

## Victorian Election

The Liberal Opposition Party is giving priority to public transport: *"In addition to \$1.4 billion for 40 new trains over two terms, he [the Leader of the Opposition] also pledged two new train stations, an extra \$100 million for infrastructure maintenance and renewal and a new \$10 million independent transport authority to co-ordinate and improve train, tram and bus services."* [The Age, 15/11/10]. All good stuff but the airport rail link idea has also been revived which generated some interesting comments including this one: *"This election 'carrot' has been dangled in front of voters so many times it's a wonder anyone out there would bother to take it seriously. ... Alleged studies have supposedly indicated that not enough people would use such a link to make it viable (hard to believe people are prepared to pay \$80 for a taxi ride but not part with the cost of a train ticket but there you go)."* [The Age]. But, whatever happened to the train to Rowville which seemed to be a firm promise by the Shadow Transport Minister just a few weeks ago?

## More on the Fast Train

*"I think what we've learnt [from previous fast train studies] is that it's not primarily an engineering problem. It is possible to engineer an alignment between Melbourne & Sydney that will do the trip in three hours, it's even reasonably commonly agreed roughly on what the cost is, and if sounds like a lot of money, its roughly equivalent to the amount of money we've spent on the Hume Highway in the last twenty years, so its hardly beyond our capacity as a nation. What none of the studies have done however is ask the question what needs to take place at a political, governmental and organisational level to bring about this transformation. ... The fastest rail service in Australia at the moment is the suburban train south from Perth to Mandurah. It only runs at 90 km/hr. ... It was built by [a] public sector rail agency, it cost about \$1.2 billion, and it was completed on time and on budget. ... [In Spain] they [built] the fast train [from Madrid] to Seville because it [Seville] was down on its luck ... and it's been very successful [for Seville]."*

Ref: Paul Mees, Late Night Live, ABC, 21/9/10

[www.abc.net.au/rn/latenightlive/stories/2010/3018184.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/rn/latenightlive/stories/2010/3018184.htm)

## And Also ...

*"Back in my high school physics we learnt a formula for work was mass x height and it makes no sense at all to me to spend great gobfulls of energy lifting all the people up high just to let them back down again when you could just push them along horizontally."*

Ref: Alan Curl, Late Night Live, ABC, 21/9/10



**"This Stephenson fellow envisages a rail machine that will achieve 50 mph. Ridiculous!"**

## Amtrak High Speed Rail Plan

*"At an average speed of 137 mph (220 kph), a trip between Washington and New York would take just 96 minutes, about one hour faster than today."*

*For the trip between New York and Boston, the average speed would be 148 mph (238 kph) and take just 84 minutes, or a time savings of more than two hours. ... The Amtrak concept plan, A Vision for High-Speed Rail in the Northeast Corridor, shows a financially viable route could be developed. Upon its full build-out in 2040, high-speed train ridership would approach 18 million passengers with room to accommodate up to 80 million annually as demand increases in the years and decades that follow. Departures of high-speed trains would expand from an average of one to four per hour in each direction, with additional service in the peak periods, and total daily high-speed rail departures would increase from 42 today to as many as 148 in 2040."*

*"The service would generate an annual operating surplus of approximately \$900 million and its construction would create more than 40,000 full-time jobs annually over a 25-year construction period to build the new track, tunnels, bridges, stations, and other infrastructure. More than 120,000 permanent jobs in improved economic productivity along the corridor and in rail operations are predicted by 2040. In addition to significant travel time savings between major cities, tremendous mobility improvements would come with environmental, energy and congestion mitigation benefits. The new transportation capacity obtained with this investment will allow a larger share of the intercity travel market to be via*

high-speed rail, strengthening sustainable, energy-efficient development in the corridor's metropolitan areas. ... With an investment of \$4.7 billion annually over 25 years, a major national transport-ation asset would be built to support the growth and competitive position of the Northeast region..."

**Ref: Envirovaluation, 4/10/10**

## Community and the Fast Train (Part 2)

"A multi-scaled coalition will be essential. A bullet train can't be won in the cities of Melbourne or Sydney alone. It will require national co-ordination but also the ability to actively involve residents in places such as Campbelltown, the Central Coast, Canberra, outer Melbourne and other regions. ... Local community activists would need to be involved in the advocacy strategy, coming together in local coalitions to build community support and maintain political pressure. ...

"When it comes to a bullet train a diverse alliance based on mutual interests could include:

- Resident groups and councils in south-west Sydney, outer Melbourne and the Central Coast, for whom a fast train provides a way to take pressure off commuting times. As Julian Disney argues, residents in these areas spend two-three working days per week travelling, at enormous costs to their families.
- Unions, for whom a bullet train provides another way to deal with the issues of work-family balance and working hours. An eight-hour day can't be reinstated without dealing with how people get to and from work, especially as commuting times are getting worse. A recent survey found that the average daily commute in Sydney has increased from 79 minutes in 1999 to 81 minutes in 2007. In addition, building this train line would be a massive investment in jobs in a period of unstable employment.
- Urban planners and housing advocates, who know that the commuting crisis in our metropolitan cities is a key strain on affordable housing. Adam Farrer, from the NSW Housing Association, has argued that land release is not enough – affordable housing strategies require transport solutions that make housing accessible to jobs. A bullet train could help by making the CBD more accessible to the suburban fringe.
- Environmental advocates, who could champion a bullet train because it would actively reduce emissions caused by cars and airlines. Transport accounts for 13.5% of Australia's total greenhouse gas emissions. Of that the greatest emissions come from road transport and secondly airline transport.
- There are would also be key allies in the business community including those involved in civil construction and tourism.

"For those excited by the prospect of a bullet train the challenge is clear – we need to develop a diverse, long term community coalition if we want this idea to become a reality."

**Ref: Amanda Tattersall, SMH, 22/9/10**

## Problems at the Refinery

"The US Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Justice fined BP PLC \$US15 million on Thursday for Clean Air Act violations at its Texas City refinery, adding to the oil company's troubles as it struggles to clean up the damage caused by its massive Gulf of Mexico oil spill. ...

BP's Texas City refinery, the company's largest in the United States, was also fined \$US87 million by the US Occupational Safety and Health Administration for problems found there after a March 2005 explosion killed 15 people and injured about 170 others. The latest violations resulted from three incidents in 2004 and 2005 that forced Texas City residents to remain indoors while thousands of pounds of flammable and toxic pollutants were released into the air. ... While the refinery is old and complex, it is not in worse condition than any other. No new refinery has been built in the United States for at least 30 years. Yet the Texas City facility has had more problems than most others, with federal agencies recovering more than \$US130 million in fines from BP for problems at the plant."

**Ref: Ramit Plushnick-Masti, The Age, 1/10/10**

## And Also ...

"A US car dealership is trying to drum up business by offering an unusual perk for potential used-truck buyers: a free AK-47 assault rifle. General sales manager Nick Ginetta says that since the promotion was announced in the Florida town of Sanford on Veterans Day (November 11), business has more than doubled at Nations Trucks."

**Ref: AP, The Age, 16/11/10**

## Problems Replacing Oil (Part 3)

*"The annual diesel consumption in Australia is 15 Giga litres. Australia's annual canola crop is variable, but is approximately 2 Mega tonnes, of which about 1.4 Mega tonnes is exported. If this crop was converted into bio-diesel, how much regular fuel would be displaced? If we changed our diet and used all of our canola to make biodiesel, we could take the 2 mega tonnes of canola grown in Australia in an average year, to yield  $2,000,000 \times 0.4/1,000 = 800$  Mega litres of biodiesel. This is about 5 % of our annual demand for diesel fuel. What if we substituted just our canola exports to make biodiesel? How much would we save? If we only used the canola that we currently export, we would only get 70% as much biodiesel. That is  $1,400,000 \times 0.4/1,000 = 560$  megalitres of biodiesel. This is under 4% of our annual demand for diesel fuel.*



Canola Field, Shire of Broomehill, WA

*"Can we grow more canola? This is a land use issue. Mostly canola is grown in dry country in rotation with other grain crops. It is subject to drought conditions. How much is grown will change from year to year, season to season. We could grow more of it, substituting for other crops. It is not likely to be a major player in reducing Australia's dependence on imports of oil. We may even have problems with degradation of land and use of scarce water supplies if we try to push more crops onto a fragile environment."*

**Ref: Peter Flanagan, August 2006**

## How Deadly is Diesel? (Part 5)

*"Because the diesel industry involves huge sums, diesel presents us with a fundamental problem of democratic self-rule. Despite mounting evidence of widespread harm, diesel has been maintained all these years by corporations and their trade associations and lobbyists – from Detroit and Houston to Washington and in every statehouse – who have run roughshod over the needs and interests of the American people for the last half-century, a tiny few who wield life-and-death power over the many – harnessing governments to employ their risk-based approach to deflect and stymie the search for least harmful alternatives. (To learn more about this appalling story of corporate crime against the people of the U.S., see Rachel's #439 at [www.rachel.org](http://www.rachel.org), and see the video, 'Taken for a Ride', which tells the story of a proven conspiracy between General Motors, Firestone Rubber, and Standard Oil of California to buy up and destroy the streetcar systems of 80 U.S. cities & replace them with diesel buses).*

*"At bottom, the diesel problem forces us to ask, What does our democracy really mean? How can a tiny minority of powerful people keep the multitudes locked into this deadly dead-end technology decade after decade? Surely, another world is possible. The publicly- subsidised institutions of higher learning in every state could help us all visualise and then realise that better world. The taxpayers of each state would feel well-served by a university system that would mount a co-ordinated effort to solve complex and pressing public problems, to help us preserve and enhance the common wealth, like clean air and our right to breathe it.*

*"Suddenly every state's very substantial brain trust within higher education would take on new relevance to the lives of the taxpaying public, and it would be appreciated and rewarded for its efforts. As a result, educational funding would naturally rise – a win-win for higher education and for the citizenry. In the process, the nation's colleges and universities could gain experience working together to solve other deep problems facing us all. With close guidance from citizens, they could develop a public-interest research agenda and a modern capacity for precautionary problem-solving. With such an effort, the U.S. might actually reverse 40 years of environmental destruction and urban deterioration and finally turn the corner. That's the diesel opportunity."*

**Ref: Rachel's Environment & Health News, Health and Energy, 24/2/05**

[http://healthandenergy.com/deadly\\_diesel\\_fumes.htm](http://healthandenergy.com/deadly_diesel_fumes.htm)



*"The fact is that you'll never see 'small particles' written on a death certificate, but we know that it kills tens of thousands in the US alone. In fact, even the World Health Organization recognizes PM [particulate matter] as a major global killer, estimating about two million deaths from air pollution worldwide each year. Diesel exhaust is notoriously full of fine PM; there's no doubt about it. And these particles actually discriminate who they kill, because it's the poorest communities with the largest minority populations who are most exposed to high diesel traffic corridors and transportation hubs. The powerful industries that rely on polluting diesel engines continue to promote the false choice between jobs and health. They are used to receiving subsidies in the form of millions of impacted lungs and lives so that they can continue to run dirty, old engines without controls. Now, CARB [California Air Resources Board] regulations forcing trucks and construction equipment to clean up their act have provoked attacks on the science of pollution-driven health impacts. These attacks are no surprise, but hopefully decision makers can stay focused on the fact that thousands of Californians are dying each year waiting for these engines to be cleaned up. These industries continue to try to sue, legislate, obstruct and do everything they can to delay the relief to stifling diesel pollution that everyone is waiting for. CARB made the right decision to re-examine the link between fine PM pollution and mortality, despite the overwhelming evidence and scientific community's conclusions that diesel pollution is bad for your health. In fact, reports abound showing stronger links between fine PM and mortality than previously thought. ... We expect CARB to release their newest report soon, bringing the agency in line with other esteemed institutions like US EPA, the World Health Organization and the Health Effects Institute, confirming the link between inhaling particulate matter and premature death."*

**Ref: Diane Bailey, Switchboard, 25/10/10**

[http://switchboard.nrdc.org/blogs/dbailey/air\\_in\\_california\\_can\\_be\\_deadl.html](http://switchboard.nrdc.org/blogs/dbailey/air_in_california_can_be_deadl.html)

*"Diesel fumes from taxis and buses are a genuine health hazard for asthma sufferers, according to research published in the New England Journal of Medicine. An international team of scientists conducted the study in the busy western end of Oxford Street in London, where only diesel-powered taxis and buses are permitted. Sixty volunteers with mild to moderate asthma experienced worse symptoms. But they had far fewer problems in the traffic-free western part of Hyde Park. The scientists blame particulates, tiny sooty pollutant particles, released by diesel engines."*

**Ref: The Guardian, 6/12/07**

## Problems with Tar Sands (Part 5)

*"At CAP [Centre for American Progress], it is our hope that 2010 will be remembered as the year that the United States began to turn away from oil, no matter what its source. This turning point has many elements: significantly higher fuel economy standards for all classes of vehicles; transitioning our heavy transportation fleets to natural gas; accelerating research and development of the electrification of cars and light trucks; big investments in mass transit; sensible residential development that discourages sprawl and long commutes; and a shrinking cap on carbon from transportation fuels."*

*"The Obama administration has already taken aggressive executive actions in support of clean energy. A few months before the House of Representatives passed its comprehensive climate and energy bill, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found that the administration has the legal right to limit CO2 and other green-house gas emissions through a regulatory program under the Clean Air Act. The EPA's decision sent a strong message to opponents of climate legislation in Senate: The alternative to passing strong legislation is not the status quo, but rather an EPA regime to regulate CO2 emissions. If the U.S. Senate fails to act on climate change legislation this summer, perhaps with a carbon-based linked fee on the transportation sector, the EPA will be tasked with doing the job."*

*"The Obama administration has been especially active in the area of fuel economy and emissions standards for vehicles. A year ago, the president announced the largest increase in fuel economy standards for cars and light trucks in 30 years, along with the first-ever federal global warming tailpipe pollution standards. Earlier this spring, these standards were finalised, and according to a Union of Concerned Scientists' analysis, their implementation will save the United States 1.2 million barrels of oil a day by 2020. President Obama also announced his intent to set the first-ever fuel economy and global warming tailpipe pollution standards for medium- and heavy-duty trucks, which will save consumers at least \$24 billion through reduced fuel costs in 2030. As the ambassador noted, Canada and the United States are working together to align their standards in this area to create a fully integrated market. And just a few weeks ago, the president set the agencies in motion to develop the next round of fuel*

economy and tailpipe emissions standards for vehicle models beginning in 2017. After years of inaction and neglect, federal standards have now quickly risen to be on par with the state of California's. Another California-born energy policy that the federal government is likely to follow is setting a low-carbon fuel standard. California's three-year old program sets a model both for the nation and for other states; 20 states are now in various stages of setting their own low-carbon fuel standards. They will likely be an increasingly important part of the energy policy landscape, both at the state and the federal level.

*"The industry should plan for these policy inevitabilities seriously and seek opportunities within them, rather than fight policymakers every step of the way. And that future doesn't mean that oil-based fuels won't have a role. We're not in a zero-sum game, even if we'd like to be. But it is my view that the role of unconventional oil will have to be altered in order to be economically and environmentally viable. One plausible option is blending higher lifecycle carbon content oil with cellulosic or other next generation biofuels to lower its lifecycle carbon content. This would allow oil produced in Canada to meet a federal low-carbon fuel standard. Tar sands companies have a strong incentive to support this industry and throw considerable resources behind it.*

*"It's important that the United States also does its part to direct investment to the right places as we attempt to make the transition to clean energy. Policymakers should make careful, long-view decisions, and send the right signals at this point in time. That's why I question the hurry with which the State Department has chosen to decide whether or not to approve the Keystone XL oil pipeline slated to reach from Alberta to the Gulf of Mexico. First, as the gulf spill reminds us every day, rushing to complete oil projects invites disaster. There are enough legitimate questions about this pipeline – how soon it will be needed, its design and safety, and its potential impacts on important ecosystems along its 2,000 mile length – to take a more deliberate approach."*

{Continued in #177}

**Ref: John Podesta, Climate Progress, 23/6/10**

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

*"To produce a barrel of oil processed from oil sands requires approximately one thousand cubic feet of natural gas per barrel. It is estimated that as proposed future oil sands projects come on stream, 20% of Canada's total natural gas production will be burned in order to extract bitumen. This means that a very significant amount of relatively clean burning natural gas will be used to produce much more environmentally damaging oil."*

**Ref: Bishop Luc Bouchard, 25/1/09**

[The Integrity of Creation and the Athabasca Oil Sands](#)

## And Also ...

*"Volvo held a press conference in Italy to show off Pedestrian Avoidance Technology meant to stop a car if people were in its path. But the car kept going, right over a crash dummy. Executive Alan Dresselss said it was a 'nightmare'."*

**Ref: Mx News, 29/9/10**

## Electric Vehicles in India

*"The recent high-profile acquisition of a small electric car company by an auto giant seems to have electrified the industry, which has been experiencing robust growth. As the world seeks solutions to high polluting and increasingly expensive fossil fuel transportation, electric vehicles could offer a viable solution. 'But where is the electricity?' people ask as they grapple with power cuts in the midst of a scorching summer. Whether it makes the power availability worse when everybody plugs their car into their home is a legitimate worry. Why would the Delhi government even consider deploying electric vehicles with these constraints? .... Along with promoting efficient public transport, this could be an appropriate solution to increasing urban air pollution and severe congestion, which is also driving up greenhouse gas emissions and turbo-charging India's fossil fuel import bill.*

*"Given the Indian economy's unhealthy dependence on fossil-fuels, over 70% of which has to be imported, any technology that helps phase out oil-dependent forms of transport should be seriously considered. EVs not only provide cleaner environment, but also reduce the dependency of the transport sector on imports and price volatility of fossil fuels. The energy efficiency of EVs is 46% higher than internal combustion engines (ICEs). They also have the potential to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by*

13-68% compared to ICEs. With the help of advanced V2G (vehicle-to-grid) technology, deployment of electric vehicles can directly decrease the emissions of carbon dioxide and other pollutants within a vehicle's lifecycle, which will significantly relieve air pollution in cities. Through peak-shaving (sending power back to the grid when demand is high), EVs can also indirectly reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

*"Given India's abundant sunlight, the electricity required for EVs has the potential to be produced from various natural sources like solar energy. India's established auto component manufacturing infrastructure, modest manufacturing and R&D costs, high urban congestion and the presence of a large domestic market could make it a significant global player in electric vehicles."*

**Ref: Damandeep Singh, Times of India, 22/8/10**

## Problems with the Nano

*"Satish Sawant, an insurance agent, collected his brand new Nano from a showroom in Prabhadevi, and headed home, dreaming of showing off his first car to his family. ... As Sawant cannot drive, the Concorde Motors showroom provided him with a driver to take him home safely. ... Suddenly, a motorcycle overtook him, signalling him to look behind. As he turned to see what the biker was pointing at, he was alarmed to see the rear of the car in flames. Sawant and the driver leapt out of the burning car. In no time, the car was engulfed in flames. Recent Incidents:*

- September 13, 2009: A Nano parked in the comfort of a housing society parking area in Ahmedabad caught fire.
- October 20, 2009: A newly purchased Tata Nano caught fire at a parking lot in Hazratganj, Lucknow. Nobody was hurt.
- October 20, 2009: A Nano ... caught fire at a parking lot in North Delhi."

**Ref: Mid Day (Mumbai), 22/3/10**



Photo: Mid Day (Mumbai)

## Promoting Sustainability

*"A 'truly radical' pay-as-you-drive scheme for Britain's motorways should be introduced to help the country switch to a low-carbon economy, a senior Tory MP says. Tim Yeo, who chairs the Commons Energy and Climate Change Select Committee, on Sunday called for drivers to be charged based on emissions and time of travel to promote green vehicle choices and cut peak time congestion. He also urged ministers to consider the 'overdue' privatisation of Britain's motorway network to fund investment in high-speed rail and road improvements. ...*

*"The South Suffolk MP, who chaired the Commons Environmental Audit Committee during the last parliament, wrote a book called Green Gold: The Case for Raising Our Game on Climate Change. In it he put forward a package of measures to accelerate the UK's move to a low-carbon economy – which he argues would provide large financial rewards in the long run. They included a personal carbon credits scheme, more renewable and nuclear power to improve energy security, strict new building standards backed by tax changes to reward those who invest in energy efficiency and a global approach. But among the most radical measures were the proposals to decarbonise the transport system by incentivising low emission vehicles, privatising the motorways and introducing road pricing. 'So far most politicians have been reluctant to embrace the huge potential which a truly radical road pricing system offers', Mr Yeo wrote. 'Allied to the overdue privatisation of Britain's motorways this could fund both more investment in better roads and the immediate development of high speed rail.*

*"Since it could also pay for a cut in fuel duty the upshot would be a cut in the cost of driving for drivers who make little use of motorways, a group which includes many rural residents for whom car ownership is a necessity, regardless of wealth'. Noting the green commitments in the coalition agreement between the two parties ... Mr Yeo said the administration would be judged on its efforts to move Britain towards a low-carbon economy."*

**Ref: Craig Woodhouse, The Age, 19/7/10**



## Mysterious Policy Statement

*"Here's a policy statement from a lobby group in Victoria I'll call 'X':*

- *'X' advocates for improved transport services for all our members, including those who use public transport.*
- *'X' does not subscribe to the cars versus public transport, argument. We believe both are necessary and complementary.*
- *Adequate public transport is a vital community service throughout Victoria and Governments should appropriately fund this.*
- *'X' advocates for improvements to outer suburban transport services. This includes enhanced bus services and improved mobility services like better public transport for people who are unable to drive or have stopped driving, or simply want choice in how they travel. A full list of the public transport improvements needed in outer Melbourne that includes new rail lines, railway stations and bus services is detailed in 'X' s Outer Melbourne Connect report.*
- *'X' believes that, where appropriate, priority be provided for public transport on congested city arterial roads and ideally, trams should operate in their own reserved part of the road.*
- *'X' supports plans for a significant upgrade of the metropolitan public transport system including: Improvements to the capacity and quality of Melbourne's rail ... Modernisation of the tram system with newer trams, better stops and information systems. Bus services in middle and outer areas and regional centres should be extended in both route coverage and hours of operation. Government should provide appropriate travel interchange facilities. Application of real time information to the public transport network.*

*"So who is 'X'? I hear you ask. It's the RACV - the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria."*

**Ref: Mal Rowe, Trans-Action Bulletin, 23/2/10** See: <http://tinyurl.com/l56gld>

## And Also ...

*"It used to be a blood-alcohol reading that determined whether a person was convicted of drink driving - now, it's a postcode. Sydney woman Jasmin Clair Henley, 27, escaped punishment for driving under the influence yesterday because she lives in an area with no public transport. ...*

*[Magistrate Brian] Maloney said he would treat the case as if he was passing sentence in a country court, because there were not enough public transport options open to people living in the northwest corridor."*

**Ref: News.com, 4/8/10**

*"Woohoo! I live in the country."*

**Ref: Sue Seegars, News.com, 4/8/10**



Songthaews  
(shared taxis),  
Chiang Mai,  
Northern  
Thailand,  
November,  
2010