

Petrol is disappearing, you can depend on it

Petrol dependency, not petrol pricing, is the issue, writes **Harold Scruby**.

HOW extraordinary is it that the NRMA would choose International Car-Free Day as the day to hold its petrol summit?

Time will prove that this summit was little more than a political motherhood stunt to make the incumbents look good, just prior to the NRMA elections.

It will achieve very little. In their communiqué, there was not one word about reducing car dependency and not one word about investment in public transport.

Instead they recommended: "A longer-term commitment by governments that any additional revenue gained through higher fuel prices should be spent on the road network and regional tourism promotion and infrastructure."

In simple terms, they want more roads and more cars.

And presumably more members for the NRMA.

This is macadamised madness. The NRMA should have called a summit about reducing car dependency. That's the major issue facing the nation today.

This summit is all about getting petrol prices down, so cars are cheaper to run and we can have more of them.

Do they not see the writing on the wall?

The Europeans understand the problem and spend heaps on public transport and developing smaller, more fuel-efficient cars.

The Americans keep building wider and wider freeways and larger and larger gas-guzzling SUVs.

According to Robert Samuelson of the Washington Post Writers Group: "What America needs most is a steadily rising oil tax. Coupled with stricter fuel economy standards, higher pump prices should push reluctant auto companies and American drivers away from today's gas guzzlers. That should be American policy."

"The deafening silence on this crucial subject from the White House, Congress and the media is a sorry indicator of national shortsightedness."

"Two-thirds of the world's proven



LONG HAUL: The result of the petrol summit will be more roads, more cars, even more demand for fuel.

oil reserves lie around the Persian Gulf. The countries there, led by Saudi Arabia, now provide about a quarter of today's oil supply. The flow could be interrupted at any time for many reasons – terrorism, war, domestic upheaval or deliberate cuts.

"A prudent society would respond to this unavoidable insecurity. The traditional US car companies, General Motors, Ford and Chrysler, are the least prepared for change."

Petrol is a scarce and finite resource. It's an international product with rapidly increasing international demand.

As demand increases and supplies are reduced, prices will go up. End of argument.

Put too much pressure on the oil companies and they'll take their precious product elsewhere.

Australian cities are built on urban sprawl and have become car-dependent as successive governments have delayed and ignored the implementation of sophisticated public transport

systems, while spending the money on cluttered roads and freeways.

As such, we are now caught in the middle of a major transport problem.

In June 2002, the highly respected Warren Centre at Sydney University completed a major study entitled *Sustainable transport in sustainable cities project – healthy transport, healthy people*.

It found that "a sustainable city needs sustainable transport that encourages health-supporting, not health-damaging, travel behaviour".

"Increased car use has displaced active transport – walking, cycling and using public transport. Current transport planning and infrastructure foster habitual car use. Consequently, almost half the population is exposed to substantial health risk from physical inactivity . . . The most effective and enduring way of increasing our physical activity is by using 'active transport' rather than driving."

The report also found: "All the urban air pollutants that have an impact on health arise from

combustion of fossil and petrochemical fuels, predominantly used by motor vehicles.

"More than a third of the greenhouse gas emissions from a typical Australian household are from transport – the opportunities exist for most people to reduce their motor vehicle-related use."

We must shake off our Western cultural arrogance and imagine the price of petrol and the effects of global warming if the people of China and India were to be as car-dependent as us.

Petrol prices would go through the roof and the bitumen would melt.

We must start setting an example and reduce car dependency immediately, before it's too late.

We therefore encourage all Australians to participate in Walk to Work Day on Friday, October 7.

Unblock some arteries, relieve the congestion, put your feet first and join the walking class heroes, but most of all – leave the car at home.

Harold Scruby is chairman of the Pedestrian Council of Australia.

So it goes: one step forward, two steps back

I LIKE talking to Jim Comerford. There aren't many people with minds as sharp, notwithstanding the fact that he's in his 90s.

Talking to Jim reminds me that many things in human affairs follow cycles. Economic cycles, political cycles and cycles in all sorts of social trends and attitudes.

Jim saw men march off to the First World War and he saw them come back – many of them cynical about the giant forces that had used them as fodder for cannon.

He saw the hungry days on the Hunter coalfields in the 1920s, the savage social conflict of the lockouts and the Rothbury Riot, the grinding agony of the Great Depression and the murderous madness of the Second World War. When I listen to Jim's recollections of the massive tides of events of the 20th century I have to shake my head and acknowledge how little I know.



Greg Ray

There were days in Jim's lifetime when the idea of paid holidays for workers was considered a communist plot. When communities survived by forming self-help networks and mutual co-operatives to feed and supply themselves, sharing profits as dividends that used to function like holiday pay when many workers took their two weeks' unpaid leave at Christmas.

Things got very tough in the Depression and some people who couldn't pay their rent or their mortgage were evicted. Riots often followed, and one of the fiercest was at Tighes Hill.

At Weston only one eviction ever took place. Jim said a bank turfed

out the family of a miner who couldn't keep up his loan payments.

"The house was instantly declared 'black' by the unemployed, the miners and the business people," he said. Nobody would rent it or buy it and it stood empty until after World War II when the bank had it dismantled.

"Nobody else sought evictions in Weston after that," he said.

To help evictees a NSW Unemployed Homes Trust was set up. Those facing eviction were given a load of building materials and a blueprint. "A block of land was no problem," Jim said. "People gave them away to be free of rates liabilities. The local unemployed then assisted to put a house up. Some of those homes still exist."

Jim has mellowed a lot. He was a firebrand union leader in his time, a passionate believer in a socialistic brotherhood of man that would

unite the world in peace, prosperity and co-operation.

"I will never give up my socialist convictions," he told me this week. "But I no longer have the certainty I had in my starry-eyed youth."

Jim has two great-grandsons and he worries deeply about the world they are going to live in.

"Greed and capitalism will destroy the world and the human race," he said, pointing to the profit-motivated destruction of the earth's natural environment as the clearest evidence supporting his pessimistic prophecy.

"They are destroying the basis and the means of existence in their hunger for money."

"There must be a better alternative, but I no longer think I know what it is," he said.

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Topics today



Today's fact

Malamutes and huskies can pull sleds 500 kilometres in a single journey.

Today's word

Immure (imm-yur): To enclose within walls, to shut in; confine, to imprison.

It happened today

From our files – 1938: A loud explosion startled everyone in the vicinity of Rothbury Estate but police were unable to find any trace of damage.

Today in history

1846: The planet Neptune is discovered by German Johann Gottfried Galle.

1912: Silent film director Mack Sennett's first Keystone Cops film is released.

1939: Death of Sigmund Freud, Austrian psychiatrist and founder of psychoanalysis.

1952: Rocky Marciano becomes world heavyweight boxing champion when he knocks out Jersey Joe Walcott in 13 rounds.

1965: Roma Mitchell is appointed as the first female judge in Australia.

1972: President Ferdinand Marcos declares martial law in the Philippines.

1973: Juan Peron and his wife Isabel are elected president and vice-president of Argentina.

1976: South Africa decides to allow multi-racial teams to represent the country in international sport.

1990: Swiss citizens vote to ban the construction of nuclear power plants for the rest of the century.

1993: Sydney is chosen over Beijing as the site for the 2000 Summer Olympics.

1999: Indonesia says it is ending martial law in East Timor immediately.

Born today

Augustus Caesar, first Roman emperor (63BC-14AD); **Mickey**

Rooney, actor-entertainer (1920-); **Ray**

Charles, singer-composer (1930-2004); **Julio**

Iglesias, Spanish singer (1943-); **Bruce**

Springsteen, pictured, US rock singer (1949-); **Lote**

Tuqiri, Australian rugby player (1979-).



Odd Spot

A man convicted of stealing a 115-kilogram beaver statue in the US state of Ohio has been ordered to guard 25 similar beaver statues and help pay to install tracking devices on them.

Today's text

Happy are those who work for peace; God will call them his children. **Matthew 5:9**