

## More on the Victorian Election

*"Labor faced the dilemma of having to satisfy demands for affordable housing and for better provision of services, especially reliable public transport. The more the city has expanded, however, the more evident it has become that attempting to overcome the first difficulty by developing new land on the metropolitan fringe only makes it all the harder to resolve the second difficulty. A transport system that has been under-resourced for many years is not able to effectively service even already developed outer suburbs, let alone new ones. The Coalition clinched office on the back of the anger this generated among voters, but it has not come equipped with any ready-made solution to the problem of the city that knows no limits."*

**Ref: Editorial, The Age, 29/12/10**

*"The Baillieu government has shelved its predecessor's much-promoted strategy, which pledged a cavalcade of new transport projects ... The transport plan [of 2008] ... was followed by a \$6.6 million advertising campaign featuring television ads that screened at least 2500 times, as well as radio, newspaper, online and outdoor billboard promotions."*

**Ref: Clay Lucas, The Age, 7/1/11**

## On the Cost of Petrol

*"The Bureau of Statistics [have identified] petrol prices as having risen sharply over the year. FUELtrac managing director Chris Kable said that along with oil price rises, motorists were carrying the extra costs of supermarket loyalty schemes, which he believed were artificially inflating prices."*

**Ref: Jessica Wright, The Age, 2/1/11**

This reminds me that a while back, **Peter Cairney** sent in this comment: *"I'd just like to take Nord Samuelson's point in Newsletter #104 a bit further - the supermarkets' fuel voucher schemes mean that poorer people in society (who don't have their own motor vehicle and don't buy large amounts of groceries at one time) end up subsidising some of the better off in society (who do both) through the higher prices needed to pay for the fuel voucher schemes. As a matter of equity, the supermarkets should make available vouchers for public transport (including taxis) as an alternative to fuel."*

## Evolution of a Park (Part 1)



**A pocket park, Albert Park, Melbourne, Jan 2007 {Cont in #183}**

## Oil Prices

*"Any hope that the strong Australian dollar would shield motorists from increases in fuel prices have been dashed - global oil prices are tipped to hit record highs early this year. This year's price increases will compound the cost pressures already inflicted on households."*

**Ref: Jessica Wright, The Age, 2/1/11**

## Trees – 1; Roundabout – 0

In a rare win for historical significance and aesthetics over motor vehicle supremacy, Heritage Victoria has refused to issue a permit for the construction of a new roundabout intersection and the removal of trees from the Bacchus Marsh Avenue of Honour, to the west of Melbourne. The reasons include that: *"The works will have an adverse impact on the aesthetic significance of the Avenue of Honour. The removal of nine (9) commemorative elm trees will remove the continuous and unbroken cathedral-like*

*arching of the canopy which makes it one of the most distinctive elm avenues in Victoria. The trees form a visually impressive colonnade effect in all seasons."*

And: *"Refusal of the proposed works do not unreasonably detrimentally affect the ability of VicRoads to fulfil its statutory duties; including the provision of efficient and safe movement of road traffic, the improvement of road safety strategies and practices and the improvement of the State's principal road network to facilitate vehicular movement of people and goods. There were other alternatives (albeit these are less preferred by the applicant) presented that provide similar road transport outcomes. In this case, the statutory duties of the applicant do not outweigh the need to protect the cultural heritage significance of the Avenue of Honour."*

It's a pity that the agency charged with tram track extension does not seem to have the same gusto as VicRoads, though hopefully not at the expense of aesthetics and history. As Julianne Bell noted: *"The Bacchus Marsh Avenue of Honour represents a very fine avenue of elms - few remain in Victoria and now in the world, given the ravages of Dutch Elm Beetle in the UK and the USA."*

**Ref: PPL Vic Email, 22/12/10**

## Electric Car-Share in Paris

*"After its successful bike-sharing program, Paris is moving into higher gear, preparing to lend out 3000 electric cars across the City of Light to fight air pollution. City officials have chosen a bid by French billionaire entrepreneur Vincent Bolloré to run Autolib, a new automobile-sharing program modelled on Paris's successful, three-year-old bicycle-sharing program, Velib. Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoë said overnight the service - which is to begin in the city and nearby suburbs by the end of next year - will make Paris the first major world city with a car-sharing program of its size. Mr Delanoë called the plan 'a revolution in efficiency that will improve our quality of life'. ...*

*"The four-seat 'Bluecars' - so called for their colour - developed by Bolloré are to be positioned at 1200 stations in metropolitan Paris and will be available around the clock. Users must have a valid driver's licence and pay a subscription fee to borrow one of the vehicles. Italian car designer Pininfarina worked with Bolloré to develop the cars. Tourists will be able to use the service as long as they have a driver's licence recognised in France, meaning US and European visitors should have no problem signing up. The service will employ about 800 people, and will be financed by a 60-million-euro (\$80.5 million) investment by Bolloré. City and regional authorities will pay to build the docking stations at a cost of 50,000 (\$67,100) each.*



*"An annual subscription will cost 12 Euros (\$16) per month, but daily and weekly options will also be available. A 250-euro (\$335) security deposit will also be required. The cars can be reserved in advance and returned to any station, similar to how Paris's bike sharing program works. A test phase of the program is scheduled for August and September, before the official start-up in October. Velib makes more than 20,000 bikes and nearly 1500 stations available around the city and nearby suburbs. Infrequent users can pay by credit card, while subscribers pay a yearly fee of 25 Euros (\$33.54) to gain access to the bikes."*

**Ref: AP, The Australian, 17/12/10**

## Problems with Electric Cars in Canada

*"Only one week after the much-hyped rollout of electric cars at the Los Angeles Auto Show, Canadian news media carried reports about how Ontario electricity costs are expected to double over the next 20 years. That forecast must have Ontarians questioning whether buying an electric car is a good idea. But there are other questions all Canadians would be wise to ask about electric cars, and the electricity needed to power them. Let's put those questions into perspective.*

*"Even the staggering electricity rate increases announced by Ontario would not generate nearly enough power to handle a large auto-recharge load, nor could already stretched power grids handle it, either.*

*Hydro-Québec recently said its distribution grid could accommodate a meagre 1,000 car plug-ins. In other provinces also, costly retooling of power generation, mainline transmission and local distribution grids would be required. Wind and solar generate less than 1% of Canada's power supply, and most provinces have subsidies aimed at increasing that portion. ...*

*"Are electric cars really 'green'? That depends on how the electricity is generated. Water generates most of the electricity in Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, Manitoba & B.C., while Alberta and Saskatchewan generate nearly all power from coal and natural gas. Overall, about 75% of Canada's electricity comes from water and nuclear power, and 25% from fossil fuels. When measured by fossil-fuel emissions, use of electric cars in Canada can generally be considered green. The situation is the reverse in the United States, where fossil fuels, mainly coal, generate 75% of electricity. So operating an electric car there would account for more fossil-fuel emissions than a conventional gasoline-powered vehicle ...*

*"Besides of their high price tag, limited range and the inconvenience of long charging cycles, there's another factor that even the greenest Canadians need to consider before buying an electric car: our northern climate. Anyone who has had trouble starting a car in cold weather knows that battery performance plummets with temperature. In our dark, cold winters, we also need battery power to heat the car and run headlights. The combined result is a much shorter driving range than they'll be touting in the electric-car showroom."*

**Ref: Gwyn Morgan, The Globe & Mail, 13/12/10**

➤ There will be responses to this article in #183

## And Also ... (Aviation 101)

*"The propeller is just a big fan in the front of the plane to keep the pilot cool. Want proof? Make it stop; then watch the pilot break out into a sweat."*

**Ref: [www.jokefile.co.uk/numerical\\_order/1087.html](http://www.jokefile.co.uk/numerical_order/1087.html)**

## Retrofitting Suburbia (Part 1)

*"In the last 50 years, we've been building the suburbs with a lot of unintended consequences. And I'm going to talk about some of those consequences and just present a whole bunch of really interesting projects that I think give us tremendous reasons to be really optimistic that the big design and development project of the next 50 years is going to be retrofitting suburbia. So whether it's redeveloping dying malls or re-inhabiting dead big-box stores or reconstructing wetlands out of parking lots, I think the fact is, the growing number of empty and under-performing, especially, retail sites throughout suburbia gives us actually a tremendous opportunity to take our least-sustainable landscapes right now and convert them into more sustainable places. And in the process, what that allows us to do is to redirect a lot more of our growth back into existing communities that could use a boost, and have the infrastructure in place, instead of continuing to tear down trees and to tear up the green space out at the edges.*

*"So why is this important? I think there are any number of reasons. ... Just from the perspective of climate change, the average urban dweller in the U.S. has about one-third the carbon footprint of the average suburban dweller, mostly because suburbanites drive a lot more, and living in detached buildings, you have that much more exterior surface to leak energy out of. So strictly from a climate change perspective, the cities are already relatively green. The big opportunity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is actually in urbanizing the suburbs. All that driving that we've been doing out in the suburbs, we have doubled the amount of miles we drive. It's increased our dependence on foreign oil despite the gains in fuel efficiency. We're just driving so much more, we haven't been able to keep up technologically.*

*"Public health is another reason to consider retrofitting. Researchers at the CDC [Centre for Disease Control] and other places have increasingly been linking suburban development patterns with sedentary lifestyles. And those have been linked then with the rather alarming growing rates of obesity, ... and that obesity has also been triggering great increases in heart disease and diabetes to the point where a child born today has a one-in-three chance of developing diabetes. And that rate has been escalating at the*



same rate as children not walking to school anymore, again, because of our development patterns. And then there's ... the affordability question. I mean, how affordable is it to continue to live in suburbia with rising [petrol] prices? Suburban expansion to cheap land, for the last 50 years – you know the cheap land out on the edge – has helped generations of families enjoy the American dream.

*"But increasingly, the savings promised by drive-til-you-qualify affordability – which is basically our model – those savings are wiped out when you consider the transportation costs. For instance, here in Atlanta, about half of households make between \$20,000 and \$50,000 a year. And they are spending 29% of their income on housing and 32% on transportation. I mean, that's 2005 figures. That's before we got up to the four bucks a gallon. You know, none of us really tend to do the math on our transportation costs. And they're not going down any time soon."*

*"Whether you love suburbia's leafy privacy or you hate its soulless commercial strips, there are reasons why it's important to retrofit. But is it practical? I think it is. June Williamson and I have been researching this topic for over a decade. And we've found over 80 varied projects. But that they're really all market driven. What's driving the market in particular – number one is major demographic shifts. We all tend to think of suburbia as this very family-focused place. But that's really not the case anymore. Since 2000, already two-thirds of households in suburbia did not have kids in them. We just haven't caught up with the realities of this. The reasons for this have a lot to do with the dominance of the two big demographic groups right now, the Baby Boomers retiring, and then there's a gap, Generation X, which is a small generation. They're still having kids. But Generation Y hasn't even started hitting child-rearing age. They're the other big generation."*

*"So as a result of that, demographers predict that through 2025, 75 to 85 percent of new households will not have kids in them. And the market research, consumer research, asking the Boomers and Gen Y what it is they would like, what they would like to live in, tells us there is going to be a huge demand – and we're already seeing it – for more urban lifestyles within suburbia. That basically the Boomers want to be able to age in place, and Gen Y would like to live an urban lifestyle, but most of their jobs will continue to be out in suburbia."* {Continued in #183}

**Ref: Ellen Dunham-Jones, Ted Talks, Jan 2010**

[www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/ellen\\_dunham\\_jones\\_retrofitting\\_suburbia.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/ellen_dunham_jones_retrofitting_suburbia.html)

## Segway PT

*"Not every gadget is destined for greatness, and for every runaway success ... there are dozens of failures and also-rans. Some are just too clever for their own good, while others arrive in the market a few months, years, or even decades before their time. ... This two-wheeled, self-balancing electric vehicle travels about 20 km/h, and its makers said it would change the world and revolutionise transportation. Although it has won a niche market in some regions, the company has weathered a merry-go-round of new chief executives and corporate strategies, which have all been unsuccessful at generating mass market appeal. The fact that they were expensive and initially banned for use on pavements were two big obstacles to overcome – but the killer blow was that people looked rather silly when they were riding them."*

**Ref: Louisa Hearn, The Age, 8/12/10**

*"I think the killer blow with the Segway was when the inventor killed himself when riding one."*

**Ref: Reader's Comment, The Age, 8/12/10**

## And Also ... (More on Street Parties)

*"The government as a special bonus, are going to throw a street party for all the unemployed all over England – they're going to hold it up the M1."*

**Ref: The Two Ronnies, BBC, c1980**



## Australian Biofuel Tax Plan

*"The [Australian] Federal Government's plans to phase in an excise on locally produced ethanol - and cut the excise on imported product - have outraged the local biofuels industry and forced Queensland to postpone its moves to make motorists use the plant-based fuel additive. The issue isn't even on the agenda in Victoria and South Australia, leaving NSW as the only state to mandate that petrol blended with 10% ethanol be sold at service stations. And even NSW has scaled back - legislation to increase the amount of E10 sold from 4% to 6% of total petrol volumes by next month has been deferred, as was the plan to replace regular unleaded entirely with E10 from July. The NSW Government cited the federal plan to cut the excise on imported ethanol from 38 cents a litre to 25 cents in July as a reason for the delay."*

**Ref: Craig Duff, Herald Sun, 10/12/10**

## Canada's Commitment to Biofuels

*"Federal regulations requiring 5% renewable fuel content in gasoline came into effect today [which] is estimated to result in a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of one megatonne per year over and above the reductions attributable to existing provincial requirements - the equivalent of taking a quarter million vehicles off the road. ... 'Biofuels can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollutants while sustaining economic growth and development', said Christian Paradis, Minister of Natural Resources. '... [and] create jobs and help stimulate our economy'."*

**Ref: Canada NewsWire, Digital Journal, 15/12/10**

## Miscanthus

*"Miscanthus is large grass (3.5 - 4m tall) that originates from Japan and South-East Asia and has C4 photosynthesis, making it more efficient at capturing the sun's energy than most plants. The variety that is used predominantly in production of energy internationally is a sterile triploid hybrid known as Miscanthus x giganteus or MxG for short. This plant has been trialled throughout Europe from ... southern Sweden down to Portugal and Italy and Greece and has excelled on all sites. It is also being very successfully trialled throughout the USA. It is naturally a tropical plant, but can tolerate very cold conditions and during winter when it is senescent, it can handle snow and soil temperatures down to - 3.4°C. MxG is a perennial grass so once it is established it can be harvested annually - during the winter - when it is senescent when its moisture content tends to be low. It re-grows from rhizomes - storage organs - that are in the ground. MxG has not been known to become weed on any site where it has been trialled or where it is used commercially."*

*"Its main current use is as a bioenergy fuel for thermal generation of power. However it also can be used to make ethanol and a lot of work is being done recently using gasification technology to make biodiesel from it. In addition it makes excellent paper. ... MxG requires very little in the way of fertiliser because of its ability to translocate the nutrients from the leaves down to the rhizomes prior to becoming senescent - and hence prior to harvest. It requires a rainfall level of at least 600 mm per year and it is ideal if most of this falls during the growing season. MxG is very resistant to insects and fungi and there are only two viruses known to affect it at all, neither of which has caused significant damage anywhere that MxG has been grown."*

**Ref: Onevision** More Information:

[http://www.google.co.nz/#q=Utube+Miscanthus+heaton&hl=en&biw=1203&bih=549&prmd=v&source=univ&tbs=vid:1&tbo=u&ei=G9emTJ66FYaOvQOqhnyDA&sa=X&oi=video\\_result\\_group&ct=title&resnum=3&ved=0CCkQqwQwAg&fp=1&cad=b](http://www.google.co.nz/#q=Utube+Miscanthus+heaton&hl=en&biw=1203&bih=549&prmd=v&source=univ&tbs=vid:1&tbo=u&ei=G9emTJ66FYaOvQOqhnyDA&sa=X&oi=video_result_group&ct=title&resnum=3&ved=0CCkQqwQwAg&fp=1&cad=b)

## Economics of High Speed Rail

*"In the 21st century, promoted by sustainability requirements and congestion of highways and skyways, which further suffer from terrorism threats and security costs, high speed rail (HSR) systems are increasingly attracting the attention of transport planners and policy makers. Following the examples of Japan and some European countries like France, Germany, and Spain, which have started to develop HSR in second half of the 20th century, various countries all over the world plan to develop their own HSR networks."*

*"In the US, the Acela Express along the Northeast Corridor is first evidence for the raise in significance of HSR, although these trains only facilitate an average speed of 240 km/h, a velocity that is relatively*

modest compared to European and Japanese systems. This line, however, is only the first step to the development of a true inter-city HSR network across the US, including completely new rail lines that feature velocities of possibly up to 400km/h which has recently been announced in a strategic plan (US Department Of Transportation, 2009). The plan already identifies US\$8 billion plus US\$1 billion a year for five years in the federal budget just to jumpstart the development of the system.

*"Besides the requirement of more energy efficient transport in order to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and oil dependency, the key argument in favour of HSR transport build on the idea that a faster connection between cities and regions will promote economic development. This is in line with the general theme emerging from spatial economics research, which predicts that more intense spatial interactions between economic agents drive internal returns and human capital spillovers and ultimately productivity through agglomeration economies. Evidence, however, on whether these expectations are met by the reality of existing HSR systems, is hardly available. ..."*

*"One of the empirical challenges in identifying the impact of HSR results from rail lines being usually endogenous to the economic geography. The strongest economic agglomerations are connected (first) as they naturally generate the largest demand. In other words, given that it is likely that those areas are connected by HSR that do or are expected to perform best, it is difficult to establish the counterfactual of what would have happened in the absence of a HSR line and to disentangle its effects from the natural growth path. Second, if the largest agglomerations are connected, the marginal impact on accessibility of a HSR line, due to large home-markets and competing transport modes, may be too small to trigger measurable effects."*

*"Ideally, we therefore want to investigate the impact of HSR on peripheral areas that do not experience a particular economic dynamic. These cases, however, are very difficult to find as the connection of such areas would naturally run counter to economic and financial viability. We find such a 'natural experiment' in the case of the new high speed rail track connecting the German cities Frankfurt and Cologne. The line is part of the Trans-European Networks and facilitates train velocities of up to 300 km/h. In the course of this new track travel time between both metropolises was reduced by more than 55% in comparison to the old track and by more than 35% in comparison to car travel. Most important, the small towns of Montabaur and Limburg became connected to the new line."*

*"The connection of these towns, which, arguably, represented peripheral locations, was the outcome of long and complex negotiations among authorities at the federal, state and municipality level, the rail carrier 'Deutsche Bahn' and various activists groups. The resulting track was finally considered the best compromise in light of cost, speed, environmental and network considerations on the one hand, and heavy lobbying pressures of the involved federal states to maximize the number of stations within their territories, on the other. As a consequence, Cologne and Frankfurt can now be approached by about 40 min train rides, making the location central with respect to two of the major regional economic agglomerations with a total population of approx. 15 million. Altogether, our natural experiment offers the joint advantage of providing exogenous variation in access to markets, which facilitates the isolation of treatment effects from correlated effects, and being man-made and reproducible and, thus, of direct policy relevance. Since the new track is exclusively used for passenger service it is further possible to disentangle effects from increased labour mobility and human capital and information spillovers from physical transport cost of tradable goods. Our results highlight the potential of HSR to promote economic growth and are supportive for economic geography theories more generally. We argue that as a straightforward application arising from these findings, an economic geography framework potentially can be employed in order to simulate effects of major transport projects as a basis for decision making."*

**Ref: Gabriel Ahlfeldt & Arne Feddersen, 'From Periphery to Core: Economic Adjustments to High Speed Rail', Sept 2010**

## The Art of Suburban Sprawl

*"Eye-catching and provocative aren't descriptions you'd readily associate with the architecture of America's sprawling suburbs. But seen from photographer Christoph Gielen's perspective, they are. 'Sprawl is a really careless use of new land. I want people who look at my photos to start a reconsideration of how they live through art', he said."*



*"Jeff Speck, principal of Washington, D.C.-based city planners Speck and Associates, says Gielen's images of sprawl in Nevada typify housing projects that have sprung up across America over the last 50 years. 'Some of manifests an actual concern about the quality of life within the community', Speck, who also serves on the Sustainability Task Force created in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, told CNN.*

*"Before taking to the air, Gielen researches potential subjects on the ground, sometimes posing as a prospective home buyer. As a resident of New York City, he finds visiting the suburbs 'disorientating' and somewhat at odds with the American spirit. 'It's so ironic because the United States touts itself as a place of limitless freedoms and the land of individuality and individual expression, but the lived experience is like a monoculture. It's weird. It's total sameness', the German-born photographer said.*

*"The issue surrounding America's sprawl is 'not a city versus suburb argument', said Speck. 'It's walkable urbanism versus drivable urbanism'. The driving culture isn't the only problem, according to Speck. 'It's the fact that we've allowed the presupposition of automobile ownership to determine the building blocks of our communities'. The car has become 'a prosthetic device', rather than the 'instrument of freedom' it once was, Speck, along with co-authors Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk and Andres Duany, argue in their best-selling book 'Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream'.*



Photo: Christoph Gielen  
See other photos via the link below

*"Continuing down this path is not only undesirable but totally unsustainable, Speck says, and is fuelling the crises of climate change and foreign oil dependence, as well as health problems, such as obesity and diabetes, in the United States. He would like to see more traditional forms of urbanism reinstalled*

*where mixed use and pedestrian-friendly areas are placed at the heart of urban planning from the beginning. 'Do everything you can to attract people back to the cities and take advantage of existing infrastructure and existing transit', Speck said. 'Urban centres have already demonstrated they have the lightest ecological footprint per citizen'. Successes are scattered everywhere, he says, singling out Portland, Oregon., for particular praise, while applauding the efforts of cities like Denver and Salt Lake City who are both investing in public transport. 'It's those places which are doing regional planning that have the strongest prospects for sustained success economically', he said."*

**Ref: Matthew Knight, CNN, 8/11/10**

<http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/americas/11/08/urban.sprawl.images.us/>

## And Also ... (Bored Brits)

*"More than 80% of British motorists who use a sat-nav have admitted to regularly pitting their wits against the device in order to reach their destination ahead of the time estimated by the sat-nav or to find a better route, reveals research by Manheim Auctions. Described as 'Route Racing', bored drivers who are already familiar with part or all of their route have resorted to playing games intended to out-think their sat-nav by getting from A to B faster than the satellite predicts. ... 'Route Racing represents the triumph of man over machine and a quicker, safer journey', said AA head of road safety Andrew Howard. 'Modern traffic information coupled with local knowledge means drivers can know things that the sat-nav doesn't – for instance, where the road works are, where congestion is likely to be, and take another route."*

**Ref: Traffic Technology Today, 8/9/10**