

Transporting Melbourne to a sustainable future

Speech by Janet Rice to public meeting on the proposed East West road tunnel, Brunswick Town Hall, 13 April 2008

Sir Rod Eddington's report into East West transport is very complex with lots of information to digest and get confused by. But it can be viewed quite simply.

The fundamental issue is Eddington's world view.

For all the talk of big change and big investment in big infrastructure, the Sir Rod Eddington view of the world is business as usual. In particular despite recommending the expenditure of \$20 billion on transport infrastructure he doesn't recognise that Melbourne's transport infrastructure needs of the next fifty years will be shaped or influenced by either peak oil or greenhouse. Dealing with both is subsumed to the overriding imperative of 'personal mobility'.

He is happy to leave market forces and personal self interest to guide our future.

I have a world view that is fundamentally different. I believe that governments and communities have a critical role and responsibility to shape a sustainable future.

Eddington pays lip service to greenhouse and peak oil of course. However it's almost small print that his plan will do nothing for greenhouse. Imagine that: spending \$20 billion on transport infrastructure in an era defined by climate change and admitting that your plan does nothing to address it.

Because he concludes, despite massive evidence to the contrary, that we can tackle both issues by just shifting to low emission, fuel efficient, or alternative fuel vehicles.

It's a nice dream of course. And you have to believe it to believe that business as usual will work.

Nothing needs to change, other than we need massive amounts of new road infrastructure to cope with the demand for all those trips. The tunnel is completely consistent and completely necessary with population growth if you presume as Eddington does that the current mode share of nine car trips to every public transport trip continues.

He concludes that we need a rail tunnel too not because he sees a shift in the proportion of people using public transport but because population growth will mean increasing

numbers of trips. Particularly in the northern and western growth areas where the population is growing fast, and local employment isn't increasing along with it.

It's a simple equation. Population multiplied by number of trips per head equals total amount of road capacity required. Predict and provide.

The second simple thing to remember when trying to make sense of Eddington's report is that whatever new transport infrastructure is provided it's going to cost money.

A lot of money. Eddington is proposing that we spend \$20 billion – pretty much half on roads, half on pt – which conveniently makes it 'balanced' of course!

And if, as is certain, that a new road tunnel would be largely paid for through a public private partnership arrangement then it will still cost. PPP's in fact cost the community more than other means of financing such projects – they are not free money – they are the infrastructure equivalent of 'buy now pay nothing for three years'.. The community pay through the nose through tolls to use the infrastructure over the next 30 years, and the total capital cost is far more than it would be if we paid for it out of the state's own coffers or loans.

If there is money to spend and we want to spend it to achieve both a viable and efficient transport system and tackle greenhouse and peak oil, then the evidence is clear- spend it on improving public transport, because there's an awful lot of catching up that we have to do, and don't waste money on building roads that we won't need in the future.

The other thing about 'free' PPP's is of course by using them you lock yourself into being driven by what is going to make money for the financiers – which as we know is as much traffic as possible thank you very much. With CBD off ramps thank you very much – regardless of what's being said now.

The one big assumption

As I've already referred to there is the one big underlying assumption in Eddington's report that everything else relies on. This assumption is wrong. This is what proportion of trips we should be aiming for and therefore planning to be made by private car and truck.

Eddington is schizophrenic on this. On the one hand he endorses the government's target of 20% of motorised trips on public transport. But critically his road demand estimates don't factor this in. They presume mode share stays much the same as today: around 90%.

On the one hand he says we shouldn't have any more road capacity coming into the CBD, because we want these trips to be made by public transport. But this would mean a significant increase in mode share – - above the current 70% of trips, because of

population growth. Particularly from the western suburbs where over 30% of employment is either in the CBD or the inner city. If this continues, that means lots more trips into the CBD not being made by car.

Climate change

Eddington's assumption is wrong because of our responsibility to be tackling climate change. Here the evidence is very clear. We have a responsibility to be reducing our transport carbon emissions. Currently transport is responsible for over 14% of Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions, and this proportion is growing. It's the second biggest sector after power generation.

I look at the world and our place in it and am passionate about us taking on our global responsibilities in partnership with other nations to do something about it. The science is telling us that globally we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60% by 2050 to have a 50% chance of avoiding dangerous climate change. That means in Australia, because our emissions per person are the highest in the world, we need to reduce our emissions by around 90%.

It's a pretty important aim. The lives of millions probably billions of people depends on us doing so. I was chatting at a party last night to someone who has just returned from a trip to Vietnam where 25 million people who live in the Mekong delta area and provide rice for a far greater population, are all threatened with total inundation with a one metre sea level rise. Who are we as affluent Australians to say that we just can't be bothered to change the way we do things – sorry our personal mobility is just way too important to and the rest of the world can just suffer the consequences.

So what should we be aiming for? Let's start with 80 per cent of motorised trips by car – the govt's 20 2020 target. Then surely 70% of motorised trips by 2030 is quite achievable with decent public transport even given Melbourne's current shape and low density outer suburbs – and an increase in trips by walking and cycling. And then 60- 40 – which would mean in overall trip terms something like 40% by car, 30% by public transport, 30% walking and cycling.

If the 40% of trips by car were made by low emission vehicles, if our trains and trams run on renewable electricity, then this would set us up well to reduce our carbon emissions by the required 90%, and would tackle the decreasing availability and sky-rocketing cost of oil head on.

A proper plan

I want to see the government produce a plan for transport in Melbourne that has greenhouse and peak oil front and centre.

The government's recently released 'wedges' report, which shows ways to possibly reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60% by 2050, relies on low emission vehicles - (and not meet the 60% target by the way). This report dismisses mode share as being insignificant – mainly because they only presume a 10% mode shift – that is less than the 20 by 2020 target!

Of course low emission vehicles are going to be important, but to rely on them to reduce our carbon emissions relies on them being available, affordable, quickly. Remembering also that it takes 18 years to turn over the Australian car fleet.

It is also highly inequitable – it means for low income households to be able to reduce their transport carbon emissions, they have to be able to go out and buy a low emission car rather than being able to get to where they need to go on fast efficient reliable affordable public transport. And its doubtful that a model of all of us ditching what are otherwise perfectly good current cars to purchase low emission vehicles would actually result in an overall decrease in carbon emissions when you consider the embodied energy in the cars – they take an awful lot of carbon to produce!

So what would a transport plan for Melbourne with a 60-40 split look like?

It would presume that most journeys to work to activity centres – not just the CBD – would be made by public transport, walking or cycling. It would presume that a lot of other trips – visiting friends, going to parties, going shopping, kids visiting their friends would be made by public transport – just like they are in many, many other cities in the world, and are to a much greater extent in the inner suburbs of Melbourne where public transport and cycling paths are relatively good.

It would presume that just like 70% of journey to work trips to the CBD which are now public transport, walking and bike trips, that 70% of journey to work trips to the inner city – to Carlton, Brunswick, Footscray, St Kilda, Richmond would also be made by public transport, walking and cycling. We would build a public transport system that would enable this to occur. It would presume public transport was a network and managed as a network– not a radial service. That means more tram and bus services connecting activity centres, running every 10 minutes at least throughout the day and night, 7 days a week.

And you know, if we had such a plan, there wouldn't be a need for a road tunnel. It would be surplus to requirements. It would be a total waste of \$8 billion if it was built.

The rail tunnel

Do we need the proposed rail tunnel? We will certainly need to shift many more people by rail than we currently do – but I reckon the jury is still out just how much more we can get out of current system by running it more efficiently – which by the way the just announced timetable changes are doing.

But, that said I don't think that's the thing we should be arguing about. Given population growth, given increased mode share we will need more public transport capacity into the inner city.

Is it the proposed tunnel? The tunnel looks like a pretty good idea to me, but I'm not a rail expert. I think the proposal should be submitted to a review by international experts. It may be just what's needed, but for \$9 billion we want to be sure.

What I do know though is that we can't afford to wait for the tunnel before undertaking the urgently needed outer metropolitan rail extensions, duplications and electrifications to the urban growth boundary.

Both the Sunbury and Bacchus Marsh electrifications would in fact create capacity because instead of running diesel country trains that hold 250 people like we do at present, they could be replaced by trains that hold 1000 people. And the extensions to South Morang- Mernda, and Aurora- Epping North feed into a section of the system that currently isn't as stretched as the western suburban lines are.

In conclusion...

Eddington's process has produced a lot of information for transport advocates, geeks and others to sit down and digest .

But the message I want to end on is: yes read it all. But don't get distracted by it.

Come back to thinking about the world you want to leave your children, your grandchildren. And get active. And get political. Enrique Penulosa when he was in Melbourne recently stressed that transport decisions are not technical engineering decisions. They are political decisions and they are hard fought political decisions. We can shape our future. I invite you to join me, join us in shaping it together.

Janet Rice
0439 363 846
janet@janetrice.com.au
www.janetrice.com.au