

## Congestion Tax for Melbourne?

*"The God in Australia, of course, is the motor car; it is worshipped by every government, and no government in the past, now, or in the future would break the commandment. ... It is hard to think of any government in Victoria that did anything serious about giving us more railway lines. Former premier Sir Henry Bolte could have been the worst: he loved tearing up railway lines. They have all been car worshippers, every last man and woman, Jack and Jill of them.*

*"Now I am going to suggest a fearful heresy, which will cause great wailing and gnashing of teeth. We need a congestion tax. You know what it is like driving in peak hour to the city – and peak hour is almost every hour. The average speed of travel in your motor cars, which will do up to 200 km/h, is under 20 km/h. You can do it much faster on a bike. Cities using or having used a congestion tax are London, Singapore, Rome, Stockholm and Milan. San Francisco has decided to give it a go in 2015. The top enthusiasts are London and Stockholm. At first, the protests were huge. Businesses in the CBD would all go broke. It was hideously unfair on low-income people and getting to town by car was absolutely a life-and-death matter.*

*"The businesses didn't go broke, thousands of people found that trips to town often weren't necessary and rarely was it a life-and-death matter, anyway. In London, city residents get a 90% discount. It doesn't apply to bicycles, motor cycles or electric vehicles. It operates from 7am to 6pm, Monday to Friday, and not on public holidays. The tax works on a number plate recognition system. Last financial year, it raised £148 million (\$A236.4 million) and all that went to improve public transport. Bus passengers rose by 6%.*

*"The big lesson was this: the more the congestion of motor cars, the more motorists tax each other. Just consider how much petrol you waste, sitting there fuming behind 200 cars, engines running and not moving. Blind Freddy can see that if we don't free up the traffic in Melbourne, this city will choke and the main thoroughfares, stacked with cars, will seem like parking lots. Bicycle Victoria reports that there has been a big increase in the number of commuter cyclists and that they now make up 10% of the traffic heading into the city at peak hour. It says everyone who pedals into the city is doing motorists a favour and that if pedal traffic rose to 30% Melbourne's traffic problems would be solved. ...*

*"Here is one argument against a congestion tax, put up by Deputy Premier Peter Ryan: public transport could not cope with the surge of passengers resulting from a congestion tax. For heaven's sake, if you accept such a do-nothing argument, you might as well let the God Motor Car take over everything. That has been the trouble all along – too hard, too difficult. The real reason? You can't do anything that will check the Great God Car. It has too many votes in it. But I hope our new state government will see reason and take the plunge on a congestion tax. By the time the next election comes around, we will all be thanking [Victorian premier] Ted Baillieu if he does."*

**Ref: Keith Dunstan, The Age, 27/1/11**

*"So we need to start by reducing speed limits to 30 km/h in the City centre. The success of this initiative when combined with a congestion charge will quickly fan out to the suburbs. The 30km speed limit would also ensure traffic flows better, as people's propensity to speed up whenever they see 20 metres of clear space in front of them would be removed."*

*"Why are 'electric vehicles' exempt from London's congestion tax? Does this include hybrid's? Don't these vehicles occupy as much physical space as a petrol vehicle, thereby contributing equally to traffic congestion?"*

*"I note the Age has opinion pieces like this every few months, yet every single week it has big glossy sections on Cars! and Driving! I don't think anything is really going to change unless some proper leadership is shown on this issue by politicians, business, media and so on. I think that Melburnians, unfortunately, are going to get the future city that they deserve."*

**Ref: Readers' Comments, The Age, 27/1/11**

## 'Give Way to the Fish'

Headline in The Age (18/1/11) on fish swimming along roads during floods in Australia.

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*"The [Qld] government's ambitious cross-river rail project, designed to deal with capacity constraints on the southeast Queensland railway network, is one of the main victims of the flood costs. The \$7.7 billion project, which was to include a new underground railway station on Albert Street, was due to begin construction in 2013 but the start date has now been pushed back to at least 2015."*

**Ref: Daniel Hurst, Brisbane Times, 28/1/11**

*"The [Vic] Department of Transport has already signed \$107 million in contracts with consultants to design the [western Regional Rail Link] project."*

**Ref: Clay Lucas, The Age, 4/2/11**

> Can anyone provide a cost breakdown that justifies \$107 million for this design?

## Grand Prix Fight Back

*"Formula One kingpin Bernie Ecclestone has called Melbourne Lord Mayor Robert Doyle's bluff, saying he'd be happy to discuss cancelling the city's Grand Prix contract. Mr Ecclestone hit back at Cr Doyle, who earlier this week said the race was costing the city too much money. The billionaire tycoon told radio 3AW the future of the race in Melbourne was not assured. ... He was adamant that his own personal fee would not be reduced to cut the cost of the race and said 'quite a few countries' would be happy to take the race off Australia's hands."*

**Ref: Mex Cooper, The Age, 28/1/11**



Year 2020 Sportscar (max 15 kph)

*"Formula one supremo Bernie Ecclestone will take home a record fee from Victoria for the Australian Grand Prix. .... The Age can reveal that this year [2009] Victorian taxpayers will part with \$47 million, simply for the privilege of hosting his car race. Formula one is the platform on which Mr Ecclestone has built his personal fortune, recently estimated at \$5.2 billion."*

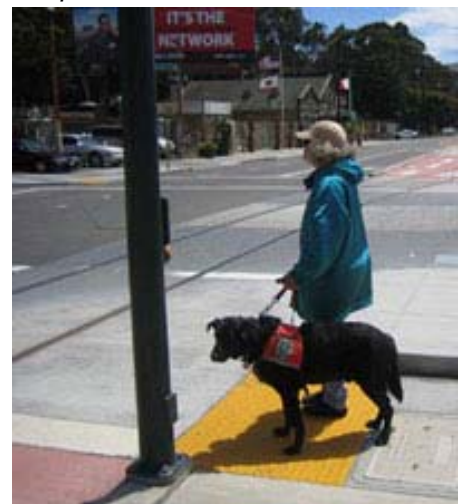
**Ref: Ben Doherty, The Age, 14/3/09**

## Silent Killers

*"The USA's National Federation of the Blind (NFB) has commended President Barack Obama for signing into law the Pedestrian Safety Enhancement Act (S. 841), which will protect the blind and other pedestrians from injury as a result of silent vehicle technology. As blind pedestrians cannot locate and evaluate traffic using their vision, they must listen to traffic to discern its speed, direction and other attributes, in order to travel safely and independently. Other people – including pedestrians who are not blind, bicyclists, runners, and small children – also benefit from hearing the sound of vehicle engines. New vehicles that employ hybrid or electric engine technology can be silent, rendering them potentially dangerous in situations where vehicles and pedestrians come into proximity with each other."*

*"President of the NFB, Dr Marc Maurer, said, 'The National Federation of the Blind is pleased that this critical legislation has been signed into law, preserving the right to safe and independent travel for the blind. The blind, like all pedestrians, must be able to travel to work, to school, to church, and to other places in our communities, and we must be able to hear vehicles in order to do so. This law – which is the result of collaboration among blind Americans, automobile manufacturers and legislators – will benefit all pedestrians for generations to come, as new vehicle technologies become more prevalent'."*

**Ref: Traffic Technology Today, 6/1/11**



**Car Sales Increase**

*"Electric cars made their debut on the Australian sales charts in 2010, in a year when the motor industry enjoyed its second-highest number of sales on record. Last year 112 electric i-MiEVs hit the road, a tiny Mitsubishi city car that runs solely on electricity and plugs in to a 15-amp power point to recharge. ... Following a 2009 result weakened by the global financial crisis, last year the new vehicles market grew by 10.5% to 1,035,574 sales, second only to 2007's tally of 1.049 million. ... Vehicles built in Korea and Thailand each outsold local cars (about 163,000 and 165,000 respectively, versus 146,000), while Japanese models accounted for almost 357,000 sales. ... Worryingly for local car makers, the market for large cars under \$70,000 shrank 3.9% to 93,603, nearly 4000 fewer than a year ago."*

**Ref: Andrew Heasley, The Age, 7/1/11**

*"Electric car pioneer Shai Agassi is a man with a startling prediction: Before 2020, he says, more people everywhere will be buying electric cars than those powered by gasoline. ... 'From 2000 to 2010, China added 120 million [gasoline] cars on the road (and) next year, 25 to 30 million', Agassi said. 'It's no longer the U.S. that sets the price (of oil). Now it's a question of how many cars were added in China, how many were added in Brazil, how many were added in India'."*

**Ref: Dan Perry, AP, The Age, 28/1/11**

**And Also ...**

*"A fellow drove a new electric car from New York to Los Angeles, and used only \$3.12 worth of electricity. The drawback, however, is that the extension cord cost \$19,678."*

**Ref: Clown Ministry.com**

**Going Car-Free**

*"As a nation, we Australians are well and truly hooked on our cars, trucks and motorbikes. While most of us aren't revheads, shining the duco or detailing the interior, we do have a love affair with using our vehicles. Only 20% of Australians are regular car free commuters, with 14% taking public transport, 4 % walking and 2% cycling to the office on a regular basis. What's true for adults is also true for our children. Even the time-honoured tradition of walking to school is losing ground to the drop-off. Back in 1971, three in every five kids aged 5-9 years in Sydney walked to school, according to the NSW Department of Planning Household Travel Surveys. By the turn of this century, it was down to just over a quarter of the cohort."*

*"What caused this car-dependence, and this decline in foot-slogging? There are some familiar reasons. The size and distribution of households and work in Australia, the unpopular nature of public transport, and the individual freedom that comes with car ownership. Time, work and family pressures add to this, making walking unthinkable. Foot power seems like a luxury when you're pressed for time and live a long way from your work or school."*

*"But driving also comes at a price for us and the kids. (And I don't just mean the scary cost of petrol, insurance and parking fines.) First, driving can be stressful and distracting, leaving us depleted and lethargic. When we drive every day we also lose opportunities for exercise. A brisk half hour walk will burn fat and help soothe sedentary bodies. The half hour we gain by driving is instead transferred to time in the gym instead, if we make it there at all. This is also true for children. A recent study by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) found that children who walk to school are more physically active than their peers who are driven."*

*"Making the time to walk correlates with a fitter lifestyle. Second, it disconnects us from our surroundings. Travelling on foot is an opportunity to physically and emotionally engage with our neighbourhoods. When we walk around the local streets, we come to know the place, its landmarks and people. This is evident in the drawings of children who walk to school compared to those who're driven. According to the ACER study, children passengers draw 'abstract isolated images' with the road and the car as the central subject. In contrast, those who walk draw richly detailed pictures of parks, trees, flowers and people playing, walking, riding. The long walk home is a time of discovery. ..."*

*"This month marks my family's ninth month of pedestrian travel. What began as a tentative experiment has become a fully-fledged commitment. Of course, it has meant modifications in how we live, when we*



*work, the things we do, and how often. We leave earlier to factor in walking time, we have a daggy shopping jeep for groceries, and we don't spend an awful lot of time at distant shopping megaplexes. We do less that requires travel. By contrast, friends who drive try to pack a lot into a day as they flit around the city. Still, it's been a boon. We know our local shopkeepers better, we've embraced the public transport on offer, and we're more creative about our shopping needs ... We're not quite ready to ditch our car completely. We've used it six times this year, for things like a late night doctor's visit for a toddler with a flaming ear infection. For the rest of the time, walking supplemented with public transport has more than sufficed.*

*"Sure, some days I want to be part of the Australian motoring majority. On these days, when the rain is coming down hard or there is a black cloud on the horizon, I want to be in a new, shiny, climate-controlled, ultra-safe, Scandinavian vehicle. But this fantasy of the quick straight road lacks the hidden healthy richness of a walking life. Of the long stroll home, with chatting children, interesting detours and familiar faces. Of discovering, up close and personal, our neighbourhood, our fitness, and one another."*

**Ref: Ruth Quibell, The Drum, ABC, 22/9/10**

*"Ditch the car and use a short term car hire (like Flexicar but there are many others). ...If you only drive a few hours a week its way cheaper than owning the sucker."*

*"I sold my car to a wrecker twelve months ago. What a joy it is to not pay for petrol, insurance, registration, road tax, pink slip, oil, spark plugs, bits, bits and more bits. The money has been going into the share market. Wow! What a difference it has made to my life. I live close to public transport."*

*"One thing that would make us far less dependent on the ownership of a motor vehicle would be to legislate that employers pay for employees travel time. In no time we would find that we all either lived within walking distance from work, or [that good public transport would be available]."*

*"And won't there be some amazing skateboard areas that used to be called freeways."*

**Ref: Readers' Comments, The Drum, ABC, 23/9/10**

## More on the Missing Thai Woman

*"A woman who boarded the wrong bus on an attempted shopping trip from Thailand to Malaysia has returned home after 25 years. Jaeyana Beuraheng ... who speaks only the Yawi dialect used by Muslims in southern Thailand, said the noise and traffic of the big city confused and disoriented her, leading her to board the second wrong bus to Chiang Mai, near the border with Burma. The woman said she spent five years begging on the street in the city and was often mistaken for a member of a hill tribe because of her dark skin tone. She was arrested in 1987 on suspicion of being an illegal immigrant and was sent to a social services hostel when authorities were unable to determine her origins. However, last month, three students from her home village arrived at the hostel for training, and they were able to communicate with Beuraheng and help her find her way home."*

**Ref: Breitbart, 7/2/07**

## Thailand Report (Part 4)

The Bangkok Declaration (see below) is an excellent blueprint for more sustainable cities in Asia. Here continues comment on some of the transport modes in Thailand.

**Intercity Trains** are reasonable, both in service quality and value, in spite of being disrupted in times of flood. Longer journeys overnight by sleeper car (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> class) are comfortable, and are perhaps a preferable alternative to flying. Thailand has the backbone of good rail system which could be augmented as they seek to improve sustainable modes of transport.



**The pleasant railway station at Chiang Mai, in Northern Thailand.** Photo: October 2010

**Intercity Buses** on the other hand are some-thing to be tolerated rather than enjoyed. They tend to be modern, & 'decorated' both inside and out in a style peculiar to Thailand. Bangkok has three main intercity bus terminals – Northern, Southern and Eastern – located away from the city centre and not necessarily easy to access. Likewise, the bus terminals in the regional cities are not typically well located or connected to other transit. For example the bus station at Krabi (in southern Thailand) is away from the city centre and the government bus does not connect to the train station – apart from a half hour tuk-tuk ride – at Surat Thani on the other side of the southern peninsula. Most tourists, I suspect, use private buses, and the large coaches distribute passengers reasonably efficiently around the country through a network of regional terminals and mini-buses.



**The Northern Bus Terminal in Bangkok, Thailand.** Photo: October 2010



**Toilet on a government intercity bus – not exactly wheelchair accessible!** Photo: Nov 2010

**Local Buses** in Bangkok have relatively low cost fares, but tend to be an aging fleet fuelled by dirty and noisy diesel engines, which as previously discussed, add to, and become trapped in, Bangkok's notorious traffic jams. Buses don't always pull over to the side of the road but sometimes disgorge and accept passengers three or four lanes away from the gutter. {Continued in #187}

**Ref: Stephen Ingrouille, 7/2/11**

## Bangkok Declaration (Part 4)

### – Sustainable Transport Goals for 2010-2020

*"The Asian - Pacific transport sector plays a central role in achieving the region's objectives for sustainable development. Successful adoption of the Bangkok Declaration is a clear sign of the renewed interest and commitment of Asian countries towards working for a promising decade of sustainable actions and measures for achieving safe, secure, affordable and efficient, people and environment friendly transport in rapidly urbanizing Asia. 'Currently, 1.6 billion people, or 40% of Asians, live in urban areas and by 2030, the majority (about 2.7 billion) will live in cities and towns with a phenomenal increase in demand for urban transport. The Bangkok Declaration comes at the right juncture, and it is a historic moment for the Asian Environmentally Sustainable Transport (EST) Initiative', said Kazunobu Onogawa, Director of the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD).*

*"Urban transport represents one of the fastest growing sources of greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global climate change. Transport - related carbon dioxide emissions are expected to increase 57% worldwide during the period 2005 - 2030. Any serious effort to mitigate GHG emissions will have to address the transport sector and, in particular, measures to reduce the increase in private motorized vehicles. The benefits from improved transport have mainly affected populations in coastal areas in Asia. The lack of adequate transport services in rural areas negatively affects rural economic development and has often led to greater migration to cities. There remains a need for a substantial transport task in order to reach large populations in deeper remote and rural areas as well as landlocked countries to encourage inclusive prosperity.*



*"Basic transport infrastructure facilities and services are still lacking or inadequate in many developing countries (both in urban and rural areas) across the world, making it difficult for the poor, including women, youth, and children, to access basic services, including those related to health and education facilities, and for workers to have access to jobs. And rural areas lack adequate rural transport infrastructure which perpetuates poverty, and poses constraints on the marketing of agricultural produce and other income - generating opportunities, thus hampering efforts to achieve the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals. ...*

*"More than half of the world's traffic fatalities occur in Asia, even though only one in five of the world's motor vehicles are registered there. Most of such fatalities are related to vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, children, and cyclists, due to poorly designed streets that lack the necessary safety infrastructure such as exclusive pedestrian and bicycle lanes, safe street crossings, and curb ramps for the disabled. 'The provision of quality transport services is intimately linked to economic performance and social equity. Asian countries need strong political will to support a socially sustainable transport system that includes investments to particularly support the barrier free mobility and access needs of society's most vulnerable groups, including low - income families, women, the elderly, and persons with physical disabilities. Road safety needs to be a primary guiding principle for transport planning and development', said Saugata Roy, Minister of Urban Development, India ...*



**Cross-River Ferry in Bangkok**  
Photo: November 2010

*"Environmentally sustainable transport represents a paradigm shift away from existing policies and practices that have placed private motorized vehicles ahead of people. UNCRD has sought to define EST as an alternative to uncontrolled motorization and its related problems and as a complementary package of public transport, quality footpaths and cycle ways, vehicle control measures, clean fuels, and road safety programs along with a set of technologies and practices that encompasses international best practices in accessibility, mobility, affordability, fuel economy and safety. 'Asian nations and cities can no longer afford to bypass the path of EST that offers great opportunity for co-benefits, including the reduction of GHG emissions, reduction of deaths and injuries from road accidents, and reduction of economic losses due to traffic congestions. There is a need for Asian cities to promote concerted efforts towards achieving efficient public transportation system such as BRT and MRT to meet the growing demand for mobility', said Suwit Khunkitti, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand."*

{Continued in #187}

**Ref: Press Release, Bangkok Declaration, 24/8/10**

## UK Suspends M4 Bus Lane (Part 1)

*"UK transport secretary, Philip Hammond, has announced that motorists and hauliers are to benefit from an extra lane on a key stretch of the M4 motorway near London. This will be achieved by suspending the M4 Bus Lane and opening it to all motorists travelling towards the capital; not just the licensed black taxis, motorcycles and buses, which are currently the only vehicles allowed to use it. The suspension has been ordered after the latest analysis showed that journey times at peak periods would be reduced for car drivers and hauliers, without significantly affecting vehicles currently allowed to use the lane. The suspension will begin before Christmas [2010] and will remain in place until June 2012, when the lane becomes part of the Olympic Route Network for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. After this the intention is to remove it permanently. The M4 Bus Lane runs eastbound, on a three lane section of motorway, towards London for 5.6km (3.5 miles), between junction 3 at Heathrow Airport and 2 at Kew.*

*"From November 8, 2010 work will take place to suspend the bus lane, including the removal of signs and road markings and introduction of a revised road layout, which is expected to be fully open to all road users from December 24. Hammond says, 'I want to keep traffic moving and improve journey time reliability, through making the most of our existing roads. The M4 is a vital strategic route and therefore it is important that we do everything possible to reduce congestion on it. Once the Olympics are over my intention is to scrap the bus lane permanently, as I believe excluding road users in this way is unfair and damaging to the economy'. England's Highways Agency will monitor the suspension over the next 18 months and the traffic data gathered will be used to inform the Govt's final decision about the future of the bus lane."*

**Ref: Traffic Technology Today, 11/10/10**

*"Seven FOI [Freedom of Information] requests were received by agencies on the 2 October 2010 following the announcement that the lane was to be removed. ... On the same day a request was sent to the Department for Transport requesting details of data held & correspondence relating to the bus lane. No response had been received by 13 November 2010. A request was also sent to the Transport for London. They responded saying that they had not been part of any discussion. Similarly Hillingdon Borough Council, Ealing Borough Council, and Hounslow Borough Council responded saying that they had not been part of any discussion. A request was sent to the Prime Minister's Office on 13 October 2010 requesting details of consultation regarding the removal of the M4 Bus Lane. No response had been received by 13 November 2010."*



Photo: Traffic Technology Today

*"The lane has been controversial since it was first introduced. In 2001 the Automobile Association suggested that it could only be deemed a success if 'significant numbers of drivers switched from their cars to public transport' and Jeremy Clarkson of Top Gear said he would 'vote for anyone who promised to tear up that stupid pinko bus lane'. In 2009 the Automobile Association described it as an underused 'white elephant'. When announcing the suspension of the scheme in 2010 Philip Hammond said that 'Nothing is more symbolic of Labour's war on the motorist', the RAC Foundation supported the move with director Stephen Glaister commenting that 'Most drivers on the M4 will wonder why this decision has taken so long'. The Sun described the bus lane as 'insane'. An FOI request in 2009 revealed that the bus lane was barely enforced, with only 20 fixed penalty notices being issued ... and that private drivers able to get away with regularly driving in it."*

**Ref: Wikipedia, 17/11/10** [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M4\\_bus\\_lane](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M4_bus_lane)

*"We have to get over the idea that this is about a bus lane. It's not. It's a clever piece of engineering designed to mitigate the congestion caused by drivers merging at Chiswick, which, as an afterthought, was made into a bus lane. And there's a saving of six minutes to car drivers by having the lane [and as a bonus] your hard-working motorist is getting an extra six minutes lie-in every morning."*

**Ref: Richard George, The Independent, 16/11/10**

*"The best option for motorists was to remove the 3rd lane completely, removing the friction caused by the merge and having two lanes straight through. The best option for anyone interested in weaning people off the use of private cars to enter the most congested city in the country was retaining the bus lane for buses, increasing the reliability of public transport at the expense of a barely noticeable reduction in journey time for private cars."*

**Ref: Boris Watch, The Independent, 16/11/10**