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## Commonwealth City Commuting: the Federal Role in Urban Transport Planning

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Commonwealth City Commuting: the Federal Role in Urban  
Transport Planning

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## **Major Issues**

Urban transport systems are under increasing demand pressures relative to their capacity. As a result, the costs of traffic congestion and associated negative effects such as pollution and road accidents are increasing. A series of serious urban rail accidents have highlighted operating difficulties. These costs are not just local in significance, but have important ramifications for national well-being, the environment and Australia's efficiency. These issues include transport efficiency and effects on economic growth, pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, health, and social amenity.

This has led some observers to call for a renewed commitment of the Commonwealth Government to ameliorating these problems and promoting more sustainable cities and urban transport systems. The proposition is endorsed by OECD findings which determined that urban travel and land use problems are not just *urban* issues. Rather, the economic, social and environmental impacts extend well beyond to *national* and regional levels. Australia is perhaps the only developed country without a national policy covering urban issues, despite the urgent need for innovative sustainable urban development programs.

The trend over recent years has been for the Commonwealth to retreat from involvement in urban transport policy. However, the current Auslink Green Paper for an integrated land transport network has raised questions about the role of the Federal Government in urban transport planning. The inaugural National Public Transport Summit, facilitated by Commonwealth and State agencies, further highlights the need to deal with the national influences of urban transport. The new Commonwealth National Transport Commission may also have a role to play. This paper examines the case for an enhanced Federal role in urban transport policy, drawing upon overseas experience, and may include direct funding of transport infrastructure and foster greater commitment to integrated planning.

Cities with sustainable transport systems address environmental, economic and social issues under partnerships between communities, governments and developers, at national, regional and local levels. City health impact assessments become part of the process, and highlight the benefits of walking and cycling as alternatives to vehicle usage.

Despite the best intentions of transport planners, the growth of vehicle use has overtaken all other travel trends, leading to a significant consequential cost of urban congestion. As counter measures, critics campaign for road tolls and road pricing strategies, and the development of light or heavy rail systems, whereas the provision of reliable and frequent bus services might provide better synergies. Different situations demand different

solutions; some may be a combination of road pricing and land use planning reforms, or of new rolling stock.

Public transport acts very much as a social service. There is little correlation between the cost of providing urban public transport and the charged fares with the result of a public transport deficit. Improvements to public transport may require ongoing subsidisation especially to ensure ongoing safety and reliability. Improvements in public transport may do little to alter the balance as people depend upon their cars.

Overseas examples provide some food for thought on successful public transport operation but these experiences must be qualified by Australia's special conditions of urban sprawl and low-density suburbs. Even so, it appears that our urban transport policies are rather a theoretical exercise, with few actual completed project achievements in terms of funded, modern programs, compared with some other countries.

Recent trends towards urban consolidation receive favour in public transport circles but do not necessarily align with social aspirations nor represent efficient outcomes for all. Our urban issues have been long dominated by housing policy, which in turn has contributed to the decentralised urban sprawl responsible for traffic congestion and associated costs.

Many factors and issues affect suburban developments, with competing interests evident at different levels of government. In general, it has been viewed as all too hard to address. Progress in remedying problems might be feasible through a strategic planning, systems management approach, that is, a comprehensive and overall exercise for all parties.

Commonwealth involvement is now largely indirect (fuel, car and pollution taxes) and so avoids the practical difficulty of being directly involved in transport planning. The Federal focus is on freight movement by road and rail, with urban roads supported to some extent under the Roads of National Importance funding scheme and by special projects.

The current national transport policy has a focus on national highways and freight modes while urban public transport is primarily a State and Local Government function. Along with taxation and regulatory measures, the Commonwealth could fund urban transport and has done so in the past. Road congestion pricing would more likely be a State function, given prevailing legislation under the Australian Constitution.

It is possible the Federal Government could become involved in urban transport planning, in a shared responsibility with the States, through pricing, regulatory and funding arrangements. These could include fuel taxes, pollution charges, new car fees and funding of public transport, as well as initiatives to facilitate interest in sustainable planning.

*The car has become an article of dress without which we feel uncertain, unclad and incomplete in the urban compound. (Marshall McLuhan, Canadian communication theorist.)*

*Buses of our transport system must fear attack; they always run in convoys. (W.G.P.)*



## **Introduction**

### **The Congestion Conundrum**

The most recent rail fatalities in Sydney at Waterfall on 31 January and Melbourne's runaway train crash brings back to the fore the urgent need for a more rigorous national approach to urban transport requirements. Urban Australians are very concerned about the state of transportation in their major cities. Both Sydney and Melbourne residents rate transport issues at the top of their worries about their cities.<sup>1</sup> In a recent Melbourne public forum, those surveyed rated congested roads and an inadequate, unsafe, public transport system as the city's biggest problems. Similarly in Sydney, residents perceive a lack of long-term planning as a major concern, and express support for a Sydney-wide planning and development authority.<sup>2</sup> Most Sydney respondents believe that the city has significant traffic and transport problems while half call for more road infrastructure and three-quarters demand more funds for public transport. South-east Queensland and Brisbane are little different, given their rapid population growth and lack of an integrated rail and bus transport network, despite plans to introduce a system more than 30 years ago.<sup>3</sup> In Adelaide, as a result of the growing traffic congestion and longer cross-city trips, Business SA now suggests a 25-year integrated transport plan, to develop infrastructure, including a north-south motorway.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, commuters' views of urban rail networks in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne raise concerns about uncomfortable carriages, concern for personal safety, poor coordination with other modes of public transport at interchanges and inadequate off-peak services. Train scheduling, safety and peak-hour congestion are other issues of concern.<sup>5</sup> Urban travellers also complain of increasing and significant traffic congestion, inadequate road networks, and lack of consistent, long-term planning of public transport systems. In the smaller urban rail networks of Perth and Adelaide some operational efficiencies may occur. Commuters note that the success of public transport operations during the Sydney Olympics and the Brisbane Goodwill Games augers well for similar performance during the Melbourne Commonwealth Games to be held in 2006. Public transport has usually been a State or Local Government responsibility, of little recent Federal concern (with the exception of some past funding involvements), until congestion began to have a negative impact on the economy.

The increasing environmental and equity impacts stemming from urban transport congestion may force Commonwealth involvement in public transport issues. Public transport operators believe that the community strongly supports improved mass transit systems, in spite of the road lobby, as evidenced in recent election issues and in general surveys of the urban public. The Commonwealth provides excise concessions for rail

under the Diesel Fuel Rebate Scheme along with other grants and some relevant tax concessions. However, its direct involvement in urban transport funding has been limited.

## **Commonwealth and Cities**

Australian Commonwealth input into urban transport issues might be expected to occur when national interest objectives arise, such as environmental effects (greenhouse emissions and air quality), efficiency and equity (road pricing), access (regional policies and social health programs) and, perhaps, with urban amenity issues. City populations are likely to rise sharply in this decade, creating even more congestion along with its consequent effects. Growing city congestion and size combine to exacerbate the negative effects of car transportation, which include energy use, death and injury from accidents, pollution and wasted time. Our cities sprawl due to affluence, government support, social change, technologies, poor planning and population growth. Without stronger planning, the negative effects of sprawl will get worse. The total amount of road freight carried around Australia is forecast to double over the next two decades, with grave implications for traffic congestion, the environment and safety.

A communiqué on 'livable communities for Australia' released on 21 June 2001, reflected the opinions of some 16 independent professional and social organisations by urging strategic direction, policy integration and understanding of the spatial impacts of national policy directions on our cities and regions.<sup>6</sup> The communiqué urged Commonwealth leadership in strategic development infrastructure — under a multi-government task force — with sustainable and integrated transport and land use programs. These would include economic, social and environmental consideration and entail wide consultations.

The public recognises that there is a lack of long-term public transport planning in Australia and the need for more urban mass transit and investment. The absence of integrated land use planning has often thwarted transport accessibility and increased negative impacts. Yet there are means of improving mass transit usage by building related high-density corridors and associated passenger facilities. The integration of transport and land use planning, involving all parties is essential to achieve sustainable urban transport.

This paper provides a policy background to urban transport and planning developments, updating previous papers on the subject. The 1995 Parliamentary Library *Research Paper* 'Towards Sustainable Cities: Urban Transport and Land Use Planning' contains a bibliography of relevant papers up to that time and a discussion on transport planning policies in each of the major Australian cities<sup>7</sup>. After examining the current state of urban transport, this paper provides a view towards an optimum future that recognises the value of and need for sustainable urban development and transport systems. It also outlines some local progress towards this direction in line with overseas trends.

## **Urban Transport Planning**

### **Driving Ambitions and Congestion**

The total kilometres travelled in Australian urban areas has grown almost nine times over the past fifty years with almost all of the growth coming from road vehicles. The car has become almost essential for across town and out of peak movements.<sup>8</sup> The personal independence and perceived image that a car offers for personal use remains a strong drawcard for its continued use. During the 1990s cars have become even more attractive, with a boom in sales of four-wheel drive vehicles, whereas the image of public transport has languished to become a perceived social service for those on welfare assistance or for peak-hour commuters.

A 1995 report on congestion management estimated the cost of congestion in Australia's capital cities at over \$5 billion per year spread across metropolitan areas and time of day.<sup>9</sup> In the United States, congestion in major urban areas costs motorists at least \$148 billion every year in terms of wasted fuel and time, while average distances driven also rise annually.<sup>10</sup> So the cost of congestion on a per capita basis in Australia rates with that of the United States.

Should the use of public transport systems double, private road vehicles would still make up 86 per cent of the transport task. By 2015, traffic could grow by up to 30 per cent with a consequent rise in congestion costs of up to \$30 billion.<sup>11</sup> We might expect technological and fuel improvements to make road vehicles less polluting and less accident-prone, but their congestion effects will remain. Current trends are likely to continue.

The 1995 report recommended broader policy initiatives with road pricing having the potential to achieve improvement. In April 1996, the Bureau of Transport Economics advocated road pricing of \$1.26 per kilometre in central Melbourne reducing to 13 cents per kilometre within nine kilometres of the city centre<sup>12</sup>. A 1995–6 Australian Road Research Board report found that the State could raise \$1.16 billion by imposing tolls on all inner city major roads — \$1.15 on freeways and \$1.30 on the inner arterials for redistribution to transport programs. These studies suggest economic strategies to attack congestion, although road pricing in itself may remain a politically unpalatable policy. However, growing urban congestion and the cost that it adds to national efficiency in freight logistics and urban movements may eventually mean that such policy is acceptable.

The institutionalisation of car dependence occurs, encouraged by road funding and the car industry, while public transport is seen as outdated and requiring deficit funding. Transportation agencies operate largely independently and often compete with one another and with planning agencies that are primarily concerned with fringe developments. Outer green-field sites can receive greater infrastructure subsidies and regulatory favour than inner city areas.<sup>13</sup>

## **On The Rails**

Public transport proponents attempt to challenge the dominant car-based paradigm by urging a wide systems approach to optimise a sustainable urban travel balance.<sup>14</sup> Their planning approaches include strategies for integrated transport and land use, improved alternatives and reducing travel demand. The former involves clusters of commercial activity along major transit routes, fast and efficient reliable public transport systems, including rail in higher density corridors, along with provision for cyclists and pedestrians. Travel demand reduction measures may include traffic speed calming, parking policies (such as park and ride), transit priority, public education, pricing mechanisms, and integrated local planning.

While some suggest that higher-density cities generate fewer trips and lower energy consumption per capita than lower-density cities, comparison is often made at different stages of development. This can create a problem of spurious causality touted to support the case for public transport, when its proponents would be better off seeking niche markets.<sup>15</sup> These might include better bus services in lower-density areas, such as demand-responsive service at late hours, combined with fare strategies to enable cross-mode use. Bus-ways can have an equivalent capacity to light rail systems, often at far less cost for implementation and usage. Car users may perceive light rail as a more attractive alternative public transport option.

Australian mass transit faces funding and operational challenges to present a modern, efficient service. The issue of rail system safety, highlighted by a series of recent train crashes in Sydney and Melbourne particularly, is also one of wide concern. There are some success stories, such as the new train systems in Perth and Brisbane and low-floor trams in Melbourne and Sydney. A balance between pricing subsidy, fares and service quality may improve this situation as part of an overall policy for urban travel. It might also include charging for parking, company car usage and the use of scarce road space, so that all road users pay closer to the full real costs of their journeys.

Past attempts to create an urban transport system with greater reliance on public transport, cycling and walking have been tried through investment in new infrastructure, use of operating subsidies and attempts to create supportive land-use patterns. Success has been mixed, because a preoccupation with technological solutions has prevailed rather than interest in operating strategies, fare policies, service quality and funding sources.<sup>16</sup> Through more coordinated overall planning, a fully integrated network might be achieved.

## **Sustainable City Transport**

### **Sustainable Urban Transport**

Sustainable development is that which meets the needs of the present community without compromising the ability of future generations to have their needs met. To succeed, renewable resource use must not exceed regeneration and pollution emission must meet environmental capacity.<sup>17</sup> To achieve a definition of sustainable transportation, pollution

must be at a safe level for humans and transport users must pay the financial costs for operation, with system access provided to all. The World Bank identifies three components of transportation system sustainability as economic, environmental and social. They involve the minimisation of vehicular freight and personal travel, a full health audit of all transportation investment plans as well as independent environmental assessment, with ongoing monitoring.

One way to facilitate such planning might be to include community development goals and objectives with the expected travel activity patterns in order to achieve transport system design.<sup>18</sup> Public involvement in integrated transport planning is increasing in the United Kingdom through institutional changes at both the local and national levels.<sup>19</sup> Other examples are transport development areas that bring transport and commercial development schemes together to provide more sustainable land use and travel patterns.<sup>20</sup> These are areas of high density, mixed use development situated around transport hubs such as railway stations. This represents a trend towards sustainability plans by local governments integrated across administrative and disciplinary boundaries while involving the community. In Australia, many new private developments in inner city areas now involve higher density residential precincts combined with regeneration and upgrade of commercial districts.

Under the theme of the integration of environmental, social and economic objectives, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) provides some relevant considered approaches.<sup>21</sup> These link to the need for long range vision and consistency in policy objectives through innovation and change in city public sectors. The OECD proposes strategic policies such as coordinated land use and transport planning and community input along with private sector involvement to invest for the future.<sup>22</sup> The OECD's nine 'Vancouver' Principles for Sustainable Transport include access, equity, individual and community responsibility, health and safety, education and public participation, integrated planning, efficient land resource use, pollution prevention and economic well-being for inter-generational equity. As such, they involve consideration of many issues within one context.

In a study to identify why such sustainable urban travel policy strategies have proven so difficult for countries to implement, the OECD determined that urban travel and land use problems are not just *urban* issues. Rather, the economic, social and environmental impacts extend well beyond to *national* and regional levels.<sup>23</sup> The study proposes a package of complementary policy instruments including integration of land use and transport planning at local, regional and national levels. The package involves measures to limit growth in car usage with expansion of available alternatives, through legal, pricing and technological tools. Public consultation, provision of quality public transport, traffic management, road and congestion pricing, climate change policies and specific policy targets are elements. Institutional, legal, regulatory and fiscal barriers remain, requiring renewed policy-making frameworks in conjunction with solid, long-term political commitment. A national policy framework for urban land-use and travel policy-making can also establish links between national objectives for transport, environment and health in regional areas. Health impact assessments become part of transport policy proposals.

An integrated transport policy engages with other sectors, as a national policy goal. Thus an integrated transport policy may mean: integration between different types of transport and the environment; land use planning at national, regional and local levels; along with policies for education, health and wealth creation.<sup>24</sup> In the United Kingdom, a recent Transport White Paper 'A New Deal for Transport' suggests the need for a wide overhaul of British transport policy in parallel with European and American trends. The White Paper concluded that the rising levels of British car dependence and rapid social change, combined with the effects on health, environment and congestion have increased the need for sound urban transportation policy. In fact, local British authorities have recognised a need to link the transport and health agendas. The lack of transport access can lead to social exclusion and economic deprivation resulting in poor health.<sup>25</sup>

Legislation in the United States, namely the *Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act 1991* and the subsequent *Transport Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century 1998*, show the way ahead. They place all transport modes on an even footing for funding purposes, through 'environmental taxes', controls on land price speculation, and a national transport policy (not yet achieved here; see below). An American proponent of their Federal involvement in urban transport issues suggests that it is futile to expect public officials to pursue policies, such as congestion pricing, because entrenched political forces mainly shape urban transportation policy. In this view, only the privatisation of incumbent monopoly public transport systems will force changes from policy makers, while roads as public goods, will continue to be congested and unable to cope with growing traffic levels.<sup>26</sup>

To summarise all of these trends, it appears that a national approach to urban transport problems is valid and timely. The means of achieving it may not be readily apparent or easy, but the study of possible policy approaches is in itself worthy to identify crucial linkages and elements that feed into the current congestion conundrum. The next section investigates some city-based approaches to the problem of achieving sustainable transport in our cities.

## **Sustainable Transport in Australian Cities**

On a per capita basis, Australia is one of the highest emitters of greenhouse gases in the world, with transport (mostly road) accounting for about 14 per cent. With strong underlying demand for unpriced urban road space, suppressed by congestion, efforts that take away some traffic may only encourage other trips to take up the spare road capacity which compounds the problem. More flexible and frequent, friendly public transport has some potential to attract users and alleviate emissions. Parking policies, high occupancy vehicle lanes, road use charges, and intelligent transport planning may help reduce transport emissions.<sup>27</sup> A number of organisations and studies have addressed such issues.

Austrroads, representative of road transport authorities, produced a CD-Rom titled *Cities for Tomorrow; Integrating Land Use, Transport and the Environment* as a better practice guide and resource document. With many useful ideas, it considers all modes of transport, offering

practical implementation strategies for development planning, such as mode road sharing. It shows that private motor vehicles can sit well, within wider transport planning strategies.

An important start in Australia has been made in Sydney with the University of Sydney's Warren Centre's *Sustainable Transport in Sustainable Cities* project that has investigated six broad strategies for development, based on community values and trends. The six strategies comprise citizen engagement, appropriate new technologies use, minimising barriers to change, performance monitoring, existing system utilisation and land use optimisation. The increasing complexity of the transportation-environment nexus, combined with technological change and distributional and equity issues, suggest the need for an integrated and systematic approach.<sup>28</sup> The violation of environmental sustainable development targets by Sydney's transportation systems remains, requiring action to halt further deterioration.<sup>29</sup>

The Warren Centre's *Sustainable Transport in Sustainable Cities* project reports of 2002, make recommendations to lift public transport use in Sydney. These recommendations include the provision of several high-speed suburban train routes, complemented by an urban bus system, with a continual flow of vehicles every five minutes, rather than routing on a timetable basis. Among more specific recommendations to governments, the study states that proper integration of transport requires the right funding and pricing. The report advocates that the Commonwealth Government restructure fuel taxes to identify the allocation between transport systems, environmental impact reduction and general tax revenue.

The study also found that the Commonwealth and New South Wales governments must work together to immediately initiate the progressive introduction of congestion and environmental pricing and to develop and introduce a carbon credits system. The report states that these governments must increase incentives to use public transport and/or provide disincentives to use company cars. Market incentives may be used to encourage the introduction of more energy efficient vehicles and to reduce the number of older, high-fuel-consumption and polluting vehicles. This is not the first such review of transport with a list of seemingly daunting recommendations.

An earlier 2002 Christie review of Sydney's metropolitan rail system reveals systemic faults and inadequate capacity, which will severely constrain future operations. The study claims that half of the city would be doomed to poor public transport unless *new* train lines and bus services were activated.<sup>30</sup> With ageing infrastructure and inadequate maintenance, the current system does not cope well with a surge in passengers. However, the vacant and extensive property-air rights existing above and long many rail lines, often through expensive suburbs, suggest a means for the property market to help fund plans. With the duplication of lines at current bottlenecks, a communications-based signalling system and fly-overs for track changes, operational synergies may be achievable. There are also proposals for a distinct and frequent rapid transit service, on three lines, between centres such as the City, Parramatta, Chatswood, Campbelltown, Liverpool and Penrith. At a possible cost between \$15 and \$30 billion over 20 years, the plans do not come cheaply, although the possible involvement of private construction and operation may assist, as is

proposed by the NSW Government for Parramatta to Chatswood. The \$1.6 billion, 28 kilometre, project has been deferred several times, but may be partly completed by 2010.

With annual Sydney public transport subsidies approaching \$1 billion already, the task of efficiently managing a transit system is not simple. In Melbourne, the urban train and tram system has been franchised to private owners resulting in some service improvements. The State Government had to provide over \$100 million to assist them in early 2002, when it became apparent that the operators faced financial difficulties stemming from problems of fare evasion, contractual claims, cost of new rolling stock and ticketing systems. The Victorian Government still controls the network and monitors service levels to ensure that they meet contractual commitments, and either provides bonuses or fines to operators depending on punctuality and reliability. The rail link to Melbourne Airport, the subject of numerous studies, is indefinitely deferred. These Melbourne and Sydney examples compare with similarly sized overseas cities such as the Asian examples given in Appendix 1.

An overall systems approach involving all relevant parties is an obvious but not easy approach, that might be facilitated through Commonwealth incentives. A new means of planning may be through a strategic, systems management approach, based upon sustainable urban planning principles (ecology, society, equity, evolution and so on) now emerging.<sup>31</sup> Integrated development, combining residential estates with employment generators well linked to the wider metropolitan area may be a key to success. Local Government strategic plans would outline local visions for their areas, setting policies and targets including urban size and density, public and private transport usage, plus a range of environmental indicators. Voluntary travel behaviour change techniques appear to have had some success among local demand management strategies. These involve the personalised application of transport advice to individual social groups to foster the considered use of alternative travel modes. Combining such strategies with an efficient public transport route structure, frequent and flexible services, comfortable and safe interchanges, multi-mode fare policies and readily available route and timetable information, points to the way ahead.

## **Urban Transport Policy Comparisons**

### **Commonwealth Urban Transport Policy**

Urban transport policy is largely a State or Local Government function, but the Commonwealth could and should take a greater role in our urban activities. Australian State and Local governments face difficulties in achieving sustainable urban development, due to problems of inter-governmental support, funding, and internal decision-making processes. The 1994 meeting of the Council of Australian Governments established some objectives for its member State Governments' future role in urban development. These included the need to:



- improve coordination in urban development within and between all jurisdictions
- promote efficient and equitable pricing and charging policies for urban infrastructure
- develop better data on urban infrastructure capacity, condition and cost
- foster a coordinated approach to land supply and housing development
- advance environmentally sustainable housing and location choices, and
- contain development costs through appropriate regulation and taxation.

In 1995, the Australian Transport Council adopted the report of the National Transport Planning Taskforce for national strategic transport planning and integrated city area plans. However, with a subsequent change of Federal Government there has been little evident further progress towards the implementation of such goals for integration.

On 28 May 2001 in Darwin, the Australian Federal and State Transport Ministers released a joint strategic outcomes statement, as a special communique to outline their agreed context for policy, planning and development of a national transport system. The communique stated that Australia requires a safe, efficient, reliable and integrated national transport system that supports and enhances our nation's economic development and social and environmental well being. As such, it approached the triple bottom line of sustainability requirements namely the management of economic capital (physical and financial), social capital (human, information, networks) and natural capital (environmental and intrinsic). The statement divided the strategic, priority outcomes needed over the next decade into seven. They are:

- building Australia: national infrastructure to meet needs, nurture innovation, private investment increased and, investment targeted to national priorities
- economic development: competitiveness (efficiency, reasonable cost, reliability), employment opportunities and, flexibility
- regional development: provide community services, encourage growth, sustainable development, efficient transport chains and, build community capacity
- environment: reduced impact of transport, health outcomes improved, less damage to natural environment, reduced greenhouse emissions, national commitment to public transport, fuel efficiency improvement and, sustainable transport and travel choices
- integrated system: integration between modes, coordination across borders, links to international transport networks, effective land use planning, best use of technology, support of government objectives, increased rail freight market share and, optimised mode choice

- accessibility: balance in service provision and, reasonable access for all (individual mobility, disability access, access for remote areas), and
- safety: reduced community cost, through fewer crashes, best practice adopted, community that values safety and, cost effective coordinated regulation.

The Federal focus is on freight movement by road and rail, with to some extent urban roads supported under the Roads of National Importance funding scheme and special projects (e.g. The Western Sydney Orbital motorway). The current national transport policy has a focus on national highways and freight modes while urban public transport is primarily a State and Local Government function. Commonwealth involvement is now largely indirect (fuel, car and pollution taxes) and so avoids the practical difficulty of being involved in transport planning in a detailed way. Along with taxation and regulatory measures, the Commonwealth could help fund urban transport. Road congestion pricing is most likely a State function given prevailing legislation under the Australian Constitution.

The Australian Transport Council follows principles for national action that include commitment to outcomes, shared responsibility, consensus in decision making and uniform collective action. Various agencies work together in this national transport planning and policy framework, such as the National Transport Secretariat and the National Transport Commission. The proposal of 8 August 2002, to establish a National Transport Commission, extends the existing National Road Transport Commission's role to include rail and inter-mode activities. It is an acceptance of the greater need for planning and the inter-connection of different modes. While as a whole the framework has lofty goals, the day to day reality of a congested and unsustainable transportation system continues in most Australian metropolises. In 2002, two new initiatives emerged to tackle the crisis: Auslink and the National Public Transport Summit.

## **Auslink**

The Federal Government's approach towards an integrated national land transport framework has been made through a Green Paper: *Auslink: Towards the National Land Transport Plan*. It proposes establishing a national, integrated land transport infrastructure network of road and rail links with connections to ports and airports, under a five year rolling plan. With a national advisory body to provide strategic analysis on development, pricing and reforms, it would encourage project proposals from a wide range of organisations for Federal funding. Auslink encourages joint development of projects between governments and the private sector.<sup>32</sup>

However, Auslink is so far mainly directed towards freight logistics problems, treating passenger transport improvements as a secondary issue and urban travel as a State affair. The Auslink paper states that urban public transport is not an area of Federal responsibility. This might be a false dichotomy, given that urban public transport is often intertwined with urban freight by road and rail. The shared use of urban rail through Sydney is an example. Motoring clubs claim that the Green Paper focus on "goods before people" is a flaw and does not

indicate how existing road network deficiencies will be remedied. Without any Auslink commitment to funding, claims arise of cost shifting to the States, local government and the private sector. Clarifying transport responsibilities is necessary in order to develop solutions to infrastructure problems. It is possible that public transport enhancements may assist national objectives.

The inaugural March 2003 National Public Transport Summit in Canberra, facilitated by the Australian Transport Council and the National Transport Secretariat, may be a step in this direction. The purpose of the Summit is to develop a partnership approach between governments and industry at the national level in order to create a public transport culture and a sustainable land transport system.

### **Transport Policy Options**

There appears to be no specific constitutional impediment to Federal Government involvement in urban public transport, only the barrier of current prevailing policy. If the time is ripe for change, the means may be achieved through the Australian Constitution, sections 51, 96, 98 and 102 (see the extract in Appendix 2) which refer to rail transport. In addition, the *Australian Land Transport Development Act 1988* allows the Minister to declare urban public transport development projects and allocate monies. The Commonwealth has provided support for private sector investments in major infrastructure projects, including the Bondi Beach Rail project in 1999, that has subsequently lapsed. The last Federal Election (2000) focused in part on funding pledges for completion of the Scoresby (Outer Ring Road) Freeway in Melbourne.

In 2002, the Commonwealth funded feasibility studies such as the Gold Coast light rail investigation and the Sydney Warringah Peninsula transport issues and options study. This latter study, conducted by the Federal Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics, at the behest of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services, examined was to alleviate growing congestion in the north-east suburban area of Sydney. It specifically looked at the possibility of a road traffic tunnel to bypass the notorious Spit Bridge area. While local Federal and State Opposition members welcomed the outcome of the study, promising a tunnel, the State Government announced that widening the existing bridge and approaches was its preferred strategy.

This impasse demonstrates the stumbling block of Commonwealth involvement in State transport programs, in that joint cooperation and agreement is a necessary requirement. A further (unique) example is the dispute over the location of the Gungahlin Drive Extension Expressway past the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra. Agencies of the Federal and ACT Governments have differed in their choice of preferred alignment for the road, with an easterly route now prevailing. It will take time and effort to achieve progress, but we may note the Commonwealth role in private and public partnerships through the tax systems to support new infrastructure. Policies in related areas like housing may guide us.

A possible shape for national housing and urban development policy is to commit to clear and equitable policies that enunciate minimum standards and public access to housing, welfare services, cultural and recreational facilities<sup>33</sup>. As well, commitment to ecological principles may include domestic water storage and recycling, waste composting, wastes recycling, air and noise pollution standards, energy efficient construction and transport. It may be possible to achieve these policies through more open public processes and stronger local and regional governments. This might be the basis of alternative urban policy.

In closing, it is worth noting that on 17 February 2003, the London central area road tax scheme comes into operation. As a measure against growing congestion, all vehicles in the central area are to pay a £5 fee or be fined, as they pass the new electronic observation system. Unlike most other major cities in the United Kingdom, which have adopted central city traffic control through the 'Park and Ride' system, London had not to date addressed its congestion problem. Park and Ride systems encourage motorists to park outside city centres and use public transport therein. That the capital city of the Commonwealth of Nations has had to introduce such a scheme to protect its own future prosperity would suggest that others will not be immune. In Australia, congestion pricing would most likely be a State Government responsibility.

Australia is perhaps the only OECD country without a national policy covering urban issues, despite the need for innovative sustainable urban development programs. If one emerges, then it may be viewed with a large measure of scepticism, unless it is finalised with a minimum of delay and is seen to deliver outcomes acceptable to both urban dwellers and those who are professionally involved in the development and management of our cities. Otherwise it will remain as simply all too hard.

## **Appendix 1: Transport Strategies in Hong Kong and Singapore**

Sustainable transport is important for developing Asian cities to provide environmentally sound, socially equitable and economically viable mobility. Most major Asian cities suffer from significant air pollution, traffic congestion, poor traffic safety and lack of transport accessibility for many groups. Policies for sustainability involve all stakeholders and may utilise strategic analysis techniques to formulate clear goals and impacts. Change may occur with the implementation of the following strategies: integrating urban land planning with transport planning, transit reform and development, traffic management, special taxes and new technologies.

The above techniques have been applied in Singapore and in Hong Kong<sup>34</sup> where city wide planning is a priority, focusing on flexible public mass transit, integrated with high-density urban development. In Hong Kong, computerised area traffic control, road transit priority measures and the relatively high car ownership costs and taxes have, as in Singapore, kept car usage rates down. However, what transit proponents<sup>35</sup> ignore in their discussions about these two cities are the high capacity base motorway systems that provide vehicular links that alleviate congestion elsewhere. Singapore has seen a merger of the previously separate bus and Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) services. Construction commenced in 2002 on the MRT Circle Line, to run 34 kilometres, as an orbital line linking four radial service lines. The project will be in five stages over eight years and cost S\$6.7 (\$A7) billion. This comes upon the completion of the MRT North-East Line and a link now open to Singapore Airport and the Expo centre.

Despite Singapore's public transport first policy, it has a basic comprehensive road network with an extensive and interconnected expressway network. This, combined with an electronic road pricing scheme, an efficient mass rapid transit system, plus a quality bus network results in seventy per cent of all trips being made by public transport, significantly reducing central area congestion. The Government's goal is to ensure relatively congestion free roads, through (1) coordination of land-use planning with transport planning, (2) a basic network of good roads to maximise capacity, and (3) quality public transit such as its MRT. The Vehicle Quota System and Electronic Road Pricing restrain road demand in a dynamic manner as evidenced by current congestion levels, but with mixed effects. However, despite the rave reviews given by some,<sup>36</sup> not all good has come out of the area pricing schemes and locals express a jaundiced view about them. The schemes have led to congestion in adjacent regions with no charges, or at non peak times and, have affected car prices in ways that have encouraged the purchase of less fuel efficient or very expensive vehicles.<sup>37</sup> A visit to the city soon demonstrates its inhabitants' love of exotic motor vehicles.

## **Appendix 2: The Australian Constitution — extract**

**51.** The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to: —

**(i.)** Trade and commerce with other countries, and among the States:

**(xxxiii.)** The acquisition, with the consent of a State, of any railways of the State on terms arranged between the Commonwealth and the State:

**(xxxiv.)** Railway construction and extension in any State with the consent of that State:

**(xxxv.)** Conciliation and arbitration for the prevention and settlement of industrial disputes extending beyond the limits of any one State:

**(xxxvi.)** Matters in respect of which this Constitution makes provision until the Parliament otherwise provides:

**(xxxvii.)** Matters referred to the Parliament of the Commonwealth by the Parliament or Parliaments of any State or States, but so that the law shall extend only to States by whose Parliaments the matter is referred, or which afterwards adopt the law:

**(xxxviii.)** The exercise within the Commonwealth, at the request or with the concurrence of the Parliaments of all the States directly concerned, of any power which can at the establishment of this Constitution be exercised only by the Parliament of the United Kingdom or by the Federal Council of Australasia:

**(xxxix.)** Matters incidental to the execution of any power vested by this Constitution in the Parliament or in either House thereof, or in the Government of the Commonwealth, or in the Federal Judicature, or in any department or officer of the Commonwealth.

**96.** During a period of ten years after the establishment of the Commonwealth and thereafter until the Parliament otherwise provides, the Parliament may grant financial assistance to any State on such terms and conditions as the Parliament thinks fit.

**98.** The power of the Parliament to make laws with respect to trade and commerce extends to navigation and shipping, and to railways the property of any State.

**102.** The Parliament may by any law with respect to trade or commerce forbid, as to railways, any preference or discrimination by any State, or by any authority constituted under a State, if such preference or discrimination is undue and unreasonable, or unjust to any State; due regard being had to the financial responsibilities incurred by any State in connection with the construction and maintenance of its railways. But no preference or discrimination shall, within the meaning of this section, be taken to be undue and unreasonable, or unjust to any State, unless so adjudged by the Inter-State Commission.

Note: The Adelaide to Darwin Railway is a separate issue not mentioned in the Constitution. When the *Northern Territory Acceptance Act 1910* came into force on 1 January 1911, it was a condition of this Act for the Federal Government to complete the Darwin railway.

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