

Submission to Infrastructure Australia

From Yarra Campaign Against the Tunnel (YCAT)

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Greenhouse Emissions and the Role of Infrastructure Australia

Global Warming looms as the great challenge of our generation in Australia and for all future generations of human beings across the planet. Industrial development and economic growth have produced great prosperity for many but at a heavy cost to the natural environment which cannot be sustained. Of particular concern is the still growing levels of greenhouse emissions which are transforming the world's climatic patterns through global warming. The melting of Arctic sea ice indicates that global warming is far further advanced than previously thought and that we are very close to reaching tipping points for runaway disastrous climate change. The time available to invest in greenhouse reduction infrastructure is short because runaway climatic changes will soon divert infrastructure resources to mitigation activities such as sea wall construction, desalination plants and population relocations.

Australia bears great responsibility for this global crisis in two respects: firstly as one of the worst per capita polluters and, secondly, as one of the countries most vulnerable to changing weather patterns, particularly in relation to drought and water scarcity. However, previous Federal and State governments have allowed lobbying from vested commercial interests within heavily polluting industries to determine policy approaches. This has delayed action to reduce Australia's emissions. The time has come for Australia to take decisive measures to transform itself into a carbon neutral economy.

The primary role of *Infrastructure Australia* should be to facilitate this transition by funding only those infrastructure projects specifically and credibly designed to substantially reduce Australia's greenhouse emissions. Infrastructure Australia should also be forbidden to fund any infrastructure projects which will increase greenhouse emissions. Increasing emissions is against Australia's national interest and is financially irresponsible as the costs that future generations and Australian Governments will incur in dealing with runaway climate change will be far greater than strategic investment in transition to a zero-carbon economy now.

Urban Transport

Australia is one of the most heavily urbanised countries in the world with some 90% of its population living in coastal capital cities. While some cities, such as Melbourne, have extensive nineteenth century rail networks, most urban development since the Second World War has been based around the car as the primary mode of transportation. It is not surprising, then, that greenhouse emissions from transport contribute nearly 20% of Australia's total emissions. Emissions from transport must be reduced through a rapid transition to more efficient and sustainable forms of mobility, such public transport, particularly the

extension of urban railways, cycling and walking. Freight must also be transferred from roads to rail.

Public Transport has the potential to reduce greenhouse gasses in urban areas. While cars will still be required in non-urban areas, and electric cars may become viable soon, until the electricity grid is decarbonised there is no benefit in switching to electric cars.

Decarbonising the electricity grid should be an Infrastructure Australia. We cannot rely on a carbon trading scheme weakened by the lobbying of the worst emitters to achieve these goals and will require investment in new technology.

Tim Flannery has argued in *The Weather Makers* that decarbonising electricity production should be the first priority, followed by decarbonising transport and agriculture, and finally air travel. Mass public transport in urban areas is a cost-effective investment for governments with excellent returns on investment for the economy, society and environment.

While substantial and rapid reduction of greenhouse emissions should be the primary objective in reorienting Australia's infrastructure priorities, there are four other significant factors to consider in relation to urban transport infrastructure. These are: oil scarcity, congestion, health and social inclusion. A strategic response to each of these factors will also involve shifting from dependence on private motor vehicles to sustainable and efficient modes of transport. Thus, the same infrastructural investments required to reduce greenhouse emissions will also deliver benefits in responding to oil scarcity, congestion, health and social inclusion.

Oil Scarcity

Exploitation of global oil reserves has either peaked or is about to peak. Just as we must make radical changes to avert disastrous climate change, so we have no choice but to adapt to a world of oil scarcity. Urban transport is a key sector to be affected but is also easier to address than, agriculture, air travel or rural transport. This is because known alternatives to car based cities are shown to be successful elsewhere.

In the outer suburbs of Australian cities, and rural areas, there is very high dependence on cars as the primary mode of transportation. This places a high and inequitable economic burden on many low income households who have few transport choices. This situation will worsen rapidly as oil scarcity forces global prices to continue their steep rise. Already the impacts of higher oil prices are being seen in substantial changes in commuter behaviour in Melbourne, where public transport patronage is rapidly increasing. These increases in patronage are occurring despite neglect from private operators and government planners and are not accompanied by proportionate improvements in services.

Congestion

Melbourne and Sydney are becoming increasingly congested due to decades of neglect of public transport and the persistence of road-based approaches to transport infrastructure. The assumption that building more roads can solve congestion is not supported by any evidence and is directly contradicted by the experience of Melbourne and Sydney. The only proven way to avoid congestion in cities is to move people efficiently through public transport. Therefore there is an urgent need to reinvest in urban passenger rail systems. A road-based approach does not represent a credible basis for transport planning and lacks community support, yet still retains disproportionate influence at a policy level. This discredited transport planning paradigm must give way to the more sustainable options based around public transport which have been successful in other countries.

Infrastructure Australia should not fund projects which are based on extension of road networks as these will merely entrench car dependency and ensure increased congestion. Rather, *Infrastructure Australia* should prioritise the extension of urban public transport to service the outer suburbs of the major cities where residents have no alternative to cars.

Health and Social Inclusion

Australians are among the most obese people in the world due to dietary lifestyle factors. These include inadequate exercise and sedentary travel, work and leisure patterns. Re-engineering Australian cities, particularly outer suburban developments, is required to ensure that physical infrastructure promotes physical activity, particularly walking and cycling as the primary modes of local transportation. Such changes will also facilitate the development of stronger, more inclusive communities.

Conclusion

Australia faces an urgent challenge to make the transition to a zero carbon economy. Urban transport is a key area where rapid changes can be made very easily to achieve this goal, as models for less car dependent cities are proven around the globe. The changes envisaged in this submission also address other significant challenges: oil scarcity, traffic congestion as well as health and social inclusion. These multiple benefits make the paradigm shift in transport planning away from the car and to public transport, cycling and walking very cost efficient indeed. There is also very strong popular support for these measures. Indeed, most Australian Federal, State and Local Governments envisage this kind of shift but have lacked the resources for substantive implementation. The opportunity now presents for *Infrastructure Australia* to implement an ambitious program of investment in urban public transport which would ensure that Australia can avert catastrophic climate change by transforming its cities into truly sustainable places to live, work and visit.