

Problems with Trucks

"The Australasian Railway Association is increasingly confident that the review of the tax system by the Treasury Secretary, Ken Henry, will recommend road-user charges that will recover from the trucking industry more of the money spent building and maintaining main roads. ... The rail association's chief executive, Brian Nye, said smaller trucks - such as those used by couriers and for deliveries to households and small businesses - were subsidising the massive B-double trucks and road trains that travel the highways. 'The current way we price road use is no longer sustainable', Mr Nye said. 'For example, I also own a farm, and to register a nine-tonne truck cost me less than to register my ute'. Mr Nye was commenting after the Rail, Tram and Bus Union - with the support of the rail association and the motoring body NRMA - announced it would begin a campaign to change the law to require the transport of dangerous goods, such as fuel and chemicals, to and from the nearest available rail hub. ...

"A 2006 Productivity Commission report found that heavy trucks contributed just over \$1.6 billion to the total road spending of \$10.4 billion. The fuel excise raised \$1.07 billion, while \$550 million came from registrations. In a report for the House of Representatives economics committee, Philip Laird, a freight and logistics expert at the University of Wollongong, used a benchmark established by a NSW road freight inquiry to calculate that the unrecovered costs of road transport were \$3 billion a year. These included \$1.5 billion in construction and maintenance, \$850 million in road trauma and \$850 million in pollution and carbon emissions. The Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics last year estimated the volume of freight to be carted around Australia would double within the next 20 years."

Ref: Andrew West & Louise Hall, SMH, 7/1/10

"In 2006 Toll Holdings told a Federal Government inquiry that 'Melbourne-Brisbane is a good long corridor where, all things being equal, rail should be very competitive with road'. The line from Sydney, it said 'winds its way slowly towards Brisbane and sometimes goes around in circles'. Imagine if today's trucks had to use roads built in the 1920s. More money has been spent on rail infrastructure in the past couple of years, but it is insignificant compared with that for roads. Labor's Nation Building Program 2009-14 for projects in NSW has allocated \$7.6 billion for roads but only \$1.3 billion for rail."

Ref: Chris O'Rourke, SMH, 7/1/10

Tougher Pollution Emission Standards

"Industry and the broader community are being asked to comment on new regulations that would cut emissions from all new cars, 4WDs and Utes sold in Australia by as much as 90%. The more stringent mandatory emission standards being put forward by the Rudd Labor Government target the pollutants responsible for the formation of smog over our major cities and health problems within our population. Compared to the current regulatory regime, the proposed new standards - Euro 5 (from 2012) and Euro 6 (from 2016) - would cut a new vehicle's maximum emissions of:

- Hydrocarbon by up to 50%;
- Oxides of nitrogen by up to 70%; and
- Particulate matter by up to 90%.

"Over time the new standards would lead to cleaner skies and healthier air quality. Euro 5 and Euro 6 standards have already been adopted by the European Union. The draft regulation impact statement (RIS) I'm releasing today lays out the costs and benefits of Australia following suit. ... While the air quality in our major cities has improved significantly in recent years, the growth in the number of vehicles means we must continually monitor our standards and where possible deploy new, more effective technologies. For example, Sydney still records as many as 25 high pollution days a year. ... New regulations designed to reduce carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions from new vehicles will be the subject of a separate RIS due for release in early 2010."

Ref: Federal Ministerial Media Release. 8/1/09

The draft RIS is available at:

www.infrastructure.gov.au/roads/environment/index.aspx, with public submissions due by 1 March 2010.

And Also ...

"The Scottish island of Islay is pioneering a system that uses whisky to create green energy.

Bruichladdich Distillery is to build an

anaerobic digester to convert thousands of tonnes of yeasty waste into methane gas, which will be burned to make electricity. ... If the idea is a success, the distilleries could end up generating much of the island's electricity and may even have enough gas left over to power vehicles. ... The distillery project would [also] help to cut tanker traffic on the island's roads and also reduce marine pollution."

Ref: Jonathan Leake, Sunday Times, 19/1/10



Islay automobiles

Downtown Planning (Part 1)

“You all know the story about the little boy, Epaminondas, whose mother put a note in his hat, told him to keep it safe there and deliver it to his grandmother. When his grandmother then gave him a pat of butter, Epaminondas carefully put it into his hat, and arrived home with trickles of butter running down his neck. ‘Oh, Epaminondas’, said his mother, ‘you should have wrapped it in green leaves and doused it in the spring water on your way home’. On his next visit to his grandmother, Epaminondas was given a puppy dog, which he of course wrapped in green leaves and doused in the spring on his way home. On his next visit he dragged home a loaf of bread on a string, because that is what he should have done with the puppy dog. And so on. Epaminondas was great at learning from experience. He just kept picking the wrong experience.

“Do you know what Epaminondas became when he grew up? He became a city traffic commissioner. He pushed just as many cars, just as fast as he could, through the downtown [city centre] streets because he had learned that was what you do with cars on a highway. He got the city fathers to condemn blocks of small shops near department stores for parking space, because he had been told there was always parking space near department stores out in the suburbs. He made life very inconvenient for bus riders by converting all the downtown streets to one-way, because that made the streets operate more like parkways, and he knew parkways are a success in the country. He made life more inconvenient for people actually using the downtown - for pedestrian shoppers, people on their way to lunch, people in a rush to see a man across the street about a deal, people strolling from dinner to a show - by cutting down the number of places they could cross the street, making them wait longer to cross it, and inundating them with cars, cars, cars. And while the downtown trickled off like melted butter, Commissioner Epaminondas determinedly closed his eyes to the real nature of the strange area he was dealing with, and searched for still more experience from the open highway and the suburbs to guide him on his next move. He was cheered on by some of the leading downtown merchants, who had the illusion that they would make better in an imitation of a tenth-rate suburb than in a first-rate downtown.

“It is impossible to talk about downtown planning, the topic I have been asked to speak on, without talking about traffic. Because how we handle traffic and transportation is going to determine -

is already determining – whether we shall have any downtowns worth planning in the future. As Francis Belle has pointed out in his Fortune article, ‘The City and the Car’, if we attempted to provide parking space in the largest cities for all the motorists who want to come to them, there wouldn’t be anything left worth coming to.

“And if we attempt to admit an even larger and larger number of the cars that want to come, there will not be anything left worth coming to either. This is the issue behind the fight which citizens of Greenwich Village have been waging against a scheme to run a highway through Washington Square Park, for example. The object of this resistance, in which it now appears we shall be successful, is to save from traffic blight the heart of an area that is now so attractive to visitors that it supports, among many other things, more than four hundred restaurants. But some of us are equally concerned about the effect on Fifth Avenue, for the park highway link would make possible and probable the conversion of this major shopping street into a one-way artery to the bridges and tunnels of downtown Manhattan.

“Before concluding that it was in the best interests of both the area and the city to close this part to traffic instead, and thus discourage growth of traffic in the area, a group of planners to which I belong took a look into the future. Using the projection of 10% increase in traffic annually, a figure given us by Deputy Traffic Commissioner Gravelle, we found (in 1958) that each of the major avenues would reach capacity by at least 1970, and several of them much sooner, even if every avenue were made one-way, signal cycles adjusted, all parking eliminated, sidewalks narrowed to the minimum and trees cut down.

“At present only 17% of those entering Manhattan south of 59th Street use private cars; we concluded it was not very sensible to wreck such havoc on the city for 100% of its users, simply to stave off the car saturation point a few more years and a few more percentage points. Even if a smaller figure of annual increase is predicated, it simply advances the saturation point a few more years, and the ultimate result is just as clear and just as destructive and futile. Down in Greenwich Village we are as progressive as anybody. Sometimes we are accused of being too progressive. But we concluded that piling in more cars, to the detriment of every other city value - and as a mere stop-gap measure at that - is no more progress than erosion is progress.”

Ref: Jane Jacobs, Address to the New York State Motorbus Association, Nov 10, 1958
{Continued in #140}

Jane Jacobs (Part 1)

“Jane Jacobs (1916-2006) was an urban writer and activist who championed new, community-based approaches to planning for over 40 years. Her 1961 treatise, ‘The Death and Life of Great American Cities’, became perhaps the most influential American text about the inner workings and failings of cities, inspiring generations of urban planners and activists. Her efforts to stop downtown expressways and protect local neighbourhoods invigorated community-based urban activism and helped end Parks Commissioner Robert Moses’s reign of power in New York City. Jacobs had no professional training in the field of city planning, nor did she hold the title of planner. She instead relied on her observations and common sense to illustrate why certain places work, and what can be done to improve those that do not. Together with William H. Whyte, Jacobs led the way in advocating for a place-based, community-centred approach to urban planning, decades before such approaches were considered sensible.” {Continued in #140}

Ref: Projects for Public Places

www.pps.org/info/placemakingtools/placemakers/ijacobs

“Probably no single thinker has done more in the last fifty years to transform our ideas about the nature of urban life.”

Ref: Chicago Tribune

“Jane Jacobs’ observations about the way cities work and don’t work... revolutionized the urban planning profession. Thanks to Jacobs, ideas once considered lunatic, such as mixed-use development, short blocks, and dense concentrations of people working and living downtown, are now taken for granted.”

Ref: Adele Freedman, The Globe and Mail

“Jane Jacobs, the world-famous apostle of livable cities, almost single-handedly reshaped the way urban planners think about their profession. Planners hated her book when it came out, but its required reading in universities around the world.”

Ref: Alexander Ross, Canadian Business

“The battles she ignited are still being fought, and the criticism was perhaps inevitable, given that such an ambitious work was produced by somebody who had not finished college, much less become an established professional in the field. ... Some dismissed it as amateurism, but to many others it was a point of view that made new ideas not only thinkable but suddenly and eminently reasonable. ‘When an entire field is headed in the wrong direction, when the routine

application of mainstream thinking has produced disastrous results as I think was true of planning and urban policy in the 1950’s, then it probably took someone from outside to point out the obvious’, Alan Ehrenhalt wrote in 2001 in Planning, the magazine of the American Planning Association. ‘That is what Jane Jacobs did 40 years ago’ he said.

“Herbert Muschamp, The Times’s chief architecture critic at the time, wrote in 2003 that Ms Jacobs’s book was ‘one of 20th-century architecture’s most traumatic events’, in part because Ms. Jacobs was dismissive about the importance of design. In recent years, she had become an inspiration to architects and planners who espouse what they call the ‘New Urbanism’, an effort to promote social interaction by incorporating such Jacobean features as ground-floor retail in suburban developments. ... As early as 1974, John E. Zuccotti, then chairman of the New York City Planning Commission, called Ms. Jacobs a prophet and himself a ‘neo-Jacobean’ when he announced a smaller-scale, more sensitive urban planning approach.

“In 1952, Ms Jacobs got a job as an editor at Architectural Forum, where she stayed 10 years. This gave her a perch from which to observe urban renewal projects. In a visit to Philadelphia, she noticed that the streets of a project were deserted while an older, nearby street was crowded. ‘So, I got very suspicious of this whole thing’, she said in an interview with The Toronto Star in 1997. ‘I pointed that out to the designer, but it was absolutely uninteresting to him. How things worked didn’t interest him. He wasn’t concerned about its attractiveness to people. His notion was totally aesthetic, divorced from everything else’. Her doubts increased after William Kirk, the head worker of Union Settlement in East Harlem, taught her new ways of seeing neighbourhoods. She came to see prevalent planning notions, which involved bulldozing low-rise housing in poor neighbourhoods and building tall apartment buildings surrounded by open space to replace them, as a superstition akin to early 19th-century physicians’ belief in bloodletting. ...

“Death and Life made four recommendations for creating municipal diversity: 1. A street or district must serve several primary functions. 2. Blocks must be short. 3. Buildings must vary in age, condition, use and rentals. 4. Population must be dense. These seemingly simple notions represented a major rethinking of modern planning.”

Ref: Douglas Martin, New York Times. 25/4/06

www.nytimes.com/2006/04/25/books/25cnd-jacobs.html

Deceptive Green: Suburban Gardens

"The private gardens of suburbia are indirectly responsible for the worst pollution figures per capita in the world. Because of the gardens, we have a catastrophic urban sprawl, which forces people into cars. Australians collectively drive 200 billion kilometres per year. Instead of short trips by foot or tram, we make long trips in cars. Ultimately, the fault lies with the area occupied by gardens. When the aesthetic comes into conflict with the ecological, who wins? So far, we can think of nothing but our private amenity and the beauty of our domestic circumstances: having a house surrounded by a cute garden. Unfortunately, 3.6 million all want the same luxury in a 50-kilometre radius.

"It wouldn't be a problem if we all took bikes everywhere: we could enjoy the gardens and not damage the planet with emissions. Then the gardens would really be Green. But few people facing a 15-kilometre ride each day will last the distance; and because of low population density, public transport is infrequent and messy. The garden lifestyle is contingent on cars. Gardens are currently protected by law in a bewildering array of municipal regulations known as 'setback'. Councils decree that you must not build too close to the border and successive storeys have to be set back from the ground level. A large margin of garden has to buffer the privacy of the neighbour's open space. This means that most of the block - namely the part close to the perimeter - is unoccupied by a dwelling; and it gets worse the higher up you want to go. In most of Melbourne, it is illegal to use the land efficiently. Australian cities - grown horizontally in the golden age of the six-cylinder car - have been built on the wrong footprint. When the estates were designed on cheap land, nobody thought about the petrol consumption that this would burden us with."

Ref: Robert Nelson, The Age, 19/9/09

"Gardens per se are not the real issue here. They are actually a passably reasonable use of what is the real problem - space. Humans are severely territorial and we down under have indulged our desire for territory - for personal space - to a point where Robert's comments on the environmental cost of suburban sprawl are tragically accurate. We seem to crave more size and space in everything - our shops (Bunnings), our cars (4 wheel drives) and our houses (McMansions).



Melbourne Urban Fringe

"Robert's comments are themselves not completely correct. There is a very good reason for building setbacks - buildings must have good sunlight. These open space values are more than just aesthetic - some degree of personal open space has psychological and emotional benefit. It just doesn't have to be the size of a quarter-acre back yard, that's all. A good city will have a mix of housing types, of differing heights and densities. A well-done vegetated courtyard can provide the garden benefits of a back yard - don't mistake quantity for quality. Remember, nothing comes for nothing. Space costs. Look at our congested roads - the price of our indulgence in car-dependent personal space. Expect it to continue getting worse. The 'concrete jungle' is in fact becoming a

more liveable and desirable environment than car-choked suburbs - just look at the property prices. We certainly need to give more people shorter distances, i.e. urban density. We shouldn't eliminate our gardens, but, like so much else in our lives, we should cut down a bit."

Ref: 'Kris', The Age, 19/9/09

"In Europe they may build high, but when you look in detail in many places the buildings are actually hollow: eg Barcelona. The centre of each large building contains outdoor space, including playgrounds, etc. The residents use these spaces for socialising. I really like the way they use their space. But our blocks are subdivided far too small to allow for this type of use. Instead of quarter acre blocks the blocks should be large enough to incorporate designated outdoor space for the immediate residents to use. This would help overcome our reticence to live in higher density areas. Another thing which would help us to preserve our gardens but be more efficient is to use the roofs of our houses as gardens. At the moment very few dwellings (and very few offices) do so. If I ever build then that is my wish: solar panels, hot water, and roof space to grow as much as possible."

Ref: 'EMR', The Age, 19/9/09

"I'd add that we need to look hard at our suburbs and recognise that they are just simply awful. The 'soul' of 'em is buried invisibly inside North American sitcom style buildings, layout and ambience. Awful, just awful."

Ref: 'Low Def', The Age, 20/9/09

See the full article and the comments at:

<http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/deceptive-green-of-suburban-gardens-20090918-fvah.html> and a longer article at:

<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Setback:+Robert+Nelson+offers+a+provocation+against+gardens+in+this...-a0186861823>

Transport and Health (Part 3)

“There are several European countries from which we can learn but we have chosen Switzerland which has integrated, state-owned transport. Travel is cheap, comfortable and efficient. More importantly the system ensures that regional and rural communities are included. In Switzerland every city has an integrated, mostly electric, public transport system. For the inter-city traveller, there are ‘no speaking’ coaches where you can work, or ‘family coaches’ if you have children or wish to talk. Trains and buses run to time and there are inquiries for even minor delays. For rural communities there are bus or train services for workers and ‘direct to school and shopping’ hubs. This transport is also utilized for post and delivery, reducing duplication and extracting greater utilization of the resource and associated capital. Employment within the service is distributed equitably to the villages and towns.

“It might be seen unusual that a very conservative country, with financial services as its back-bone, should eschew private involvement in this system. However it operates within the national plan that dictates rural Switzerland as essential to the nation and which must be maintained. Now it might be asked what relevance this could have when we compare a rural bus service in Switzerland that travels 20 kilometres to one in Australia that travels 200 kilometres. The relevance is that the overall cost in Australia is less. The terrain in Switzerland imposes larger overhead.

“Switzerland will suffer further loss of permanent snow due to climate change and many pastures will become less productive because melt water supply will falter. The village of Isenfluh has been assessed as sustainable because its water catchment is large, and it depends only partly on snow melt. It sits on an alp 1000m above the floor of the Lauterbrunnen Valley. According to scientific climate change data it will be able to sustain its dairy industries. It is supplied four times a day with a post bus on a road which requires extensive and costly engineering, and which crosses a cliff with huge exposure. Two years ago a 1 kilometre section of this road was demolished by avalanche. Engineering reports indicated that this could not be rebuilt. In a matter of months a tunnel through solid rock of 2 kilometres had reconnected the village with the Lauterbrunnen valley at a cost of over \$10M. The number of residents in the village is 80 (eighty). In effect the decision to act on this was taken as a result of the standard national

strategy and policy which values rural Switzerland as much as urban Switzerland.

“In Switzerland there is a national consensus as to the future needs of the country, based on sustainability and the integral importance of maintaining rural communities. Arguments about market forces, private versus public enterprise or subsidies are not entertained. It is interesting to note that politicians of this conservative country, who dare to suggest privatisation of this system, inevitably lose their seats. The sell-off of assets would be regarded as an abrogation of duty. ... In a wealthy country, with high car ownership, 20% of all journeys are now made by public transport and this is increasing rapidly. ... Success in transport policy, in connecting a country, depends on a high level of service, suitable transport modalities, an ‘intelligent’ timetable with a system of ‘hubs’, and appropriate infrastructure of high quality.

“An integrated transport policy is essential to the needs and health of all Australians and to mitigate greenhouse emissions. To date our failure to provide this reflects a failure of this and the previous government to act in complex situations. ... In Australia, taking into account the scientific data on climate change, agricultural potential and the local industry base, we need to ask if our rural communities can remain economically viable. If so, the decision to provide adequate public transport must be made. If we value the health of the citizens of this nation then we must also take the decision to provide suitable transport modalities for urban Australia.”

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

“A hazy sky has become an inescapable part of life for Hong Kong's population of seven million. ...

“A study conducted by the Civic Exchange think-tank showed that Hong Kong's own emissions - not those from the factories in mainland China - are the dominant sources of air pollution, affecting the city 53% of the time. Although the government in 2006 imposed a requirement for newly-registered vehicles to meet European vehicle emission standards, Civic Exchange found that 99% of the 6,000 franchised buses are below the Euro IV standard. Christine Loh, chief executive of Civic Exchange, warned that dirty air is now driving away the people who are instrumental to the success of the city.”

Ref: Polly Hui, News.com.au, 17/12/09

Interview with Oz Kayak (Part 9)

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: So this was the beginning of a change in thinking by the community [about the concerns of building freeways, particularly through inner-city areas]. VicRoads had an enthusiasm for doing the things that they were training themselves to do – that is, build roads; passenger numbers on the railways were probably declining; it was an interesting period for the government?

OK: You must remember that at the same time City Loop [underground rail] was going in; the railways were not asleep, and also the spur line to Doncaster was prepared. We excavated a trench from Victoria Park to the middle of the Eastern Freeway which we had to back-fill. It cost us a million and a half dollars to fill it up, to put the rocks back in ...

SI: ... because of ...

OK: ... because the railway wasn't going to go ahead.

SI: So they actually dug a trench and filled it back up again?

OK: MMBW dug it for the railways in 1973 or 1974, but when the MMBW was taken over by VicRoads, it was immediately dropped, the whole game-play changed. {Continued in #140}

More on Cycling

"As a trauma nurse at Royal Melbourne Hospital Operating Suite I can confirm a sharp increase in the number of bike accidents. This is not though, out done by road accidents and stabbings in Melbourne."

Name Supplied, 19/1/10

"Australian Customs import figures released this week show that 1,154,077 bicycles were imported into Australia in 2009. With negligible domestic production, imports are used as a proxy for sales in this country and the figures show an increased margin of 23% more bikes sold than cars in the past year with more than 10 times the number of bicycles sold than motor bikes." **Ref: Cycling Promotion Fund, Media Release, 21/1/10**

Doncaster Rail

"The people of Doncaster are plaguing the life out of me to get a survey of the proposed line from Canterbury to Doncaster", local MP John Keys wrote to Victorian premier Duncan Gillies in 1888. It was the peak of the land boom, the biggest of Melbourne's property binges, when every suburb was clamouring for its own tram or railway and log-rolling politicians were desperate to placate them. But the boom soon burst and the railway mania came to an end. More than a century later, the people of Doncaster are still waiting for their train to arrive. Their hopes rose briefly in the late 1960s when a Doncaster railway was one of the few public transport projects included with the 500 kilometres of freeways in the Melbourne Transportation Plan. Beyond the reach of trains and trams, middle class Doncaster already had the highest level of automobile ownership in the metropolis. Its sprawling haciendas, with long drives and triple garages, epitomised the new model of car-dependent suburbia Australians had copied from the United States. The Eastern

Freeway opened in 1977 amid protests by inner-suburban residents. The engineers who designed the new road also made generous provision for the expected Doncaster railway. In spite of this costly down payment, the rail project was quietly shunted into a siding and almost forgotten." **Ref: Graeme Davison, The Age, 24/8/08**



"When the F19 (Now Eastern) Freeway was designed in the 1970's, a train line to Doncaster was included in the wide median strip down the middle of the freeway. When it opened the freeway only went as far as Thompson Road. The line was proposed in response to community outrage at the prospect of hundred of thousands of cars being dumped of the end of the freeway onto Alexandra Parade and Hoddle Street. Not only was the median reserved for a rail line, but a tunnel was blasted to Victoria Park station, where the train was to join the existing tracks to Jolimont. Blasting caused cracks in houses around Abbotsford, Collingwood and Clifton Hill. The rail line was published in the 1982 Melway Edition 14. This line could not be afforded by Cain/Kirner Government during a period of declining patronage of public transport and the Kennett Government sold the reservations in East Doncaster where the stations were to be located, and the line disappeared from later Melway editions." **Ref: Yarra Campaign for Action on Transport, www.ycat.org.au/?page_id=45**