

Petrol Prices

"Seems that memories are rather short when it comes to [Australian] petrol prices. The peak petrol price was \$1.80/L in July 2008 when the dollar almost hit parity and oil rose to \$147/bbl. Today's price of \$1.42/L peak, \$1.28L discount is about right as there is a constant fuel tax in that that does not change. Oil is becoming more expensive due to the USA 'quantitative easing' like there's no tomorrow. Also, Australia is literally running out of oil. We were self sufficient in 2000, but now import 40% of our daily needs. In 2015 it is estimated we will need an extra \$15 billion a year of imported oil, blowing our current account deficit wide open. Who is going to export oil to us when other countries too are reaching their peak? ... The Australian government should be heavily promoting CNG (natural gas / methane) as an alternative to oil. We literally have no time to waste."

Ref: Reader's Comment, The Age, 19/1/11

"Australia will be exposed with its fleet of six cylinder cars averaging 10lt/100kms or higher. This is the next crisis facing our economy. Anybody that thinks petrol under \$2 per litre will last more than a few short years in kidding themselves. The inevitable oil shocks that will present themselves in these times will be far reaching and severe. Next time there's a supply constraint in the Middle East, look out for stockpiling and panic buying by China and the USA. When it costs the average Australian \$175 to fill their family sedan, fringe dwelling mortgage holders living 70+kms away from the CBD will pay for the failure of governments and planners to integrate infrastructure when the times were good."

Ref: Reader's Comment, The Age, 19/1/11

"We will now have a conga line of big car & SUV owners whining. Did they ever pause to think?"

Ref: Reader's Comment, The Age, 19/1/11

"Customer: *I'm always slightly confused about which type of petrol to use? 'Normal' unleaded (91 or 95) or premium fuel such as Shell's V-Power?*

"Flexicar: *Premium fuel is about octane rating, which is the measurement of the fuel to resist 'engine knocking'. It is by far the most pricey type of fuel, and is intended to increase the performance of your engine. Unless you are driving a high performance sports car ... using premium will make no noticeable difference."*

Ref: Flexicar Newsletter, 6/1/11

New York City Summer Streets

*"The New York City Summer Streets program is modelled on similar initiatives in cities around the world. In Bogotá, Colombia, the presumed birthplace of these types of car-free streets programs, 70 miles (113 kilometres) of street are closed to traffic every Sunday and on major holidays for a weekly event called *recro-vias*, which brings residents and visitors into the streets for fun and physical activity. In most places, this kind of program is part of a larger liveable streets movement that aims to make streets more welcoming to non-motorised transportation."*

"New York City began experimenting with a car-free streets program in August 2008. For three consecutive Saturdays, the city closed a 6.9-mile (11-kilometre) stretch of road from the Brooklyn Bridge to Central Park. The Summer Streets program continued in the summer of 2009 and 2010. The program encourages more sustainable forms of transportation such as biking and walking and free bike and roller skate rentals and helmet fittings are offered. The Summer Streets program also promotes recreation, health, and community involvement. Along with walking and biking, exercise and dance classes take place on the streets. The 2010 Summer Streets program featured temporary swimming pools for the community to use. New York City Department of Transport (NYC DOT) worked with the City of New York Police Department to ensure that the chosen route would have a minimal impact on traffic. The department marketed the program as a new way to enjoy the streets of New York, using the motto, 'Your city, your streets, your playground'."



The Big Apple

"An estimated 150,000 people enjoyed the three 2008 Summer Streets road closings. Positive feedback from users, area residents, and news media encouraged NYC DOT to host Summer Streets annually. In 2009, the NY Metro Chapter of the International Special Events Society recognized the success of Summer Streets with a Best Green Initiative award. The department partnered with business improvement districts and neighbourhood associations to host similar events in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island, and expanded the dates and locations in 2010."

Ref: Pedestrian & Bicycle Information Centre

<http://www.walkinginfo.org/library/details.cfm?id=4630>

Transforming Beijing

"Where Beijing's walls once stood, roads now encircle the city. One road was constructed, and then another as the population grew, and then more. Today, seven concentric highways loop the city of 10 million. Ask a Beijing resident where he lives, and you might hear: 'Somewhere between the sixth and seventh circular road'. 'Beijing is more modern than Paris', the city's then-mayor told me some years back. 'You have just one circular freeway. We have seven!' The roads are choked with nightmarish traffic (cars are no longer scarce in Beijing) under a hazily polluted sky."

Ref: Guy Sorman, Asian Megacities, Free and Unfree, How politics has shaped the growth of Shanghai, Beijing, and Seoul, City Journal, Vol 20, No 4, 17/12/10

"According to Singapore's Straits Times, Beijing's vice mayor in charge of traffic management has resigned and has been sent to the far-western region of Xinjiang as officials take drastic steps to ease chronic gridlock in the Chinese capital. Huang Wei's resignation and appointment as vice-chairman of Xinjiang were approved December 23, the official Xinhua news agency said – the same day that Beijing announced plans to slash the number of new cars in the city in 2011."

"Huang was appointed vice-mayor in 2008, but appears to have paid the price for soaring vehicle demand that has seen the number of passenger cars on the streets of Beijing explode by nearly 85% in the past five years. The number of registered cars in Beijing stood at 4.8 million on December 23, with 750,000 new cars hitting the already congested streets this year – an average of 2,000 every day – officials said."

That compares with a total of 2.6 million cars in 2005, state media said. Beijing's air is among the most polluted in the world and the problem is getting worse amid high demand for private vehicles from its increasingly affluent residents."

Ref: Traffic Technology Today, 27/12/10



Photo: Traffic Technology Today

"Beijing's attempts to curb congestion in the capital appear to have backfired, according to the China Youth Daily. The plan would see the municipal government take various measures in 2011, including limiting car purchases by placing restrictions on obtaining license plates and charging more fees for traffic congestion. Beijing started soliciting public opinions on the plan last Monday. However, the announcement of the plan created a rush to buy cars among city residents to reduce the increased cost of vehicle purchases or avoid restrictions on obtaining license plates. The increase of car purchases also pushed up car prices in the city. Auto dealers have cancelled all sales campaigns and raised car prices, while more than 400 dealerships are reported to have nearly have run out of stock. ... In the first week of December, 21,000 new cars were added to the roads of Beijing, a 100% increase over the amount added during the same period of 2009, according to the figures released by China's Association of Automobile Manufacturers."

Ref: Traffic Technology Today, 21/12/10

Fallout from Cancún

"Jack Short, Secretary General of the International Transport Forum, the transport think tank at the OECD in Paris, believes that the agreement reached in Cancún will not increase pressure on the transport sector to reduce its CO2 emissions. Transport is responsible for 23% of global CO2 emissions from fossil fuel combustion. ... 'This means that political pressure to reduce emissions in the transport sector will probably not increase over the next few years. In some cases it may indeed wane. In practice, carbon constraints will likely not become a defining factor for transport policy for several more years'."

Ref: Release, International Transport Forum, 14/12/10

Climate 2010

"2010 tied with 2005 as the warmest year of the global surface temperature record, beginning in 1880. This was the 34th consecutive year with global temperatures above the 20th century average."

Ref: National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, US Dept of Commerce, 12/1/11

www.noaa.gov/stories/2011/20110112_globalstats.html

Not-So-Grand Prix

"[Victorian] Premier Ted Baillieu has failed to rule out scrapping Melbourne's formula one grand prix when the contract expires in four years, after reports that it would cost the state \$70 million a year to underwrite by 2015. Melbourne lord mayor Robert Doyle yesterday called for Victoria to cut its losses and dump the grand prix because of rising costs and lack of local interest."

Ref: The Age, 24/1/10

Feedback on Sydney's Light Rail Plan

"I find it fascinating that the management of Randwick Racecourse are advocating {in #183} a light rail system. Up until February 1st 1960 they had one! Of course in those days they were called trams."

"My wife remarked only yesterday that getting back from the Melbourne Tennis centre is a breeze compared with Homebush in Sydney. The reason is Melbourne's very efficient tram system. Until such time as Australians get over their love affair with the car, regardless of the fuel that it uses, congestion in our cities will not improve. When I was young, my parents could not afford a car so we went everywhere by public transport. Guess what? I survived! Before I retired, I spent 25 years commuting by train to work. It took longer in some cases but boy was it cheaper and I read a lot of books."

Ref: Geoff Olsen, 18/1/11

Station – 1; Trains – 0

"Southeast Queensland's newest railway station won't have any train services when it opens to the public later this month, due to a track maintenance clash. Queensland Rail will officially open the \$40 million Richlands Station on Sunday, January 23, on the same weekend major upkeep is scheduled for the Ipswich Rosewood line. ..."

"Queensland Rail's executive general manager for corporate and external affairs, Martin Ryan, yesterday confirmed the open day would clash with the wider track maintenance. 'The train station, people will be able to go and have a look at it, but there won't be train services operating' ... The prospect of a train station with no running trains evokes memories of an episode from the satirical series 'Yes, Prime Minister', when character Jim Hacker tours a hospital with no patients. Mr Ryan said ... 'it would be nice to have trains operating'..."

Ref: Daniel Hurst, Brisbane Times, 6/1/11

The Cost of Obesity

"An estimated 60% of Australian men, 45% of women and one in four children are overweight or obese. The cost of obesity through lost productivity, premature death, disability and medical treatment, is more than \$58 billion a year."

Ref: Jill Stark, The Age, 2/1/11

Thailand Report (Part 2)

In the last edition I noted some systemic problems with car dependence in Bangkok, such as pollution and gridlock. These issues typically also apply to other cities in the region. The good news is that a series of strategies – *the Bangkok Declaration* (see below) – have been identified which if implemented will lead to more liveable and more sustainable cities. The problem is that in Thailand, there does not seem to be the political will to immediately implement all the recommendations. Meantime a growing middle class – growing in wealth – will parade their prosperity in the latest automobiles. One Bangkok billboard for an expensive car had the headline: ‘*You Deserve It*’.

The problems of gridlock may ultimately be solved by rapidly rising fuel prices. But this is a cure that could be worse than the symptoms and begs the question: ‘should we be squandering our precious fossil fuels?’ If the answer to this is no, then the solution lies in implementing the Bangkok principles and getting on with introducing the basics – and these apply to many cities around the world – including:

- Stop cars and other objects blocking footpaths, and encourage walking strategies;
- Control car parking;
- Introduce safe bike lanes;
- Introduce bus priority lanes;
- Manage tuk-tuks and taxis so that they are not excessively roaming without passengers;
- Establish rail-based modes of at-grade (street level) public transport (Light Trams, Trams, Light Rail) on the key spine routes.

The question is not: can we afford to implement these measures? But rather: can we afford not to implement them? When I was in Thailand in November last year the country was suffering a series of floods. The inference was that they were exacerbated by human activity: upstream land clearing and climate change.

It is worth noting that the costs for the initiatives in the dot points (above) should easily be recovered from increased productivity; from reduced congestion; savings in health costs caused by pollution from automobiles; savings in the need for road construction and road maintenance; savings in the cost of oil imports; savings from reduced crime by having better urban spaces; and income from increased tourism, again from have better urban spaces and sustainable transit systems.

{Cont. in #185}

Stephen Ingrouille, January 2011

☞ We are seeking feedback on this subject



Bangkok:

Pedestrian obstructions

Note the poles, posts and barriers (above and right)

Cars and a bus parked on the pedestrian crossing (below)

Alienated land under a freeway (bottom)

Photos: Nov 2010



Bangkok Declaration (Part 2)

– Sustainable Transport Goals for 2010-2020

"We, the participants of the Fifth Regional Environmentally Sustainable Transport (EST) Forum in Asia express our intent to voluntarily develop and realize integrated and sustainable transport policy options, programmes, and projects that will help realize the following EST goals and objectives by the year 2020 in the Asian region (EST 20):

I. Strategies to Avoid unnecessary travel and reduce trip distances

"Goal 1: Formally integrate land-use and transport planning processes and related institutional arrangements at the local, regional, and national levels;

"Goal 2: Achieve mixed-use development and medium-to-high densities along key corridors within cities through appropriate land - use policies and provide people - oriented local access, and actively promote transit-oriented development (TOD) when introducing new public transport infrastructure;

"Goal 3: Institute policies, programmes, and projects supporting Information and Communications Technologies (ICT), such as internet access, teleconferencing, and telecommuting, as a means to reduce unneeded travel;

II. Strategies to Shift towards more sustainable modes

"Goal 4: Require Non-Motorized Transport (NMT) components in transport master plans in all major cities and prioritize transport infra-structure investments to NMT, including wide-scale improvements to pedestrian and bicycle facilities, development of facilities for intermodal connectivity, and adoption of complete street design standards, wherever feasible;

"Goal 5: Improve public transport services including high quality and affordable services on dedicated infrastructure along major arterial corridors in the city and connect with feeder services into residential communities;

"Goal 6: Reduce the urban transport mode share of private motorized vehicles through Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures, including pricing measures that integrate congestion, safety, and pollution costs, aimed at gradually reducing price distortions that directly or indirectly encourage driving, motorization, and sprawl;

"Goal 7: Achieve significant shifts to more sustainable modes of inter-city passenger and goods transport, including priority for high-quality long distance bus, inland water transport, high-speed rail over car and air passenger travel, and priority for train and barge freight over truck and air freight by building supporting infrastructure such as dry inland ports;



Ferries – the fun, convenient and inexpensive way of moving around Bangkok. Just a matter of matching the flags on the boat with the flags (right) on the wharf



III. Strategies to Improve transport practices and technologies

"Goal 8: Diversify towards more sustainable transport fuels and technologies, including greater market penetration of options such as vehicles operating on electricity generated from renewable sources, hybrid technology, and natural gas;

"Goal 9: Set progressive, appropriate, and affordable standards for fuel quality, fuel efficiency, and tailpipe emissions for all vehicle types, including new and in-use vehicles;

"Goal 10: Establish effective vehicle testing and compliance regimes, including formal vehicle registration systems and appropriate periodic vehicle inspection and maintenance (I/M) requirements, with particular emphasis on commercial vehicles, to enforce progressive mission and safety standards, resulting in older polluting commercial vehicles being gradually phased-out from the vehicle fleet, as well as testing and compliance regimes for vessels;

"Goal 11: Adopt Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS), such as electronic fare and road user charging systems, transport control centres, and real-time user information, when applicable;

"Goal 12: Achieve improved freight transport efficiency, including road, rail, air, and water, through policies, programmes, and projects that modernize the freight vehicle technology, implement fleet control and management systems, and support better logistics and supply chain management;"

{Continued in #185}

Ref: www.itdp.org/documents/Final_Bangkok-Declaration_25ug2010_rev.pdf

Evolution of a Park (Part 3)



The expanded park at Albert Park, with the plants starting to grow. 'Inviting' places – without heavy traffic – encourage walking and cycling. Photos: November 2008

Retrofitting Suburbia (Part 3)

"This was a very large mall on a hundred-acre superblock. It's now 22 walkable urban blocks with public streets, two public parks, eight bus lines and a range of housing types. And so it's really given Lakewood, Colorado the downtown that this particular suburb never had. Here was the mall in its heyday. They had their prom in the mall. They loved their mall. So here's the site in 1975 with the mall. By 1995, the mall has died. The department store has been kept. And we found this was true in many cases. The department stores are multi-story; they're better built. They're easy to be re-adapted. But the one storey stuff ... that's really history.

"So here it is at projected build out. This project, I think, has great connectivity to the existing neighbourhoods. It's providing 1,500 households with the option of a more urban lifestyle. It's about two-thirds built out right now. Here's what the new main street looks like. It's very successful. And it's helped to prompt – eight of the 13 regional malls in Denver have now, or announced plans to, be retrofitted. But it's important to note that all of this retrofitting is not occurring – just bulldozers are coming and just ploughing down the whole city. No, it's pockets of walkability on the sites of under-performing properties. And so it's giving people more choices. But it's not taking away choices.

"But it's also not really enough to just create pockets of walkability. You want to also try to get more systemic transformation. We need to also retrofit the corridors themselves. So this is one that has been retrofitted in California. They took the commercial strip ... and they built a boulevard that has become the Main Street for their town. And it transformed from being an ugly, unsafe, undesirable address, to becoming a beautiful, attractive, dignified sort of good address. I mean now we're hoping we start to see it – They've already built city hall, attracted two hotels. I could imagine beautiful housing going up along there without tearing down another tree. So there are a lot of great things. But I'd love to see more corridors getting retrofitting. But densification is not going to work everywhere. Sometimes re-greening is really the better answer.

"There's a lot to learn from successful land-banking programs in cities like Flint, Michigan. There's also a burgeoning suburban farming movement – sort of victory gardens meets the internet. But perhaps one of the most important re-greening aspects is the opportunity to restore the local ecology, as in this example outside of Minneapolis. When the shopping centre died, the city restored the site's original wetlands, creating lakefront property which then attracted private investment, the first private investment to this very low-income neighbourhood in over 40 years. So they've managed to both restore the local ecology and the local economy at the same time. This is another re-greening example. It also makes sense in very strong markets. This one in Seattle is on the site of a mall parking lot adjacent to a new transit stop. And the wavy line is a path alongside a creek that has now been day-lit. The creek had been culverted under the parking lot. But day-lighting our creeks really improves their water quality and contributions to habitat." {Continued in #185}

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

www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/ellen_dunham_jones_retrofitting_suburbia.html

Satellites and Road Safety

"Ian Townsend: Like never before, the world's economy has embraced satellites, especially the incredibly useful GPS navigation satellites. ... In New South Wales, for instance, the Roads and Traffic Authority is testing a safety device, said to be the biggest thing since seatbelts. It's called 'intelligent speed adaptation', and it's getting drivers to stick to the speed limit and slow down in school zones. ...

"John Wall: We can use GPS to make what is unpredictable today on the road, predictable tomorrow. I guess one of the applications would be dedicated short range communications. This is where cars are actually talking to each other and telling each other where they are on the network. So if you've got a vehicle for example, travelling along a road 90-degrees to you and you're coming up to a rural intersection, this system would actually tell you that there's a car about to enter that intersection way before you could see it and way before any of the new technologies like radar and things that are mounted on some of the high-end vehicles could detect that car. If it detected that that vehicle wasn't going to stop, it would then warn you that that vehicle's likely to collide with you and in the future I can imagine automatic systems actually taking over, then braking you, if you didn't react to that advice quick enough. ...

"Ian Townsend: 'Intelligent speed adaptation technology'. It uses satellites to remind drivers what the speed limit is on a stretch of road. ...

"John Wall: Well essentially it looks very much like your satellite navigation system that you've got, so it's just a small mobile phone sized device that's fixed to the vehicle. It has a display on it, so people can look down and they can actually see the speed limit of the road at any time that they're driving on the network. If they can't see a sign for example, they can look down on their device and the speed limit will be displayed. It only really starts to warn you if you start to go over the speed limit, but it will tell you when you change speed zones, and important, one of the features that we had built into this system was to make sure that it let people know when they were in a school zone as well.

"Ian Townsend: It shows you the speed limit and beeps annoyingly when you exceed it. These devices can also slow the car down automatically. Others, guided by satellite, won't even let you drive faster than the speed limit. There's been a trial in Japan between a phone company and a car maker of a device that warns drivers if a pedestrian's about to jump out in front of them. Already fitted in some cars are devices that tell emergency services if the car has crashed.

"John Wall: What we call 'eCall' is an important function that GPS can play in saving lives and we already see that here in Australia to a very limited amount. But over in the US, the OnStar project from General Motors is something that is doing that today, where if a vehicle was involved in a collision, it would automatically call police, medical and rescue services to let them know that there's been a crash. It can even tell operators how many airbags have gone off in the vehicle and the likely severity of injuries of patients as well."

Ref: Space Rules the World, Background Briefing, ABC Radio National, 26/12/10

www.abc.net.au/rn/backgroundbriefing/stories/2010/3082690.htm