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Committee Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

To the honourable members of the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport committee,

I have no claim to expertise on transport except that I use it and am dependent upon it so it concerns me greatly. I have read a great deal of literature on Peak Oil and its consequences, and the lack of planning and foresight of my government in this area worries me. I am thankful that the Senate has instigated this enquiry.

Australia is dependent on oil for around 98-99% of all of our transportation by air, sea and rail. This is not a healthy situation in any terms. On a global scale our population is small, but per capita we are heavy users of oil products. Mining and agriculture, the back-bone of the Australian economy, rely on cheap oil.

We have followed the American model of creating spread out sub-urban environments (Dodson and Sipe, 2005) that are poorly served by electrified public transport, and more importantly we have persisted as a society with our obsession with heavy automobiles with large engines that suck-up 10-15 litres of fuel for every 100 km travelled. Our reliance on personal car transport to shop for food, take the kids to school and commute to work, has resulted in a society where people rarely walk or cycle and where obesity is a major health hazard.

While I live this lifestyle, I believe it is unsustainable, not in the future but NOW! I have to change and my government should assist, not hamper, me.

How can government assist me?

1. Public transport

While I am aware that I should catch the bus rather than take my car into the city, as a single parent and small business owner I am time short, per trip catching the bus can take 30 to 60 minutes while driving my car takes 10 to 20 minutes. Time is my most expensive commodity.

Solutions:

- Smaller busses running more frequently
- an initial subsidy until many more people are using busses and they become more viable.
- Introduce cross-city routes so that we don't need to catch two busses.

2. Fuel efficient cars

Australia is a big country and there are lots of places I need to go where public transport is not viable.

Solutions

- Put a high tax on cars which are not fuel efficient.
- Cut the tax and/or subsidise fuel efficient cars.

- Subsidise industry to develop cars which run on alternative fuel
- All government vehicles should be alternative fuel or fuel efficient – politicians should set the example (this includes Governors)

3. Alternative transport

I am a novice bike rider and am too scared of the traffic to ride to the city or my shopping centre on my bike although the distance is not great.

Solutions

- Close some roads or alter them so that there are fully dedicated bike passageways into the city from all directions. (Because we are surrounded by Parklands this would be dead easy in Adelaide.)
- Subsidise courses for people who have not ridden bikes on public roads.
- Have bike centres strategically in cities where bike riders can hire lockers to deposit their sensible shoes, helmets etc while they go about business in the city – also need mirrors so that we can remedy the effect of helmets squashing our hairdos.

4. Transport for agriculture and industry

In Adelaide we have only 17 days reserve supply (storage) of oil and in the last few years our reserves have fallen as short as 3 days. **Three days is a very short time when your oil products travel thousands of miles to get here!**

What would happen if our oil ran-out? Our food supply and distribution system – including the public being able to get to the shops – would collapse. **How many days ahead could I survive from my larder or garden even though I have an organic plot in my local community garden?**

This is perhaps the single most important consideration – how would I feed myself and my child? All other matters become insignificant when basic survival is at risk.

Solutions

- Encourage rail transport
- Encourage localised supply and organic sustainable farming
- Devise an Oil Disruption Emergency Action Plan (ODEAP).
 - Emergency fuel rationing when reserves fall below a certain threshold (e.g. ten days)
 - Priority access to fuel for public transport and food distribution and production and essential services
 - Ban use of AWD vehicles during crisis period.

I find oil a scary issue – why?

Not only are we not finding much oil, we are using more than we ever have before and our demand is growing. China and India are mechanising and their demand for oil and its by products has risen dramatically in the last ten years which means global demand has grown (see Rubin and Buchanan, 2006; ICF Consulting, 2005).

For the past two to three years the ability to produce more oil has been hampered by conflict, old oil-fields going into decline, and the lack of new discoveries. Iraq and Hurricane Katrina have both reduced global oil production, if the US bombs Iran we are likely to see further disruption in production and **oil prices will rise sharply** (Australian Institute of Petroleum, 2003; Australian Investment Review, 2006).

Australia sits at the end of a very long supply line for oil (Australian Institute of Petroleum, 2003). Oil from the Middle East takes 4 weeks (20% of supplies) to reach the west coast and from Asia to the East Coast takes around 15 days (around 40% in 2003).

We have plans to cope with fire and flood and national emergencies. Yet, we have not set up systems to cope with an oil-shock or the longer-term down-turn in global oil production that results from the decline in global oil reserves "Peak Oil". **A disruption in supply of oil will very rapidly result in a national emergency.**

There is a wealth of well-researched papers and reports on oil-supply issues and I urge the Commonwealth and State Governments to start to look at these issues very seriously – NOW. There is no longer time to plan for 15 or 20 years ahead **we need to plan for NOW!**

References:

Web resources to investigate (note: a Google search on "peak oil" will get you 2,000,000 hits):

www.aspo-australia.org.au – The Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas - Australia

www.adelaidepeakoil.com – The website for Adelaide – ASPO associated

www.peakoil.net – The global website of ASPO – See Swedish plans to reduce oil reliance by 2020,

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