The Urban Ecology NEWSLETTER

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UEA Update

Convener's Report

The 2009 AGM was held on the evening of Tuesday, October 20th. A good number of members turned up and following a short socialising session Paul Downton presented another of his inspirational talks, titled ***"Are We There Yet?"*** accompanied by a slide-show.

The AGM was then conducted in a brisk manner, there being no comments or queries from the floor about last year's minutes or the financial report.

Elections were held, resulting in the same board being re-elected with one new member, Patrick Greene. Therefore the board is as follows: Wayne Anthoney (Convener), Anne Hamilton (Treasurer), Michael Robertson (Webmaster), Norm Rohde, Andrew Tidswell, Jane Manifold, Sue Gilbey, Patrick Greene. A very good board and we look forward to generating some interesting new projects in the coming year.

We lack funds to employ office staff for the hours we need, though small parcels of money are coming in, in response to Norm Rohde's hard work in doing grant applications.

Wayne Anthoney
Convener

Letters to the Advertiser from UEA (not published!)

1. "Superway"

$812 million for a 4.8km section of elevated road! So much money for such a small section of South Road that is generally free-flowing compared to other sections of that road.

The issue however is not which bit of South Road needs a bucket load of money, but where best to spend such money for the long term benefit of our transport requirements.

Given the pressures that climate change and peak oil will put on all forms of transport in the future it would seem foolishly short-sighted to spend so much money on less than 5km of truck highway to reduce travel time by up to 7 minutes, at least until it clogs up in the future.

Far better to put the money towards more long term sustainable transport options such as rail, including the by-pass proposal from Murray Bridge to Gawler, and additional public transport infrastructure, especially associated with the TODs.*

** Transport Oriented Developments*

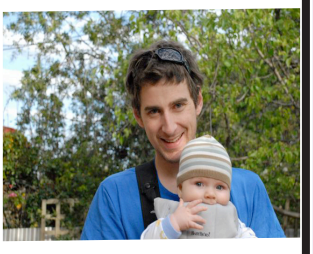
2. Property Council of Australia's "vision" for Adelaide in 2036

It comes as no surprise that the Property Council of Australia's "vision" for Adelaide in 2036 is a short-sighted vision, given that their focus is on property and development (The Advertiser 26 Oct 09), but it is greatly disappointing that there is no hint in the report of any concepts of sustainability, green building design, energy conservation, vehicular traffic reduction or indeed any of the strategies that individuals and governments are slowly coming to realise must be put in place if greenhouse gas emissions are to be reduced.

Some facts: Cities generate half of the world's greenhouse gases – about one and a half million tonnes PER HOUR world-wide in fact. Adelaide is a typical western city. Australia is per capita the world's worst polluter. Populations are becoming more and more worried about atmospheric change. THEREFORE, it is up to governments and organisations such as the Property Council of Australia to think in more radical terms than just endless, mindless, ultimately unsustainable growth. It can't be 'Business as usual' any more.

New UEA Board member Patrick Greene

Patrick is a business development manager with Brisbane based renewable energy company *Ingenero*.



He specialises in setting up community based solar programs and is also developing some large scale solar projects for commercial and industrial users. Patrick took up his current role when he moved to Adelaide last year. Prior to that he worked as a sales director for a company in Singapore, and lived in London for 5 years before that working in the film and television industry.

Patrick grew up in Sydney and studied politics before converting to a science degree in Geo-Ecology and Environmental Management. He recently completed a Graduate Certificate in Sustainable Business Management from the University of South Australia. He is interested in the public policy of climate change, energy efficiency, renewable energy and permaculture. He lives with his wife and 8 month old son William in Beulah Park.

The views expressed in this Newsletter are not necessarily those of the editorial team or Urban Ecology Australia Inc.

UEA Update (cont)

UEA RESPONSE TO 'PLANNING THE ADELAIDE WE ALL WANT'

Progressing the 30-year Plan for Greater Adelaide

Urban Ecology Australia submitted a detailed response to the SA Government draft document that was recently published for public comment. A summary of the UEA assessment and response is as follows:

Sustainability and climate change resilience is one of the three key objectives in the Plan, however much of the detail in it fails to address this objective seriously. This should be the main driver and criteria for all strategies, policies and targets and for all decision making.

New housing locations. The Plan still envisages 50% of new housing occurring in fringe expansion areas initially declining to 30% by 2038. This is still a very large amount of fringe development and urban expansion and contrary to many of the principles listed in the Plan (eg compact city, transit focused and having climate change resilience). Sustainable development requires urban consolidation and minimal or no expansion at the edges.

Increasing density in particular areas to create a more compact efficient urban form requires the provision also of public open spaces, accessible to such communities for biodiversity, wildlife, recreation, urban farms, community gardens, and stormwater management. Adelaide is a heavily vegetated city which must be retained albeit in a different form. This is not addressed in detail in the Plan. The present policy of allowing ad-hoc subdivision of large blocks into smaller blocks will not create a compact, sustainable, and liveable urban form.

Increasing public transport use and integrating good public transport into the Plan will require a major change to the nature of public transport provision, not merely upgrading the existing light & heavy rail network and tinkering with timetables and bus routes. A proposed increase in the use of public transport to 10% by 2018 is far too small a target and will make little difference to the vision for sustainability and climate change resilience. Radical improvements in public transport must occur at the same time as urban consolidation, increased density and TODs are developed to change the culture of transport use.

The Plan needs the will to be bold and develop visionary designs to succeed, especially in the first major development towards a compact and carbon efficient city. It needs to foster excellence, meet the vision and also be popular, or nothing will ever follow. It should contain big aspirational targets for the 30 years, not merely the good intentions contained in the Plan, and it must provide interim targets that can be regularly monitored.

Increased and improved housing options are required, including affordable housing, better environmental performance, high quality design, a wider mix of designs and then incentives to ensure that they dominate the market. Incentives are also needed to encourage good environmental retrofitting of existing houses. Consider competitions as well as mandatory performance standards and concessions for above-standard designs.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and providing climate change resilience requires higher density developments, smaller housing area footprint per person and significantly improved environmental performance from new and existing buildings. The Plan does not provide any strategy for how such imperatives will be implemented.

Community consultation is essential to ensure that the Plan is really "the Adelaide we all want". Developing excellent examples showcasing desirable development and highlighting where these have been done successfully elsewhere is important, as is listening seriously to community views and being flexible to deal with local issues – a new compact, efficient urban form is not a 'one size fits all' solution. Governments traditionally have been poor at community consultation, imposing their own plans or allowing developers to do the same; and they wonder why there is often a community back-lash.

Incentives for compliance and penalties for non-compliance are required if any of the vision, principles and general good intentions are to be met. Too many documents in the past have contained guidelines and desirable intentions but have generally been ignored as 'business as usual' prevails. The Government must treat this document with much more seriousness and rigour than any in the past.

Overall the Plan is an important document…

however it needs to be locked up…

or we will just get business as usual with a bit of window dressing.

Overall the Plan is an important document and contains some noble vision, objectives and targets that can change the way Adelaide develops for the future, however it needs to be backed up by committed Government policy action, local government support and good community consultation or we will just get business as usual with a bit of window dressing.

Andrew Tidswell

Is There a Technology Resistance? -

By Peter Crabb

The driving force behind the anthropogenic destruction of Planet Earth is locked inside our skulls. Neuroscientists are just beginning to identify the neural networks of the ***Technological Mind***, but one thing is certain: the irresistible impulse to use tools is the product of natural selection over the last 1.5 million years, and so it is probably more deeply ingrained than even our impulse to use language. Our most tool-savvy ancestors were the ones who best survived the daily threat of predators and were able to exploit food resources out of reach of their hapless untooled neighbors. A feedback loop between tool use, survival, and reproduction drove the evolution of the species in the direction of complete dependence on technology. As descendants of those clever animals, our evolved brains find it difficult even to imagine life without technology. And so our Technological Minds drive us daily to use tools to do virtually everything we want to do, often to the point of pathological compulsion and environmental devastation. When a large proportion of 7 billion Technological Minds has access to vast tool kits of energy-guzzling, polluting, and dangerous technologies, it is entirely predictable that the nest will sooner or later become fouled.

http://www.culturechange.org/go.html?546

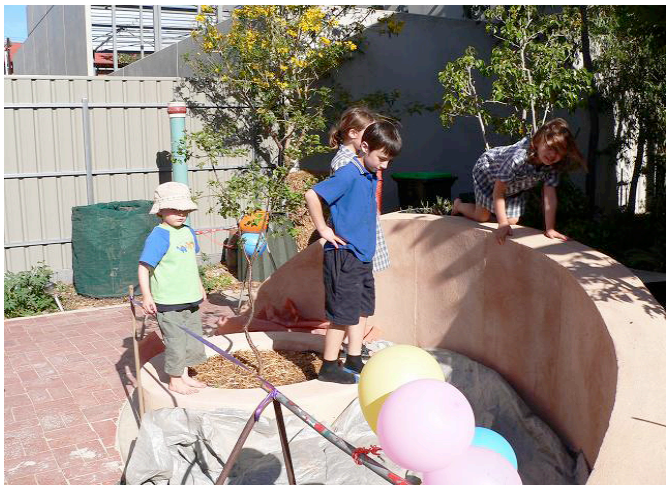
Christie Walk Update

The latest project at Christie Walk has been the building of the sandpit. The sandpit was 'launched' on Friday October 30 with children and grandchildren playing in the sand, and supported by adults, many of whom had worked on the making of this beautiful 'art piece'.

The community is now preparing for the launch of the Christie Walk Story Wall on Friday November 27 (5pm) by the Right Honorable the Lord Mayor, Michael Harbison.

I f you have (or have not!) received an invitation to the Launch please ring Urban Ecology on 8212 6760 to confirm your attendance. All UEA members are very welcome!

The youngest community member is one year old Tenzin seen here playing in the sand.



Waiting for the action!

The sandpit is uncovered. The tree in the centre is an apricot tree!

Can we make a difference? Check these sites

www.avaaz.org

- an international site with 1.26 million members worldwide encourages viewers to open a website and add their name to a petition. For example the latest from Avaaz:

'1 in 6 people worldwide go hungry everyday. With the recent financial crisis, poverty is skyrocketing, but our governments are failing to take significant action.

In a few days, leaders meet at the World Food Summit in Rome to tackle this growing crisis. The best solution is funding to boost sustainable agriculture in poorer countries, but France, Germany, UK, Italy and Japan are backing out on a $20 billion promise made earlier this year.

Millions of lives are on the line and this is our chance to hold them to their word. Sign the petition below and it will be delivered directly to world leaders and through a spectacular stunt at the Roman Colosseum on the eve of the Summit:

http://www.avaaz.org/en/world_hunger_pledges

The world produces enough food to feed everyone. Yet the number of people suffering from chronic hunger across the planet has reached the record-high figure of 1 billion this year.'

Readers of this site are alerted to take action on something that is happening in the near future.

www.getup.org.au

- an Australian site that again urges readers to take action in a variety of ways. The latest appeal was for donations to place a full page ad in the Australian on Monday 16 November to lobby politicians about the importance of investment in clean-energy jobs.

Many of the appeals for money or for signing a petition need urgent action. Here is the latest example:

"UPDATE*** Amounts raised in excess of the clean-energy jobs ad will help fund our volunteers' Canberra delegation, and an impersonator delivering the speech we want our PM to give, as the ad launches.***

As MPs make their way back to Parliament next week, confront them with a huge newspaper ad countering the polluter lobby's fear-mongering and showing that cutting emissions creates jobs.

Parliament decides our fate on climate change this fortnight so make sure they see your call for investment in renewable energy to create clean-energy jobs."

When last checked more than $100,000 had been raised for this appeal. GetUp has more than 335,000 members.

Both Avaaz and GetUp make it very easy to lobby – and make a difference!

Food Connect Adelaide starting soon – what is it?

On Sunday November 1 an enthusiastic crowd of growers and potential customers gathered at Clarence Park Community Centre for a very busy 4 hour intro to Food Connect.

Main speaker Robert Pekin, who started FC in Brisbane several years ago, explained that FC is a 'paddock to plate' delivery system for fresh produce, similar to other systems overseas such as Riverford Farms in UK. From a simple 'one box suits all' it has grown to thousands of boxes a month, offering various choices of fruit and veggies.

Everything is:

- guaranteed fresh and in season (picked ripe, not force ripened or from cold storage)
- comes from within a 5 hour drive (cutting those food miles)
- delivered weekly to a convenient local pickup point near you
- can be ordered and paid by phone or internet, and
- costs around supermarket price or better.

There are also dairy products, a 'cheese club', and extras like olive oil and chickens. More than that, most of it is organic, and growers are carefully rated on a variety of criteria. In return, growers get a fairer price, prompt payment, and more reliable sales. They can't be undercut by subsidised cheap imports – and less produce is left to rot in the paddock or on the tree.

No wonder Food Connect in Brisbane has 28 staff and gets more customers every week! And now Food Connect Adelaide has been formed as a separate local entity along similar lines, and expects to start deliveries in February 2010. Customers can try it out with a minimal commitment for as little as 4 weeks.

Food Connect is a 'social business', passionate about being fair and responsive to all its stakeholders – growers, staff, shareholders and consumers. It aims to be transparent, equitable, efficient, and to keep improving. All boxes are recycled, and they have achieved a zero waste target for produce arriving at their Brisbane distribution centre, with any leftovers going to local cafes for soups, or to their own worm farms.

While Central Market devotees may not find all this as attractive as the busy young suburban mums who are typical FC customers, I think this new Adelaide venture deserves our support – at least in spreading the word. Consider the following:

- 28% of Australian greenhouse gas emissions are due to household food
- growers currently get scarcely 10% of the price we pay in supermarkets, and many Australian farmers have already gone out of business
- An estimated 50-60% of the food we grow is currently wasted, and
- Australia is a net importer of fruit and veggies!

There's a lot of room for improvement! So tell your friends about Food Connect Adelaide.

For more info see:
www.foodconnect.com.au (see the successful Brisbane system in detail)

www.foodconnect.com.au (the new Adelaide website – register interest and receive updates as they prepare to start deliveries).

Simon Fisher

The story of Bird - a lesson in preserving biodiversity

He was picked up on a cold, wet day on the corner of Russell and Sturt Streets, a tiny, shocked little bird.

When he arrived on my doorstep I knew that if he was to be given a chance to live, my life would have to be put on hold for a couple of weeks, but who could resist the plea of a good friend who knows of my love of birds?

So began my three weeks with Lucius Bird.

The first two days I was not sure that he would make it, but when I forced the tiny beak open to feed him and give him water he swallowed strongly before settling back to sleep, indicating a will to live.

His home was a shoebox with a small cloth 'nest' to make him feel secure. Weak and sick as he was, he never fouled his nest, but would come out after a feed, and reverse to toilet at the far end of his box.

On the second day he suddenly got the idea that I was trying to feed him, and the tiny beak shot open at the offer of food. He needed to be fed every half hour, and a heated wheat bag kept his bed warm. At night I would to get up around 2am to reheat his wheat bag, to be rewarded by a small contented twitter.

We soon settled into a routine. He needed feeding at least every hour, followed by removal of the paper serviettes on which he toileted.

As he grew stronger he would sit on my finger while I stood at the front door looking onto the garden, and the small head would turn as he observed the calls and movement of the birds that come to the garden to feed.

If I went out for a while I would close his box and he would sit quietly until he heard the door open, when he announced his presence and state of starvation in no uncertain tones!

On day seven he made his first weak attempt at flight, crashing into the window a metre away from his box. Unhurt, he found a place on the windowsill where he could see outside more clearly.

By the end of the second week he was flying strongly, and knew to avoid windows and any indoor obstacles. The gift of a small bird cage helped with his management, but he would not be closed in the cage, using it only to go to his bed, and to feed and bathe. He had a daily bath in a small dish of water and was definitely getting closer to the inevitable day of freedom, but still unable to feed himself.

Opening and closing the front door became very difficult as he was flying freely around my place, while all my furniture was draped, and I was cleaning bird poop in the most unlikely places!

On Sunday 18th we both knew that he was ready to go. He had been picking up his own food for two days.

At 9am I opened both balcony doors, he left his perch and flew toward me, noticed the open doors, and without a backward glance flew off.

I watched as he flew toward Morphett Street, rose higher, turned and flew back before heading strongly toward Gilbert Street.

Who said ***'Parting is such sweet sorrow"***?

Yvonne Maher

[Tree martins, deprived of their nesting hollows in native trees, now nest in the hollow metal bars on electricity pylons and can be seen flying high above our streets in small family groups.]

Capital City Committee Forum
Adelaide as a Sustainable City

Five UEA members attended this event on 5th November along with a large array of invited participants from state government, local government, industry and environmental organisations.

The 'forum' bit comprised only a twenty minute question and answer session at the end of three hours of presentation. The presentations generally were quite specific and focused on technical and engineering initiatives to reduce fossil fuel consumption in South Australia.

Nylar Sarwar described her current research for the SA Government into so-called sustainable bio-fuels such as micro-algae, those that don't compete with land and other crops for food production. They not only provide a fuel source but can also be used as feedstock for plastics, cosmetics and fertiliser as well as treating wastewater.

The forum generally missed the real issue about sustainability

Alina Dini from Carnegie Mellon University, Adelaide described the next generation of electric cars that will be more efficient, have greater battery capacity and ever cheaper. All major world car manufacturers have committed to electric vehicles in their range and the industry plans to have 500,000 such vehicles on the road in Australia by 2013 – that will be an interesting target to watch.

So far we had heard of some technical fixes that would allow business (almost) as usual. Then we heard about some initiatives in the built environment that could make a difference to the nature of urban development.

Developer **John Culshaw** described his new Point Boston development at Port Lincoln and new Majestic Hotels projects in the city. Point Boston is a 75 hectare development on the outskirts of Port Lincoln for up to 1,000 dwellings under community title, with a strong component of environmental initiatives including solar powered street lights, water capture storage & re-use (to 90% of consumption) and houses to meet ESD design requirements.

(The Point Boston website shows some typical designs that meet the project Building Design Guidelines. They vary from 130 to 300 square metres in area, have no north point indicated, but at least do show some serious consideration of sun shading and appropriateness to the local environment.)

John is one of very few developers who have a commitment to more environmentally sustainable buildings, but as he admitted, it is hard to bring about change in a conservative property development industry.

Graeme Hopkins, landscape architect and passionate promoter of green walls and roofs presented a snapshot of what has been done and is being considered around the world to introduce more green elements into city planning and building design. The important message from Graeme is that we can create small and local initiatives for wetlands, stormwater detention, food production, 'cool' island effects, biodiversity and shade; particularly important as we increase the density of the city and deal with the impacts of global warming.

(It is a pity that he didn't include showcasing Christie Walk as a living example in Adelaide that is doing these very things).

Bruce Taper, Director of Kinesis (a firm that develops strategies for companies and governments to reduce carbon emissions) provided a change of pace from relying on the technical and engineering fixes for our current situation. He asked the obvious question: "is it sustainable to build a 'green' house in an unsustainable development?" and followed it by the cautionary "we must be careful not to 'greenwash' by claiming that a building is solar powered if it only generates a few percent of its electricity from PV panels". A lesson for governments here.

He also warned not to assume that building rating schemes will give good environmental performance, as most 20+ year old houses are using less energy than current 5-star rated ones. We need a new generation of homes (and other buildings) that are inherently better designed. This was enlightening coming from the person who helped develop the BASIX rating tool used in other states.

Bruce reminded us (not that UEA members need such reminding) that 75% of global greenhouse gas emissions emanate from the built environment of cities and this is where the greatest opportunity for savings exists.

In summary

What people got out of the forum obviously depended on their own area of interest and understanding of what is meant by a 'Sustainable City'.

It was encouraging that the Minister for the City of Adelaide The Hon. Jane Lomax-Smith who was a panel member at the Forum, made some encouraging comments, having got past the usual 'look how good we are' rhetoric, including ***"we need to be careful to take initiatives that are really worthwhile . . .in terms of environmental impact"*** and ***"Adelaide has advantages of climate, scale, culture and heritage to do things really well"*** and finally ***"we need to do a whole range of things to make Adelaide more sustainable".***

The forum generally missed the real issue about sustainability. It is not about new fuels, electric cars, green roofs and better house design, as useful as these are on our journey, but they can sidetrack us from the real issues.

I am reminded of an article I re-read recently by Dr Tony Fry of the EcoDesign Foundation who wrote in 2001, "The frequent reduction of sustainability to worthwhile instrumental actions – like stormwater management, organic farming or recycling – is doing 'the cause' harm." Such actions reduce sustainability to "off-the-shelf simple solutions and technofixes, and while they may be worthwhile acts of damage limitation and may deliver useful knowledge they are not securing the ability to sustain".

Andrew Tidswell

Adelaide Thinkers in Residence

Thinker in Residence Laura Lee

Laura Lee, Professor of Architecture at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, USA was a recent Adelaide Thinker in Residence, focusing on the value of design and the impact of the built environment on the quality of life for South Australians.

She gave a public lecture on 14th October as a final activity prior to finalising her report

The public lecture was entitled "Sustainable Futures: An integrated design strategy for South Australia" and one would have been encouraged to attend to hear something about an environmentally sustainable future. However it was generally about sustainability of good design, the processes needed to ensure good decision making and integrated strategies.

I guess a sustainable future for SA is predicated on good planning and design, and getting the processes right. She did recommend that we need to change the current culture where planning and development seem to be paramount to one where good design leads and instructs the other two.

Once she had got past the congratulatory messages to the current State Government (at times it sounded like a government press release) she did provide some memorable quotes that are relevant if we are to plan for a future which is sustainable:

- 'Sustainable places will come from creating spaces that have value and a sense of belonging for people, leading to their curiosity and enjoyment; and not from technology'.
- 'We must be planning for resilience, which is beyond sustainability'.
- 'SA has strong community desire for environmental sustainability. The challenge is to harness it as a series of positives (such as become the world expert in water management) rather than as problems (we don't have enough water)'.
- 'Re-branding can change perceptions such as replacing "medium density housing" with "a life of diverse inhabitants"'.

In Laura's short time in Adelaide she understood some of the unique features we possess, such as a strong alliance and collaboration between environmental experts, a willingness to explore new initiatives, often only 2-degrees of separation, a strong research base and an 'engine' of skilled people.

She did observe some of the constraints we put on ourselves such as: "South Australia is like a series of episodes without a story; of symphony instruments without an orchestra. It needs the threads being drawn together". With that she seemed to understand the contradiction that exists here: on the one hand a willingness to explore new creative solutions to problems, but on the other hand a frustrating conservatism that stifles innovation from being realised.

At the time of writing this article her final report is still awaited, but it will be on the website in due course - *www.thinkers.sa.gov.au.*

Andrew Tidswell

Thinker in Residence Fred Hansen

Fred Hansen is world leader in the field of transport and integrated land use. He is renowned for his innovative approach to the provision of public transport.

Fred gave his inaugural address on October 7 to a large crowd in the Allen Scott Auditorium. He had only been in Adelaide for a week so was not prepared to offer advice! But he did describe some of the actions taken in his home town of Portland, Oregon.

Fred is General Manager of TriMet, the public transport provider in Portland and a former Deputy Administrator of the US Environmental Protection Agency under President Clinton.

Portland is internationally recognised as one of the finest exponents of a sustainable and integrated public transport system.

Fred believes that land use and transportation must be fully integrated if we are to provide for the mobility needs of our citizens as well as addressing global climate change.

Fred's residency began on 2 October with a three-week visit, with a further visit scheduled for late in 2010. A number of us look forward to his findings and advice for Adelaide

Joan Carlin

Objectives of the residency (the following is from the website *www.thinkers.sa.gov.au.*)

We aim to grow Adelaide as a liveable, sustainable and productive city that creates opportunities for its people. This residency will challenge traditional development patterns through debate, critical thinking and innovative action on integrated transport, urban form and planning.

During his residency Fred will focus on three key objectives:

- Encourage community debate and demonstrate the benefits of well-planned higher density development along transport corridors and at key transit-oriented developments.
- Develop practical principles and processes for the design of quality, character, and higher density developments. The purpose is to integrate transport networks and land use planning to advance economic, environmental, social, education and public health outcomes.
- Provide advice and/or recommend delivery and implementation strategies for key transit-oriented developments and along transport corridors.

There are other articles that we recommend you read on p6:

Remember Jan Gehl?

Green Transport

News and Notes

Thanks to Sharon Ede and her 'Opaleye' summaries, Jane Manifold, Margaret Rohde and Simon Fisher.

Many of the items in this newsletter come from references in OPALEYE which is described as :
"Scribings and postings from an Antipodean sustainability transmitter and sponge, advocate of the just and ethical, appreciator of the unusual, humourous and odd…"

Open the on-line archive *http://opaleye.blogspot.com/*. This is also where you can read the whole articles that are edited here.

Greener transport?

Remember Jan Gehl?

There is an interview with world-renowned architect and Urban Designer Jan Gehl in Adelaide Review, written during his recent return to Adelaide. Gehl says that:

"I envisage that Adelaide will be one of the cities that is overripe for a bicycle culture."

"I worked with improving cities for many, many years. I worked here (in Adelaide) in 2002 and we are going to start a new study shortly to pick up on the old ones, to build up the momentum like we have done in Melbourne, Perth and Sydney. Next thing we can see is that cities are really turning around and realising that 50 years of cheap petroleum is over and we cannot go on. We have to do something else."

Green transport

Excerpt from Globe & Mail, 13 October 2009

'From his second-floor office overlooking a Baltic-fed canal, Andreas Rohl ponders a daily question: ***How can he make life hell for the car drivers of this Scandinavian capital?***

Mr. Rohl, you see, is the bicycle program manager for the city government of Copenhagen. And it's his job to get more of the almost two million Danes living in Greater Copenhagen out of their cars and onto bikes.

Copenhagen is the cycling capital of Europe, and possibly the most bike-friendly city in the world. An amazing 37 per cent of those living in Greater Copenhagen use a bicycle to get to work or school every day. That number jumps to 55 per cent if you look only at people living inside the city limits.

Imagine this: Traffic lights that were once co-ordinated for car speeds were adjusted to cater to the pace of the average cyclist, allowing them to travel long distances without ever getting a red light. To increase safety, stop lines for cars are five metres behind those for bikes. Cyclists get a green light up to 12 seconds ahead of cars to help increase their visibility.

Surprisingly, few cyclists in Copenhagen wear a helmet, a matter that local politicians often debate. But there has been a general reluctance to make them mandatory because it might discourage people from riding. ***"The benefits of cycling, both environmentally and healthwise, outweigh the risks of riding without a helmet", Mr. Rohl said.***

[Is this food for thought in Adelaide? - the addition of sets of bikes in pods throughout the city as in Paris, Barcelona and many other European cities would be difficult in Adelaide because helmets are compulsory and need to be fitted to the rider. This takes time and cannot be automated and the bike needs to be returned to the pod from which it was borrowed. Could cyclists riding just in the city be exempted from this rule?]

What is the Adelaide trend?

A recent briefing memo for Lord Mayor and Councillors reports some encouraging signs such as '***a move toward more sustainable transport modes, with the share of journey to work by walking, cycling and public transport rising from 35% to 42% from 2002 to 2006.***' Also ***'a large increase in trips by bicycle - almost 50% increase from 2003 to 2008'.***

These results seem to differ significantly from those presented in a talk by Paul Mees (RMIT Melbourne) recently in which his figures (from census data) seemed to show everything going backwards in use of public transport and bicycles in all states.

What should we believe?

Carfree cities - an idea with legs

Excerpt from Worldchanging, 2 November 2009

'A quarter of households in Britain – more in the larger cities, and a majority in some inner cities – live without a car. Imagine how quality of life would improve for cyclists and everyone else if traffic were removed from areas where people could practically choose to live without cars. Does this sound unrealistic, utopian? Did you know many European cities are already doing it?...

Carfree UK...was set up to promote European-style car-free development in the UK. 'We are not anti-car, we are pro-choice. We have recently run public meetings in London to set up a new car-free association for London, which is beginning to look at areas of the city from which traffic could be removed. We know considerable potential demand exists for traffic-free housing in London, and probably in a number of other major cities. Where else do you think might be suitable?"

Smart Commuting Could Save 4.6 Million Work-Hours per Day

...or we could just set about redesigning cities that allow people to live and work and play in closer proximity...take fossil fuels out of the urban equation [ref: peak oil] and none of our current urban forms and norms would be possible!

Excerpt from Greener Computing, 10 November 2009

'Out of the 26 million hours a day British workers spend commuting to and from work, 4.6 million of those hours are wasted, according to a survey released this week during National Commute Smart Week. The survey found that, perhaps unsurprisingly, 62 percent of commuters want to spend less time traveling to and from work; and although workers want to embrace flexible schedules and remote work options, but their bosses are the biggest obstacle to doing so.

More News and Notes

Some business leaders no longer have their heads in the sand!

Panic Warning as Oil Supplies Run Low

Excerpt from the Sydney Morning Herald, 11 November 2009r

'The world is much closer to running out of oil than official estimates admit, says a whistleblower at the International Energy Agency who charges it has been underplaying a looming shortage for fear of triggering panic buying.

The senior official says the US has played an influential role in encouraging the watchdog to underplay the rate of decline from existing oil fields while overplaying the prospects of new reserves.

The allegations raise serious questions about the accuracy of the organisation's latest World Energy Outlook on oil demand and supply - to be published yesterday - which is used by many governments to help guide their wider energy and climate change policies.

This year's report is believed to repeat the prediction in last year's that oil production can be raised from its present 83 million barrels a day to 105 million barrels. External critics have argued that this cannot be substantiated by firm evidence and say the world has already passed its peak in oil production.

Now the "peak oil" theory is gaining support at the heart of the global energy establishment.

Greening consumer behaviour

Excerpt from The Guardian, 16 October 2009

'Climate change catastrophe can be averted by "greening" consumer behaviour rather than by curbing economic growth and mass consumerism, leaders of some of the world's biggest businesses including Tesco, Coca-Cola and Reckitt Benckiser have argued.

They urged politicians to be braver at the Copenhagen talks on climate change in December, saying voters could be persuaded of the need to act. The degree of focus on climate change by the business people would have been impossible five years ago. But some in the audience angrily insisted that they underestimated the need to slow consumerism.

Sir Terry Leahy, the chief executive of Tesco, told the conference that combating climate change was now the number one priority of his company, and announced that his multibillion-pound business would be zero-carbon by 2050. "Survival is the issue, not just for our business, but the entire planet," he said.

The president of Coca-Cola, Muhtar Kent, warned politicians: "Act now or you will fail, and so will the world. Politicians need to think like businesses and think about the long term."

In the words of George Monbiot, who also writes for The Guardian:

'Green consumerism is a substitute for collective action. No political challenge can be met by shopping.'

Designing for different gardening

Sky vegetables

Excerpt from GreenBiz, 7 October 2009

Keith Agoada's young company, Sky Vegetables in San Francisco has a vision both simple and elegant: green rooftops, not just as gardens, but as urban agriculture hubs for herbs and edible greens, utilizing off-the-shelf hydroponics and aquaponics equipment in greenhouses to grow food to sell for profit within the community.

Says Agoada: The economic potential of what we're doing is mind-blowing. But from a more general perspective, we'd be a catalyst in trying to localize food systems and localize vegetables, and protein perhaps as well."...

Sky Vegetables has unlimited potential to fill a hunger - not just for nutritious edibles, but for a simple but powerful model of food production that feeds all of our appetites for creative and conscious capitalism.

Living walls and roofs

Excerpt from Architecture & Design, 4 September 2009

'Green roofs are being added as "a piece of fluff" to finished designs when they should be integral, according to an expert.

Architects need to stop adding living walls and roofs as an afterthought and start integrating them in the first stages of design, Sidonie Carpenter, president of the not-for-profit *Green Roofs Australia*, said.

He emphasized that real sustainable benefits come from integrating green roofs back into storm water management, grey water recycling, increasing capacity of solar output, reducing energy costs of running air conditioning units.

He suggested that Australia is lagging behind the rest of the world when it comes to green roofs and living walls. [he referred to Graeme Hopkin's work, and the roof garden at Christie Walk]

"Many cities offer grants and subsidies for green roofs, and there is a mounting body of evidence that they can work as profit-generators for building owners and developers," says Carpenter.

The roof garden at Christie Walk now boasts a pond