

End of the American Love Affair?

"America's love affair with the automobile could be sputtering to an end. About 14 million cars were taken out of action last year, 4 million more than rolled off the assembly lines and onto the roads, a report from the Earth Policy Institute said. It was the first time since World War II that more cars were scrapped than sold, reducing the size of the US car fleet from a high of 250 million to 246 million. Last year was an extraordinarily bad year for the US industry. Two of the three big car makers, GM and Chrysler, went through bankruptcy and were bailed out by the Government. Sales fell 21.2% from 2008 and the total sales volume was the lowest since 1982. ...

"The Obama Administration's efforts to spur demand by offering motorists up to \$US4500 on trade-ins of older cars and pick-up trucks took 700,000 older models off the road last year. But that

did not affect the total number of vehicles on the road because consumers could take advantage of the scheme only if they replaced their old clunkers with new, more efficient vehicles. The slump in car sales went beyond the economic recession, said the director of the institute, Lester Brown. Americans might finally have decided that with cars, enough is enough. The country now has 246 million licensed cars for 209 million licensed drivers. 'This is not a one-time event. We expect the shrinkage to continue into the indefinite future' Mr Brown said.

"The US has also undergone a transition into a largely urbanised society, with four out of five residents living in towns. Big corporations were now taking congestion into account when planning new offices, Mr Brown said. Washington and other big cities have been raising parking fees to increase revenue, and others are exploring congestion charges. A younger generation - unsure about finding a job after high school or college - was also far less likely to see car ownership as a rite of passage, Mr Brown said. According to the report, the number of teenagers with licences peaked at 12 million in 1978 but was now less than 10 million."

Ref: Suzanne Goldenberg, SMH, 8/1/10

Baltic to Barcelona by Solar Vehicle

"Peoples Projects for the environment announces a programme to raise the funding for Baltic to Barcelona - a solar powered voyage and a parallel solar powered road journey across Europe, from the north to the south, from Stockholm in Sweden to Barcelona in Spain. This is a benchmark setting solar journey involving pure solar boats on inland and coastal waterways and real practical solar vehicles on the public road.

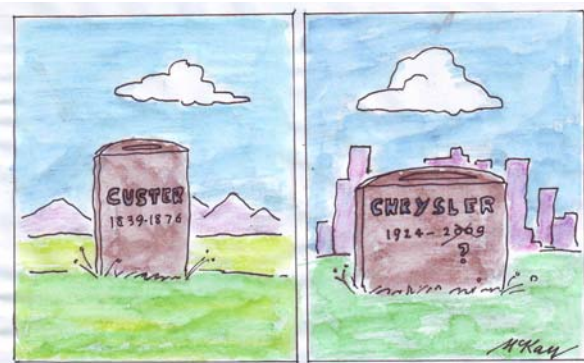
"The journey will take place over six months including stops for major solar transport demonstrations and talks and question and answer events in main cities. There will also be

almost daily local solar demonstration events in smaller towns and villages along the route. A professional crew of ten will handle the boats and drive the vehicles and run the solar transport demonstration events. There are seats for up to 18 paying passenger/participants or for sponsors to buy and distribute to guests. Separate back-up teams will look after accommodation and event scheduling and logistics and the making of a television

documentary. Average zero emissions, zero input, daily distance covered by the vehicles over the 6 months of the 3000 kilometre journey will be at least 25 km a day or the equivalent of 25%, a full quarter, of the average daily use of all conventional motor vehicles over the same period. This will be achieved without loss of average speed or load carrying. The parallel inland and coastal waters boat journey is longer than the road journey, over 4000 km, and involves more weekly travel than leisure motor boats cover on average or, typically, in a weekend of intensive use. The boats and the vehicles are expected to establish benchmarks or records for trans-European solar powered journeys by practical solar transport products. The boats and the vehicles will be totally self-sufficient in photovoltaic generated energy throughout the journey. They have no plug-in facilities and absolutely no back-up motors or fuels on board.

"The journey will be the basis for a three hour 3-part television mini-series. ... The route passes through seven European countries: Sweden, Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, France and Spain."

Ref: Peoples Projects Foundation Media Release, 7/12/09



American Historic Monuments

Public Transport Costing Myths

"The MTF [Metropolitan Transport Forum] is of the view that public transport should be acknowledged as far more cost effective for transit in cities such as Melbourne, than car based solutions. As cities become conurbations, reliance on the motor vehicle as the primary mode of transport undermines city liveability, amenity and efficiency.

- **"Myth No 1:** that public transport is heavily subsidised by the State.

"The costs of public transport infrastructure and services must be balanced with the greater benefits in emissions, health, safety, land use, congestion, social equity, inclusion/exclusion and other externalities. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) has assessed that given wide economic and social benefits, public transport requires only 30% cost recovery from fares.

- **"Myth No 2:** that investment in roads is more cost effective than investment in public transport infrastructure and services.

"The analysis should examine the full externalities of road pricing including GHG and other emissions, taxation, spatial land use, accidents, health impacts, parking and consumer costs. When properly costed, it is submitted that the public road subsidy far exceeds the public transport subsidy.

- **"Myth No 3:** that road freight is more cost effective than rail transport.

"Rail transport uses, on average, one third the fuel of road freight per tonne carried, and puts out one third of GHG emissions. Steel wheels on rail have far less friction than rubber on bitumen. Road freight incurs high accident, road infrastructure and damage costs. Any analysis should also examine road and related costs incurred by local authorities which are responsible for 80% of roads. It should be noted that the latter costs and GHG emissions were not properly costed by the Productivity Commission in its inquiry into freight transport.

- **"Myth No 4:** that affordable housing/living can be achieved by expansion of Melbourne's urban growth boundary.

"The cost of providing transport & infrastructure for a dispersed city has been assessed at over double the cost of urban consolidation. The MTF estimates that building 284,000 dwellings through expanding Melbourne's urban growth boundary will cost at least \$102 billion more than if the same number of dwellings were accommodated within established suburbs. The

MTF seeks that the Budget fund analysis of the costs to the State and community of expanding Melbourne's urban growth boundary as against the urban consolidation envisaged in Melbourne 2030.

"There has been broader transport cost-benefit research by Professor Peter Newman in WA, John Stanley in Victoria, the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) in NSW, RailCorp in NSW, the Australian Senate, and Todd Litman. The MTF urges that a comprehensive study is undertaken in Victoria to examine externalities of road pricing compared with public transport and rail freight. The MTF seeks that this analysis also covers the costs to the State and community of expanding Melbourne's urban growth boundary as against the urban consolidation envisaged in Melbourne 2030.

"The MTF emphasises the considerable dormant and under-utilised land within established parts of Melbourne, inside the present urban growth boundary available for development. There are many Council approved projects which are not being proceeded with by developers holding permits. Approved structure plans by Councils involving urban consolidation around rail stations are also awaiting investment. These should be examined by DPCD and DTF for assessment of incentives to encourage their development against the costs of further extending Melbourne settlement in areas without supporting infrastructure and services.

"The analysis of marginal costs and externalities is sought so that these are properly understood and documented so as to provide a firmer base for public policy decision making. This research is essential to properly inform policy development and to take into account Government policy and the economics of climate change, emission reduction, infrastructure and other costs to the community. In terms of funding, the MTF considers that budget savings should be identified through a rigorous analysis of State expenditure and the 1.2 million people on the Government payroll. Priority should be given to service delivery & infrastructure development over administration. ... As President Obama said on 16 April 2009, setting out new plans for rail in America:

'What we need is a smart transportation system equal to the needs of the 21st century. A system that reduces travel times and increases mobility. A system that reduces congestion and boosts productivity. A system that reduces destructive emissions and creates jobs ... (and will) lay a new foundation for our economic competitiveness and contribute to smart urban and rural growth'.

Ref: MTF State Budget Submission, 26/10/09
www.pt4me2.org.au/media/MTFstatebudgetsubmission_oct09.pdf

Transport and Health (Part 2)

"The pollution in cities from car emissions causes an increase in colon, breast and, possibly, prostate cancer. The Premier's Council for Active Living (NSW) hints at this and there are reports in the literature indicating a correlation between compounds such as benzene, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and other exhaust emissions contributing to pre and post menopausal breast cancer. There is a known relationship with breast cancer and exposure to carcinogens in exhaust fumes, particularly in children and young people. Recent research has also established a definite link between obesity and the above cancers.

"Public transport, by encouraging more exercise than use of the private car, improves mental health and can delay the onset of some forms of dementia. ... The additional physical activity induced by the use of public transport is important in preventing osteoporosis.

Walking and movement supports osteoblastic activity which, in turn, can contribute to an increase in bone density through calcium deposition. The development of good public transport systems is likely to result in fewer vehicle accidents and lower fatality rates simply by virtue of the reduction in number of vehicles on our roads or time vehicles spend on the roads. The potential savings in health and insurance budgets is significant.

"The World Health organisation provides an important definition of health. 'It is a state of complete physical, mental and social well being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'. It is a fact that in cities dominated by private transport, green space is lost and communities are physically divided. Cars, roads and parking areas take up greater amounts of land, increasing urban sprawl and reducing arable land near population centres. Water run-off and flash flooding increases, as does the 'heatsink' effect of cities. The latter may increase heat stress on vulnerable populations (eg: elderly, very young and infirm) during heat waves. The recent experiences in France stand as testament to this. Multimodal public transport has the capacity to reduce land usage footprint, thus leaving capacity for more green space within and around cities. In an ageing population, drivers no longer capable of maintaining licenses will be increasingly dependent on public transport to access medical care and social contacts. Personal mobility in an ageing population must be available to support independent living and the maintenance of social contact, essential for good mental health outcomes.

"The present collapse in the price of oil should not allow us to forget that it is a finite resource and that the price will quite likely rise significantly over the next decade. As oil costs increase, residents of outer suburbs, often with lower incomes and increasingly disadvantaged by transport costs, need public transport to remain economically and socially viable. Inadequate transport can act as a stressor, contributing to demonstrable economic and health impacts on entire families. Throughout Australia many housing developments are proceeding without adequate public transport planning. The urban sprawl continues to incur public infrastructure costs and disadvantages residents in terms of the economic outlay necessary to fund private transport. ...

"As the scientific predictions of climate change take effect, [regional and rural] communities are coming under increasing physical, mental and economic stress. The problems of depression, anxiety, family breakdown and suicide are already evident. Climate change is affecting communities which are already disadvantaged by isolation and lack of services - including medical. The Lower Lakes region of South Australia is an example of this, as are parts of rural Victoria, western NSW and other remote locations throughout Australia.

"We know from our rural members that if the question is asked of rural people 'what is the one intervention that will have the greatest impact upon your life?', the answer is almost inevitably the provision of public transport. We can confirm from the experience of other countries that the one intervention we can undertake, with the knowledge that it will have a positive impact, is the provision of public transport. Reduction in isolation has a profound effect upon rural and regional communities.

"In considering this matter we have to ask, firstly, what are the reasons behind the progressive depopulation of rural Australia? There are many which are not necessarily related to economic viability - though this is assuming greater importance with the advent of climate change. The range of issues that reduce viability relate to the provision, or lack of provision, of education, medical, banking, library and financial services - all of which are taken for granted in the cities and suburbs. Reliable public transport can ameliorate some of these deprivations. ... Caring societies are healthier societies." {Continued in #139}

Ref: David Shearman, Doctors for the Environment, Submission to Senate Rural and Regional Affairs & Transport Committee, 2009
www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/rrat_ctte/public_transport/submissions/sub70.pdf

Our Oil Dependence (Part 2)

“So oil is important - what of it? Humans are an adaptable species and we have a range of clever technologies at our disposal. If we don't have petrol to power our cars, then why don't we use biofuel instead? Better yet, let's start manufacturing electric cars and make more of public transport. So what if many of our plastics, pharmaceuticals and food products are no longer available? Surely we can employ alternative materials.

“Unfortunately, our dependence on petroleum and petroleum-based products (President George W. Bush described it as an addiction) and the scale of the potential problem means switching to alternatives won't happen overnight and it won't happen without significant disruption. Worst of all, this isn't the idle speculation of a few worrywarts. The prospect of a world facing a limited or declining supply of oil has given rise in recent years to a growing cadre of petroleum experts, scientists and economists who devote their energies to exploring the consequences of an oil-less world. It's known as the 'peak oil' movement. Peak oil is the point at which maximum global petroleum production is reached and then slides into decline.

“The thing is, when you do the numbers the world is frighteningly under-prepared for oil shortages. Take transport as an example. According to the Australian Association for the Study of Peak Oil (ASPO Australia), Australian transport authorities have no serious planning in place to handle a major fuel shortage. Switching to public transport simply won't meet the need. According to ASPO Australia's convenor, Bruce Robinson, no Australian city has anywhere near enough public transport capacity to handle even a quarter of existing car travellers if they needed to use buses and trains instead. And switching to alternative fuels simply can't happen quickly enough. The volumes are just too big. For example, ASPO points out that diverting Australia's entire wheat crop to produce ethanol (biofuel) would replace less than 10 per cent of our oil usage. In 2005 the US Department of Energy released the Hirsch Report, one of the most comprehensive studies on the likelihood of the occurrence of peak oil and its consequences. It found that world oil peaking is going to happen, and it's likely to be abrupt and disruptive. Although it needn't be if we prepare for it. But here's the rub - given our total dependence on oil we need to prepare well before peak oil hits us if



we're to avoid dire consequences (and by dire consequences think economic collapse and revolution).

“So, how much time is enough? The Hirsch reports estimates it will take 20 years of mitigation - weaning ourselves off oil - if we're to adapt to declining oil supplies without substantial impacts. If we were to rush the transition and compress it down to 10 years - which would require extraordinary efforts from governments, industry, and consumers - there would only be moderate impacts, maybe only a worldwide recession. Many oil watchers believe peak oil is close. Some at ASPO have nominated that 2012 might well be the year, give or take five years. Recently, Royal Dutch Shell chief executive Jeroen van der Veer nominated 2015 as D-day. In other words, it might be happening even as you read this but will take a few years before it's acknowledged. Peak oil is no fantasy. What's more, the experts are convinced that, given our total dependence on oil, the very realisation that oil supplies are declining will be enough to tip the world towards chaos.”

Ref: David Salt, G Magazine, 31/8/09

And Also ...

“The Environmental Protection Agency in the United States ... is the agency that tests fuel saving devices for the American motor industry. The work of the EPA can be downloaded free from the Internet by anyone who cares to take the time. Significantly, of the 93 additives and devices that have been tested by the EPA since the program began in 1971, none has received the agency's seal of approval.” **Ref: Gerard Ryle, Ockham's Razor, ABC Radio National, 30/8/09**

www.abc.net.au/rn/ockhamsrazor/stories/2009/2668778.htm#transcript

No Car? No Problem

“The pioneers of Vauban, Germany, are going where few suburbanites have gone before: They're giving up their cars. In Vauban, a new suburb of the city of Freiburg, 70% of families don't own cars, and 57% sold a car to move there. The only places to park in Vauban are two garages where spaces sell for \$40,000. It's part of a trend in Europe and the United States in which planners are designing suburbs that are less reliant on cars, with greater access to public transit and more stores within walking distance. One motivation is to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions: Passenger cars produce 12% of greenhouse emissions in Europe and up to 50% in the U.S.”

Ref: New York Times Upfront, 21/9/09

Car Domination in Toronto

"The appalling death of a cyclist following an altercation with former attorney general Michael Bryant reminds us of the desperate need to humanize this city and learn to share its public spaces. Of course that includes getting serious about bike lanes, an idea we have discussed endlessly in Toronto but about which we have done almost nothing. But there's more to it than cyclists, as important as they are – and will increasingly become in the oil-starved decades ahead. What's needed most is a sea change in civic attitudes; it's time to put aside old ideas that the streets 'belong' to drivers and that the rest of us have no place on them, except on the most limited basis.

"North Americans long ago put their faith in the automobile. That may have been understandable once, but 60-odd years later, it's clear the situation is badly out of balance. Cities from New York to Copenhagen have taken bold steps to reclaim their public realm from the car and return it to inhabitants. That doesn't mean cars are eliminated, but that they must share the roads with pedestrians and cyclists. In Toronto, however, we have had huge difficulty getting to that point. It's true that Canada is not the most dynamic, innovative or creative nation on earth, but in recent years we have started to creak. In the same way that Canadians are loath to deal with their environmental responsibilities, they are also reluctant to deal with the country's shifting urban fortunes.

"Our dependence on the automobile knows no bounds; many genuinely believe our very well-being depends on the car, though experts argue otherwise. It's the other way around, they say: gridlock costs us plenty. Still, measures such as road tolls and pedestrian zones, widespread around the globe, have gained no purchase here. Indeed, the proposal to add bicycle lanes on Bloor St., where cyclist Darcy Allan Sheppard was killed Monday night, has been adamantly opposed by local merchants. They fail to see beyond their bottom line to the city of which they are part. And as for the nonsense heard recently about Toronto's 'war on the car', it's laughable. Quite the contrary: we do everything we can to continue to drive with impunity.

"Meanwhile, other cities have made enormous progress, not to eliminate the car, but to restore order, balance and equality to streets. The Dutch concept of the 'woonerf' (living street) is a good example. Cyclists and pedestrians have priority on these sign-less streets, but cars are also allowed. Because users must be aware of each

other, to the point of making eye contact, accidents are reduced. The woonerf will be included in the new West Don Lands neighbourhood, now under construction on the waterfront. But for the time being, Torontonians unquestioningly accept the supremacy of the automobile. Drivers remain convinced they 'own' the streets. That's what must change. Roads, and the rest of the public realm, belong to everyone.

"Car advocates and safety tyrants argue that the rest of us must be kept off the streets for our own good. Isn't that just another way of punishing victims? That the public is ahead of politicians on these issues is borne out by the growing number of cyclists on Toronto streets. The city's response is to have squandered the past 30 years, decades when it could have rebuilt the infrastructure, especially the transportation infrastructure, intelligently, sustainably and humanely. Instead, we cling to illusions about who we are and the inviolability of our way of life. As events this week have made horribly clear, however, that way of life is increasingly becoming a way of death."

Ref: Christopher Hume, Toronto Star, 4/9/09



Separated Cycle Lane in Copenhagen

Picture: Matthew Blackett, Toronto Star

"When I arrived in Copenhagen for my week-long visit, it felt like I landed in the opposite world of Toronto. There was plenty of congestion on the roads, but it was bikes clogging the streets and not cars. Shop owners weren't demanding more parking for vehicles but were providing their own racks for bikes. Businesses were lobbying for more streets to become pedestrianized. It seemed like I had travelled into the future of what a sustainable transportation city could look like. ... The day after I returned to Toronto I strapped on my helmet and rode the four kilometres from my home to my office. As I squeezed in between streetcars and parked cars and listened to drivers honk at me for taking up too much of the road, I fretted about how two cities like Copenhagen and Toronto, with such similar geography, climate and density, could have such different attitudes toward riding a bike. Even as Toronto modestly tries to move our transportation habits into the future, I couldn't help but feel we're still living in the past."

Ref: Matthew Blackett, Toronto Star, 28/5/09

Interview with Oz Kayak (Part 8)

Oz Kayak started as an engineering cadet with the Victorian Roads Authority, later worked with Victorian Railways and today is passionate about active forms of transport, community health and urban design. Here continues our discussion:

SI: What was the driving force for the F2 [freeway] in Melbourne.

OK: In the mid 60s we still had the [Premier] Bolte 'spaghetti plan' – the government vision, the MMBW vision as well (they reserved the land) – for a city freeway network. The first step was to put the road network in 'at high kilometre'. It was a government object to get from anywhere to anywhere in twenty minutes, so you had to be able to get around Melbourne at 100 KPH, that was the policy. No one was arguing that at the time. The dominant factor was: what is an acceptable travel time for most of the population, and that goes back to the railways as well. It was all work focused: journey to work, journey home again; twenty minutes; that was 60s thinking and you needed the 'spaghetti system' to do it. We planned to line the Merri Creek with concrete to deliver the water and the freeway above it built to deliver the cars; this was maximum delivery, minimum engineering cost, thinking. In the mid 60s, we had Jane Jacobs [in New York] as part of the counter movement [against freeway building]

SI: So the imperative was to allow people to move quickly?

OK: Well it was also to get rid of the floods. VicRoads bought land that was subject to flooding in the 60s so we could use it for the freeway, down the creek. The land owners didn't object, in the beginning, and that land was to be used for the F2, and we designed the bridges. We did it Tuesdays and Thursdays overtime and we did it in imperial units. I kept on say that we should be drawing this up – if at all – in metric units.

SI: Because you knew the system was changing?

OK: Yes we could see that coming, but it hadn't been done officially, and we only worked under the Act. But more importantly, I said on day one, to the teams that were coming in and doing the work on overtime: 'get your money because this is never going to be built', because nobody had done an Environmental Effects Statement. From 1965 Environmental Effects Statements began to feature. I studied Town Planning but we had no

idea what they meant, but they began to bite. Later, with the F2, I could see that the Environmental Effects Statement would change the rules. Somebody would say: 'hey this creek is wonderful'. We could see it coming, we had read about it from around the world. I can't remember when they [the environmentalist] stopped a couple of bridges in Sydney, but there were other major projects where the roadway punching through the urban area was stopped.

SI: Who was behind the Environmental Statements?

OK: Enlightened people in Planning at Melbourne Uni, and I suspect also at RMIT – we did read the American planning magazines. {Cont. in #139}

Green Number Plates in Ontario

"Ontarians have voted for a new vehicle licence plate that will encourage consumers to switch to environmentally-friendly cars and trucks. The new plate will have green lettering on a white background with the picture of a trillium [flower] in the middle. It was selected from four choices in an online vote that ran from July to October. Drivers sporting these plates on a plug-in hybrid or battery electric vehicle will be able to:

- Use Ontario's High-Occupancy Vehicle lanes until 2015, even if there is just one person in the vehicle;
- Access recharging facilities at GO Transit and other provincially operated parking lots;
- Use designated parking spots at the University of Toronto and private companies;"

Ref: Ontario Government Website, 2/12/09

"The McGuinty government's plan is to have one out of every 20 passenger vehicles on Ontario's roads an electric vehicle by 2020. Green licence plates will encourage Ontarians to think green when choosing a vehicle." Ref: Jim Bradley, (Ontario) Minister for Transport {as above}

And Also ...

"The mysterious felling of nearly two dozen trees near Los Angeles billboards has provoked finger-pointing between state officials and an advertising company while adding fuel to the debate about outdoor advertising in the city. Vandals apparently equipped with chain saws hacked back the trees, which were part of a major landscaping initiative along the 405 and 10 freeways, said Daniel Freeman, the California Department of Transportation's deputy district director for maintenance in Los Angeles and Ventura counties."

Ref: LA Times, 25/2/09