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To the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee

Inquiry into the investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public passenger transport infrastructure and services

This submission addresses two of the six terms of reference of the inquiry:

- d. measures by which the Commonwealth Government could facilitate improvement in public passenger transport services and infrastructure; and
- e. the role of the Commonwealth Government legislation, taxation, subsidies, policies and other mechanisms that either discourage or encourage public passenger transport.

Introduction

Any new investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public passenger transport infrastructure and services has to take account of worldwide knowledge and concern about climate change, global warming, and use of fossil fuels that produce CO₂ emissions and the build up of CO₂ in the atmosphere.

In the US, President, Barack Obama has set an ambitious agenda to double the supply of renewable energy within three years, stating: *the energy challenge we face is so great and the consequences of inaction are so dangerous. We must act quickly and we must act boldly to transform our whole economy, from our cars and our fuels to our factories and our buildings.*

Obama has challenged the US to face: *...one of the great challenges of our time: confronting our dependence on foreign oil, addressing the moral, economic and environmental challenge of global climate change, and building a clean energy future that benefits all...*

Obama has set a number of targets to meet these challenges, that 10% of US energy will come from renewable sources by 2012, growing to 25% by 2025.ⁱ

In 2007, your Committee recommended that: *Government take into account the concerns expressed in the World Energy Outlook 2006, namely -*

- *current trends in energy consumption are neither secure nor sustainable;*
- *energy policy needs to be consistent with environmental goals, particularly the need to do more to reduce fossil fuel carbon dioxide emissionsⁱⁱ.*

We recommend that this inquiry should reiterate these principles. Two years on, there is increasing urgency for the Government to progress the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energies. Unless we take concerted action to replace our fossil fuel consumption with renewable energy our civilisation will collapse. Strategic planning and systematic government action can address the real change that is necessary, can help absolve the individual of guilt and responsibility and can engage citizens to work together to reduce their fossil fuel footprints.

Transport, Urban Planning and Design

Urban design must be based on efficient use of energy. To maximise energy efficiency, urban planning should encourage development within existing urbanised areas to ensure a better use of existing urban infrastructure, with mixed-use development in the CBD, medium-density development in middle-ring suburbs, and follow the Western Australian model of a transit led development of satellite cities.

In 2005, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage recommended that *provision of Australian Government transport infrastructure funds include provision of funding specifically for sustainable public transport infrastructure for suburbs and developments on the outer fringes of our cities.*ⁱⁱⁱ

While some progress has been made in the last four years, we recommend that this inquiry restate and elaborate on this earlier recommendation and set ambitious targets for the development of sustainable public transport infrastructure across Australian cities.

Planning and provision of public transport services in new urban areas can provide the opportunity for commuters to reduce their dependence on fossil fuels and to opt for public transport services. Transit oriented development (TOD) with mixed-use residential and commercial areas could maximise access to public transport, and encourage transit patronage. A TOD neighbourhood typically has a centre with a bus station (train, metro or tram, as appropriate), surrounded by relatively high-density development with progressively lower density development spreading outwards from the centre. TODs are generally located within a radius of 400m to 800m from a transit stop, a manageable scale for pedestrians.^{iv}

One consequence of the current economic crises is a fall in demand for petrol. While we are now seeing lower oil prices, as the international economies recover, so will demand and prices increase for both oil and gas.

Through the current downturn, international oil companies are reducing their financial exposure, winding down exploration and not increasing refinery capacity. Given that many of the major oil fields are now running low, and the cost of drilling deeper wells in new fields is growing, it is unlikely that low oil prices will last beyond the downturn, notwithstanding that consumption may fall as transport moves away from fossil fuels.

While heavy road transport will probably remain basically diesel powered for some time, we are beginning to see the end of the gas guzzlers, SUVs and four wheel drives. These will be replaced by hybrid, plug in electric cars and some gas powered vehicles. In the US, car manufacturers are now being persuaded to produce energy efficient models, and we can anticipate that increasing use of electric vehicles will lead to rising demand for electricity.

The most economical way of producing renewable power is for Governments to be proactive, to make the move to efficient large-scale solar thermal units that feed low cost electricity into the grid, rather than relying on pockets of individual goodwill. It is cheaper and more effective to have a large-scale solar thermal generator than it is for individuals to install domestic photovoltaic units that produce small quantities of electricity for their household consumption and feed excess production back into the grid. Individual installations are expensive and are ineffective in terms of achieving national carbon reduction goals.

The cost of producing large-scale solar thermal power is now competitive with coal and nuclear electricity generation. Solar thermal generation is becoming one of the cheapest sources of electricity in the USA and Europe, and the investment costs are falling. Solar thermal plants burn no fuel, use minimal water, have no air or water emissions and they create jobs.

We are seeing enormous changes worldwide. Renewables are now capable of providing the base load through the grid network. California^v aims to have 20% renewable power by 2010, and 30% by 2020. Germany^{vi} currently produces over 13% of its electrical power from renewable sources; Spain produces 7% from renewable sources.

Reducing carbon footprints between Sydney and Canberra

In 2005, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage recommended that *the Australian Government significantly boost its funding commitment for public transport systems, particularly light and heavy rail, in the major cities.*^{vii}

We recommend that the current inquiry progress this earlier recommendation, particularly addressing the potential to renew and strengthen existing heavy rail systems. For example, the rail infrastructure between Sydney and Canberra is currently under-utilised because it does not provide a service for passengers travelling to and from the two cities on business. The current train timetables are primarily designed to support passengers travelling to towns in the Southern Highlands or travelling leisurely between the two cities.

There have been campaigns and arguments to build an entirely new ‘very fast train’ line between Sydney and Canberra. This is a costly and wasteful proposal. The existing infrastructure has the potential to provide a faster, more efficient service and to significantly reduce the carbon footprint of travel between these two major centres.

With a new timetable providing a Monday to Friday, non-stop, express service from Sydney-Central to Canberra leaving around 6.00am the existing infrastructure could transport day-commuters to Canberra by 9.30am, in time for a full days work. A return express service leaving Canberra at 6.00pm could enable those commuters to get home within the day. A parallel express service could operate from Canberra to Sydney.

This new timetable would give commuters, who would otherwise fly or drive, the option of reducing their carbon footprints in travel between the two capital cities. Increased patronage could encourage new investment to realign sections of the line with new bridges across the Nepean that would succeed in shortening the journey by at least half an hour each way.

With the increase in patronage the objective should be to electrify the entire route. With minor changes and upgrades to the Goulburn – Canberra section it would be possible to electrify the entire line.

We recommend that this potential be examined by the Committee and included in the report of the Inquiry.

Transport in Aboriginal Communities

The Australian, 2 February 2009, reported that in larger Aboriginal centres in the Northern Territory, where traditional owners agree to town lease arrangements, permit-free townships will be developed with access to roads and airstrips. Some town leases have already been

signed. These new towns and villages will be the ideal locations for new primary, middle and high schools to improve educational opportunities for young Aboriginal people. They will also provide new job and training opportunities as village services such as a visitor/cultural centre, post office, art and craft galleries, a bakery, a hairdresser, a service station/motor mechanic, and overnight accommodation for visitors, are developed.

The Australia Government Intervention, requiring many Aboriginal families to redeem vouchers in approved supermarkets in larger centres has already exposed the enormous transport disadvantage within Aboriginal communities.

To support the development of new towns and villages in Aboriginal communities, two forms of transport are urgently required: development of school bus networks to bring children in to school from outlying communities around the new towns, and community transport to provide regular, reliable and affordable services for transport disadvantaged people to access shops and higher order services in the town centres.

In 2005, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage recommended that *the Australian Government provide adequate funding to develop new programmes and support existing programmes, such as TravelSmart and the National Cycling Strategy, that promote and facilitate public and active transport options.*^{viii}

Community transport programs in the Northern Territory could be developed to meet the needs of transport disadvantaged Aboriginal Territorians to provide them access to education, medical services, recreation, shopping and increased participation in community life.

Community transport is generally provided by non-government, community-based organisations in situations where conventional passenger transport services are not available or not appropriate. In some instances services are government funded or subsidised. The primary focus of community transport is on the needs of passengers rather than on the operating requirements of transport systems.

The first community transport service in the Central West of New South Wales provided a fortnightly bus service to and from a network of villages around Bathurst, enabling in the first instance, elderly residents to come to town to shop, attend medical appointments and to continue to remain in their homes in the villages. The Bathurst Community Bus has continued its operations for over 30 years and the model has been taken up in hundreds of communities in all other States.

A Community Bus service in Roebourne, WA is supported by Rio Tinto. A Community Bus service in Brewarrina operates under a Shared Responsibility Agreement between the Aboriginal Community and the Australian Government. It addresses school attendance issues and is used to transport community groups to events outside the town including sporting events and camping/cultural trips.

In NSW transport authorities recognised that there was a need to ensure effective community transport services were available, especially in rural and regional communities, since this was often the only transport option available to those who were disadvantaged.^{ix} Transport NSW minimised impediments to community transport volunteers and addressed road safety needs by requiring particular classes of driver's licence for particular types of vehicle categories, that included size and weight of vehicles.^x

In the mid 1990's Transport NSW developed and implemented operator accreditation standards for community transport groups using a bus (that is, a vehicle which seats more than eight adults) and which received Home and Community Care Program, the NSW Community Transport Program and the Area Assistance Scheme funding.

NSW operator accreditation was designed for community transport groups in recognition of their 'not-for-profit' status and the difference in service provision between community transport and commercial public passenger services. Accreditation standards for community transport operators are less stringent than those for bus operators and could provide a model for training and accrediting Aboriginal community bus drivers in the Territory.

Accreditation should also include a school service operator category to enable community members to be licensed, contracted and subsidised to drive children to and from school.^{xii} Australian Government leadership and expertise can plan and develop effective small scale transport services to support and develop Aboriginal schools and communities.

We recommend that the Committee examine and advocate the specific development of these new programs in rural and remote communities across the Northern Territory to help realise Mick Dodson's call for every Aboriginal child to be enrolled and attending school by Australia Day 2010.

Yours faithfully



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ENDNOTES

ⁱ Obama and Biden New Energy for America Plan. 2008

ⁱⁱ *Australia's future oil supply and alternative transport fuels*, February 2007, Recommendation 2, para 3.145.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ib id* Recommendation 7, page 73.

^{iv} TODs can be seen across the Singapore Mass Rapid Transport system that circumnavigates the island; in the new towns developed in France, Sweden and Japan after the Second World War, in communities built on reclaimed land in the Netherlands and in exurban developments in Denmark.

^v In central California, Ausra is developing a 177 megawatt solar thermal plant that will create 350 skilled jobs on-site during construction, and an additional 100 permanent jobs in the area.

^{vi} Germany, with far less solar radiation than the Territory, has subsidised development of solar power plants by private enterprise. It also subsidises domestic photovoltaic units, buying back the excess produced at levels that provide an incentive for people to install them. People in Germany now rent other people's rooves to produce an income from solar power. The cost of Government support to the renewable producers is charged to all consumers in their tariff.

^{vii} *Sustainable Cities*, August 2005, Recommendation 6B, page 70.

^{viii} *Sustainable Cities*, August 2005, Recommendation 10, page 81.

^{ix} In NSW more than \$36.5 million in recurrent funding has been allocated for 2008-2009 to 134 community transport service providers under the Home and Community Care Program, the NSW Community Transport Program and the Area Assistance Scheme. See NSW Ministry of Transport Website. Local and Community Transport Programs page: <http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/lact/programs.html>

^x See Transport NSW *Review of the Regulatory Framework For Community and Courtesy Transport Services* in NSW Report. May 2002.

^{xi} In rural areas of other States school bus operators can be local farmers/farmers' wives/residents who have their drivers license and their vehicle certified and regulated for that purpose.