/8/10

How Deadly is Diesel? (Part 1)

"(1) Even a limited search of refereed research literature clearly shows that the in-vehicle micro-environment contains higher than ambient levels of engine-generated health endangering air pollution.

"(2) A simplified and approximate DALY analysis will be able to show that the impact on the health of vehicle drivers from diesel use is far greater than the roadside or general population.

"(3) Government programs that reduce the risk of premature death from diesel fuel to truck drivers rather than reducing the health risk to the general residential population would be the most cost effective.

"(4) An epidemiological study is required to quantify mortality and morbidity patterns for the drivers of diesel powered vehicle. Premature and preventable deaths of truck drivers due to in-cabin pollution should be a serious occupational health and safety issue."

Ref: Oz Kayak, 22/6/10

"Our understanding of the physiological effects of air pollution has taken a step forward with the release of results from a study where volunteers were exposed to common pollutants. This particular study focused on how our airways react to the tiny particles (less than ten microns in diameter) produced in the exhaust fumes of diesel engines. In the experiment, carried out by researchers of the university hospitals of Umea (Sweden) and Southampton (UK), 15 healthy, non-smoking individuals, made up of 11 men and 4 women aged between 21 and 29 years, were exposed for one hour to diesel exhaust fumes inside an exposure chamber at the University of Umea. The level of diesel exhaust inside the chamber was comparable to that found in underground car parks, tunnels or the congested streets of major cities. Bronchial biopsies were then carried out

"Despite the short exposure time, clear effects on the human volunteers were observed six hours after inhaling the fumes. The mucosa of their airways showed signs of an acute inflammation, characterized by up to three times the normal concentration of cells belonging to the immune system, known as neutrophils and lymphocytes. The Swedish and British researchers are the first to demonstrate these effects in healthy subjects by means of mucosal biopsies and bronchoscopy. While the inflammation was clearly perceptible in the airways, the traditional lung tests (such as measuring the exhaled air volume) showed no abnormal variation. 'Thanks to these analyses, we have been able to demonstrate that diesel fumes are much more dangerous than was so far assumed', said Dr Anders Blomberg of the University hospital of Umea, one of the main authors of the study. 'To our knowledge, this is the first time such effects have been described in humans exposed to a concentration of diesel exhaust that may be encountered in the environment'.

"The fumes of diesel engines contain up to 100 times more soot than ordinary petrol engines, but this 'particulate matter' is so tiny - less than ten microns in diameter - that it is not caught by any filtering device in our respiratory system. This means that the particles are inhaled in great quantities deep into the lungs, right into the delicate alveoli. Moreover, these particles can bind to a whole range of toxic compounds, such as metals or benzene derivatives, some of which are known to be carcinogenic. Some researchers are now beginning to say that diesel particles, as well as causing respiratory inflammations, might also be involved in the aetiology of lung cancer. The particles are of the same size as those in tobacco smoke, and carry similar toxic substances on their surface."

Ref: Science Ago, 22/9/98

www.scienceago.com/news/19980822132822data_trunc_sys.shtml

"Leading New Delhi heart surgeon Naresh Trehan says he can unerringly pick out from a batch of chest X-rays those that belong to residents of the Indian capital. 'They are always full of soot'. The same goes for heart specialist Krishan Kumar Aggarwal who thinks that anti-smoking campaigns are useless in Delhi because 'breathing the air in this polluted city is equivalent to smoking a pack of 20 cigarettes a day'. Trehan and Aggarwal are among 125,000 doctors who have signed on for a campaign to get diesel engines banned. They consider these engines mainly responsible for the deplorable state of the breathing apparatus of people in Delhi.

"Leading the doctors is the highly respected National Research Prof. V. Ramalingaswami who estimates that one Indian dies prematurely every hour as result of inhaling respirable suspended particulate matter (RSPM) originating mostly in diesel exhaust. 'As a first step we urge the government to stop the dieselization of the private vehicle fleet. Commercial profit and public good have to be mutually compatible and reinforcing', Ramalingaswami said. The doctors and leading environmental non-government organizations (NGOs) which support them are up against a powerful lobby of car manufacturers out to capitalize on government cross-subsidies on diesel fuel." {Continued in #173}

Ref: Ranjit Dev Raj, Asia Times, 17/7/99

Fixing Public Transport (Part 3)

"Peter Mares: *And what about Australians' love of their cars? I mean don't you need to have some way of sort of levering people out of their cars to get them on public transport, or is it a case of build and they will come?*

"Paul Mees: *Well I'm not sure about building, but I think -*

"Peter Mares: *Organising I mean.*

"Paul Mees: *Yes, provide and they will come.*

"Peter Mares: *Make the network you're talking about?*

"Paul Mees: *I'm just not quite sure that Australians are actually less morally virtuous than people in places where cars aren't used to the same extent you know. The Swiss have shown some pretty unenlightened attitudes on everything from building minarets through to then relatively late in giving women the vote, and I have a feeling that even people that don't care very much about the environment, use public transport when it's the most convenient option. Conversely, in most Australian urban regions, you've got to be a real glutton for punishment to try and get around without a car, and so I don't think it's about love affairs with the car, I think it's about trying to design a transport system that doesn't require a mass outbreak of heroism or martyrdom in order to achieve environmentally benign outcomes.*

"Peter Mares: *In case people don't believe you, because we've talked a lot about Europe and Germany and Switzerland, I think it's important to mention here too, that you also look a lot at Canadian cities, cities like Ottawa which is very spread out, I've been there, Toronto, Vancouver, which also achieve much better public transport outcomes than we do.*

"Paul Mees: *Yes, and importantly, the trends are good as well. It's not just that they're doing better than us, it's that 30 or 40 years ago they were doing less well than we are, and so they've kind of swapped places with Australian cities. Canadian cities are kind of like a bridge now between if you like, the European model of transport and the kind of spread-out urban form you get in North America and Australia. But their urban densities, which you can get from the statistical agencies in each country, are about the same as ours. So Montreal's about same as Sydney; Vancouver and Ottawa are about the same as Melbourne, and Calgary's about the same as Adelaide. So even Canadian cities where really the only substantial difference is the appalling weather there, which would probably make you more likely to run off and get your car, they have also learned, if you like, the European lesson about how to provide effective public transport.*

"Peter Mares: *How do we get to that point? I mean where we have one authority planning the networks and the routes and making sure they talk to each other and co-ordinate it. The one-ticket system and so on. I mean how do we get from where we are to where we want to go?*

"Paul Mees: *Well one of the lessons I also learned from looking at the series of model cities, was that there was something they all had in common, and that is that none of them sorted out their public*

transport by the bureaucracy, spontaneously reforming themselves. It always required pressure from citizens' activist groups and environmentalists and politician entrepreneurs who were prepared to wade in and actually change the status quo. In Australian cities we seem to be very good at doing the same thing we've done over and over again, and coming up with excuses for not substantially changing things. Sometimes even when we reorganise the bureaucracies to create things that look on an organisational chart like a European model, we then decant all the existing staff with their defeatist and conservative approaches into those new bodies, and so we don't get substantial change. And it does appear as if you need strong public support and some serious political intervention if you're going to make change.

"Peter Mares: And it also means giving up on the idea of a balanced system between road and public transport, and actually making a commitment to put public transport first.

"Paul Mees: Yes, that's right. But the extraordinary thing is that every serious piece of polling done, even in Australia, shows that when people are asked which they think should have priority, in overwhelming numbers they say public transport and environmentally friendly modes should receive priority over the car. The political class seems to be more conservative than the public on this question."

Ref: National Interest, ABC Radio National, 30/4/10

www.abc.net.au/rn/nationalinterest/stories/2010/2887416.htm

And Also ...

"How bout making people's start time when they leave home. Then they would be travelling on their employer's time. That would see a big push from business to improve the transport system-and might even attract some investment from them."

Ref: Comment, The Age, 30/8/10

The Benefits of Light Rail (Part 4)

"The priorities for Melbourne's tram network are increasing capacity to accommodate burgeoning demand and improving efficiency across the system. The Victorian government must ensure the timely delivery of 50 new low-floor trams, as targeted in the Victorian Transport Plan, and continue programs that provide greater tram priority and expand clearways, as detailed in the Keeping Melbourne Moving plan. In addition, more trams will be needed to meet demand on the system and to replace existing, outdated rolling stock. ...

"After an absence of almost 40 years, light rail was reintroduced to Sydney in 1997. Though limited in scope, Sydney's light rail line provides a valuable service between the southern CBD and inner-western suburbs, connecting Central Station, the Sydney CBD's primary rail hub, with key business and leisure hubs, before terminating at Lilyfield. The fully privatised system has a 7.2 kilometre operation, 14 stops and a fleet of seven trams. It carries 4 million passengers each year, operating 24 hours a day, every day of the year on a frequency of 10-15 minutes for most of the 24 hour period (30 minute frequencies occur between midnight and 6:30am). ...

"In Adelaide, the light rail network runs from Glenelg, on the coast south-west of the CBD, into the city centre - with the recent City West extension connecting users to the University of South Australia and the proposed new Royal Adelaide Hospital precinct. Eleven trams, operating on 12.4 kilometres of track and covering 21 stops, carried 2.6 million passengers in 2008-09. To date the system has largely been a victim of its own success with patronage growth constrained by capacity, leading to the announcement of additional trams and track extensions in 2008. ... Six new trams have entered service since late 2009, taking the total number of trams to 17 to meet demand levels and service the new extensions. ...

"Stage 1 of the Gold Coast light rail rapid transit project will be delivered as a partnership between the federal, Queensland and local governments and the private sector, and connect Griffith University and Broadbeach via the tourist hub of Surfers Paradise. The initial 13 kilometre system will operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week on 7-8 minute frequencies during peak periods, and is due to be operational by early 2014. The project is forecast to create 6000 jobs during the construction phase and, once complete, move 10,000 people an hour.

"Light rail will provide the Gold Coast with a modern, sustainable rapid transit mode, helping to reduce car reliance in one of Australia's growth cities and providing opportunities for urban renewal and investment. The system will be located within walking distance to more than 20 per cent of Gold Coast residents and 50,000-60,000 overnight visitors. Significantly, the project has been prioritised and given substantial funding under the federal government's Infrastructure Australia program, as part of the Commonwealth's re-engagement with urban transport. The project is also a model for inter-government and public-private cooperation, with all levels of government and the private sector having stakes in the delivery and operation of the system."

"The TTF (Tourism and Transport Forum) is a strong supporter of light rail as a reliable, high-capacity, sustainable mode of transport well-suited to urban and inner-suburban areas. In addition to being a reliable and attractive mode of transport, light rail routes can trigger denser residential development than has been typical of Australian cities - a desirable goal to limit the unsustainable sprawl of our biggest cities. We believe Melbourne is a global leader in demonstrating how a high quality light rail system can benefit a city. We advocate continued investment by the Victorian government in the Melbourne tram network, particularly to meet projected demand and provide greater priority. We also support the extension of the existing light rail systems in Sydney and Adelaide, in the context of broader government transport and urban growth strategies for those cities."

"For the medium-term, TTF considers the Gold Coast Rapid Transit project to be one of the most important public transport initiatives in the country, with the potential to deliver a world-class light rail system in Australia's fastest-growing region. In drawing on funding and expertise from three levels of government and the private sector, the project represents a test case for a truly national approach to transport infrastructure prioritisation."

"More generally, TTF would urge all levels of government to look at light rail as a potential policy and infrastructure solution to the problems of congestion and urban mobility. Integrated public transport will be essential if Australian cities are to meet the economic, social and environmental challenges of the years to come, and light rail has an important part to play in delivering urban productivity, liveability and sustainability."

Ref: Tourism and Transport Forum Position Paper, March 2010 See full report at:

<http://www.ttf.org.au/DisplayFile.aspx?FileID=762>

Losing Our Way on Roads



The Montague Street Flyover, South Melbourne

Photo: Craig Abraham. The Age. 30/6/10

As one wit noted: try being a pedestrian here!

More on the Eco-Bus Trial

"Hybrid buses are quite a different issue to alternative fuels, and a much simpler technology on which to measure results. Hybrid systems use a normal diesel or gas engine (CNG, LNG, LPG or whatever). The technology includes some way of storing excess energy – such as from braking – to reduce the power required from the main engine on starting off from rest. Two main means are used for this storage: battery electrical and hydraulic. Battery systems have significantly more storage capacity but are heavier and more expensive. Hydraulic systems are light and cheap but generally store only enough energy to help with a single acceleration from rest.

"Which system works best depends a lot on local circumstances including frequency of stops, gradients, peak and average loading and a lot else. Generic data from elsewhere – especially North American or European cities – will not be as valuable as local testing. Maintenance requirements and local availability of spares will also be important factors in localising hybrid technology. I've been trying to persuade my local council to stipulate hydraulic-hybrid rubbish trucks because that is clearly the leading technology in that usage. In bus usage the choice is less clear. Hybrid technology has the potential to reduce fuel usage in local stop-start work by 30 - 50%, at relatively low cost. Alternative fuels are a whole other issue, often clouded with a lot of guesswork and plain bulldust as to the relative environmental impacts of the alternatives, particularly if you include 'biofuels'. The territory of hippie hucksters and corrupt politicians to a large degree."

John Harland, 1/9/10

Problems with Tar Sands (Part 1)

"Centre for American Progress president John Podesta brought a dose of reality to a tar sands public relations session organized by Canada for Washington policymakers. At the Canada 2020 conference 'Greening the Oil Sands', Podesta responded to Canadian ambassador Gary Doer, who accused Americans of a 'holier than thou' hypocrisy about Canada's high-pollution synthetic petroleum production from Alberta's bituminous deposits. Podesta also debunked the rosy picture painted by a cavalcade of industry officials, who spoke of their progress in 'greening' tar sands production: Oil extraction from tar sands is polluting, destructive, expensive, and energy-intensive. These things are facts. I think suggesting this process can come close to approximating being 'greened' is largely misleading, or far too optimistic, or perhaps both. It stands alongside clean coal and error-free deepwater drilling as more PR than reality. 'Unconventional sources of fossil fuels cannot be our energy future', Podesta explained bluntly. 'There are no leapfrogging technologies on the horizon that suggest with any plausibility that this could be otherwise. There are no silver bullets waiting to be fired'.

"The BP Gulf of Mexico disaster is 'one in a long line of wake-up calls, and we ignore it at our peril. Beyond Petroleum is an ironic slogan, but not a real strategy', Podesta noted. He criticised the oil industry for using clean energy for public relations instead of investment, citing research by the Centre for American Progress that the big five oil companies invested only 1.7 percent of profits in clean-energy R&D, 'because the corporate culture and core competence of oil companies favour large, centralized investment opportunities, like the unconventional resources in Canada and or deepwater drilling in the Gulf of Mexico'.

"The U.S., Canada, and the rest of the world are 'absurdly trying to ride two horses galloping in opposite directions', as 'we have to keep global temperatures under 2 degrees Celsius to avoid catastrophic climate change' but continue to pump investment and planning into a fossil-fuel future. 'The oil industry is extracting oil from sources that are harder and riskier to access, and where a one-in-a-million failure, even if that is an accurate risk assessment, nevertheless has huge, unaffordable consequences'. During the Q&A that followed, Gary Mar, Alberta's representative in Washington, thanked Podesta for his talk which was 'valuable', Mar said, because it 'compels the Alberta government to sharpen its case for the oil sands'."

Ref: Climate Progress, 23/6/10

<http://climateprogress.org/2010/06/23/podesta-green-tar-sands/>

More on Counterpoint

"Thanks for your comments Andrew in #170, and I can't let your comments go unchallenged either. My city, Hobart, has 90% of households owning a car(s). So I am not the only fortunate one physically, mentally and financially able to use a car! Of course public transport is necessary for those who either

have to, or choose to use PT. But in cities like Hobart with low levels of congestion and low population growth and where mode share is around 82% car, 1% bike, 5.5% public transport, the reality is that public transport and other alternatives just don't meet the needs of people. As for whether I can use a car in future as I age for example, having seen my elderly parents go through the latter stages of their lives in Melbourne, and who never used public transport, I suggest to you that as in our case the extended family still uses the car to transport those 'less fortunate' who physically, mentally and financially are not able to use a car. Public transport failed miserably in Melbourne for my aged parents when they were alive. I hope I am wrong but I doubt that PT can do much better for others in future."

Mark Broadley, 1/9/10

More on the Clem 7 Problems

"Well-paid traffic forecasters had predicted that 91,000 vehicles daily would use the Clem7 by now and, by late next year, more than 100,000. ... As it has turned out, fewer than 28,000 vehicles are now using the Clem7 – less than a third of the original predictions – even after RiverCity Motorway, the operator and builder of the tunnel, halved tolls and introduced other incentives in a desperate bid to entice motorists. With those ambitious traffic forecasts now seemingly impossible to meet, the tunnel named after former Brisbane lord mayor Clem Jones [infamous for removing Brisbane's trams] is on the verge of following the lead of Sydney's failed Cross City and Lane Cove tunnels. Yesterday RiverCity revealed the extent of its predicament when it posted a \$1.67 billion annual loss ...

"Put simply, the traffic forecasts here were made to fit the financial models. John Goldberg, an honorary associate of the University of Sydney and a leading critic of the toll-road model, says ... 'They worked out what the investor was going to be happy with in terms of rates of return, and they worked back to a set of numbers which would produce that return for investors. Such forecasts do not properly relate to the interaction of land use and transport, and it is not surprising that they are not fulfilled. Moreover, the forecasts usually correspond to congested conditions during the peak periods'. ... Traffic forecasters were not the only ones to bank handsome [\$2.7m] payouts from the project. Fees in excess of \$50 million were dished out to the legion of advisers for the public float of RiverCity. ... One option now on the lips of industry leaders is the so-called availability model used for the \$750 million Peninsula Link highway in Melbourne. Unlike toll-road projects under the public-private partnership arrangement, the Victorian government will make periodic payments to the builder to maintain the 25-kilometre Peninsula Link once it is operational, regardless of traffic volume. It also means that if motorists fail to use the Peninsula Link after it is completed in 2013 the Victorian government, rather than the private sector, ends up with a white elephant. 'What is happening is that the patronage risk is being pushed back onto government. Capital markets are saying, "We don't want to guess what the traffic is",' an Austock analyst, Andrew Chambers, says. 'In the case of the Sydney and Brisbane tunnels, it is the equity investors that have borne the brunt of a shortfall in traffic. It is now falling back on government or it won't get built'. ...

"BrisConnections, through its traffic forecaster Arup, has predicted that the Airport Link will attract about 135,000 vehicles a day just a month after it opens, rising to 291,000 vehicles in 2026. But despite the failure of other projects elsewhere, BrisConnections is sticking resolutely to the optimistic predictions for the Airport Link. As much as the legion of advisers, traffic forecasters and companies behind the failed projects share the blame, governments, too, deserve to take much of the criticism for creating a model that enabled the group with the most optimistic forecasts to win the project bids. Ultimately, taxpayers will have to shoulder a larger burden if their demands for bigger and better public transport infrastructure are met."

Ref: Matt O'Sullivan, Brisbane Times, 1/9/10

"The chairman of the troubled company behind the Clem7 tunnel has vigorously defended paying five managers bonuses totalling more than \$1 million despite posting a \$1.67 billion loss."

Ref: Courtney Trenwith, Brisbane Times, 3/9/10

"Is this what [Lord Mayor] Campbell Newman supports? He claims Brisbane has benefited from his tunnel and that a private company is taking all the risk. He conveniently ignores the fact ratepayers contributed \$770 million to build this white elephant. And now we find our money has gone towards huge bonuses to the Corporate Executives running the show."

Ref: Comment, Brisbane Times, 3/9/10