

# URBAN TRANSPORT 2004

## Dresden 19-21 May 2004

### Conference Report

#### *The Conference*

“Urban Transport” is the title of an international conference held every year to share the latest findings in urban transport research. The 2004 Conference was the tenth in the series and was held in Dresden, Germany. Philip Laird and I had submitted a paper called “Transport, the Environment and Health in Australia”, based on a position paper we had prepared for the National Committee on Transport, and expanded somewhat to make it suitable for an international audience.

#### *The Attendance*

There were 94 delegates from 28 different countries. The heaviest representation came from the US, UK, Japan and Italy, with about ten delegates each, insufficient numbers to dominate proceedings. The geographical breakdown of delegates is shown in Table 1.

Region	Number of delegates
Continental Europe	43
Asia	20
North America	14
UK	10
Other	7
All	94

Table 1: Geographical Background of Conference Delegates

The “Other” group included three Australians – myself and two University Professors, William Young from Monash University and Lal Wadwha from James Cook University. He, with an Italian professor, was the conference co-chairman.

An academic and male background predominated among the delegates, as Tables 2 and 3 make clear.

Professional Background	Number of Delegates
Academic	70
Other	24
All	94

Table 2: Professional Background of Conference Delegates

Gender	Number of Delegates
Male	88
Female	6
All	94

Table 3: Gender Breakdown of Conference Delegates

## *Presentation*

Philip Laird had been unable to attend the conference, and I presented our paper. It was scheduled for the first session of the first day and therefore drew a good audience. Technical support was very poor, with every speaker (myself included) having difficulty with the provided laptop and projector. I ended up using the back-up device of OHP transparencies which I had also prepared, but many speakers had not taken this precaution and much time was wasted during the conference as they wrestled with the technology.

Our presentation was less academic and more practical than most, and from feedback I got during question time and afterwards this was much appreciated. "It's good to see that some engineers are aware of the bigger picture" was a typical comment.

## *Proceedings*

Some 86 presentations were made, with the conference being divided into two parallel sessions. Hence inevitably everyone had to miss half the presentations, but all delegates were given a tome of nearly 1000 pages where almost all the papers produced for the conference were published.

Papers of particular interest to me included:

### Environmental pollution and tradeable transportation rights in Europe

Some rather idealistic ideas about tradeable transportation rights, originating from Belgium. They seemed to take little account of the usefulness of revenue streams in the real world.

### Energy and pollution control opportunities for Lahore (Pakistan)

#### An analysis of Ahvaz bus services system ... (Iran)

#### Urban air pollution: input from car parking places (Latvia)

Several descriptions of third world conditions in which it was obvious to me that the main problem was finding the funding to do anything significant.

### An evaluation of future energy conversion systems including fuel cell

A description of fuel cell technology from a senior Japanese professor who took Toyota's "Prius" as a state-of-the-art vehicle. I asked whether his description of "the ideal vehicle for the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (low emission, energy efficient, running on renewable energy etc) did not describe a *bicycle* rather better than it did a Prius, but he affected not to understand my question.

### Road pricing and urban freight transport: practices and developments from the BESTUFS project

#### Future trends and driving forces in transport and logistics

These looked at trends in urban transport which showed huge growth, especially in road freight (as in Australia), but all trends seemed to have an underlying assumption that energy would be available with roughly the same conditions and price as today. See further comments under "Conclusions".

### A new method of transportation in Mongolia: Wing-In-Surface-Effect Craft

Another Japanese professor spoke about the development of an ekranoplane to serve the Mongolian steppes. The video he showed of his prototype revealed an extremely erratic vehicle and he never described how pastoral nomads or even cattle would react to the approach of such a (full-sized) vehicle flying towards them at a height of ten metres and a speed of several hundred kilometres per hour.

### Transit for small urban areas

A Canadian academic had some very interesting ideas but where I felt that NSW was several years more advanced already.

### Explaining the suspect behaviour of travel demand forecasters

Tony Brinkman from Wayne State University in Detroit did an excellent presentation of his work on investigating bias in travel demand forecasting. I had written a review of this already, and it is expected to be published in a forthcoming issue of *Transport Engineering in Australia*

### Planning fundamental urban traffic changes: experiences with the Groningen traffic circulation scheme

A Japanese postgraduate student restored national honour in my eyes by describing the introduction of the (now) world-renowned pedestrianisation of central Groningen (in the Netherlands) in the 1970's. It was obvious that its introduction had nothing at all to do with the technical merits of the scheme and everything to do with power structures – with moves by the various political parties on the local council, by the national transport minister, by the police, by the chamber of commerce, by the local newspaper etc. Very illuminating.

### Public transport developments in integrated transport and land use planning in the three largest Australian cities

Lal Wadwa gave a presentation on integrated transport planning in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, based on government-issued planning documents of a few years ago. I pointed out that Sydney has moved on (backwards) since then.

### *Networking*

A large part of the value of a conference like this lies in the out-of-session networking opportunities, and this was no exception. It was particularly useful, from a purely national point of view, to establish a much better rapport with the two Australian academics. If a funding source can be found it is clear that Tony Brinkman would be more than willing to repeat, in Australia, his North American research on modelling ethics. Here quite different conclusions could potentially emerge.

### *The Venue*

The city of Dresden was chosen for the conference because the restoration of some of its pre-war architectural splendour is seen as a good showcase for a European urban renaissance. It was however noticeable that much shoddy communist-era architecture remained, that much of the city's extensive tram network used obsolete Czech trams and I was told that part of the reason why so many citizens were enjoying life on the streets

was because they were unemployed but still had a traditional East German socialist attitude that “the State would look after their needs” whether they worked or not.

### *Conclusions*

Most of the delegates at the conference seemed to have been content to spend their time researching very specific issues of limited real world value. From conversations outside the sessions it was clear that all were aware of some of the major issues transport is facing – none bigger than the coming tightening of oil supplies - but tended to see this as a research topic for someone else to deal with. I believe that our paper, while it did not dwell on the approaching problem, did at least offer a practical way forward in lessening its force. This is a position that the National Committee on Transport should exploit to the full in coming months.

It is clear that Australia has little to concede to other countries in the quality of our transport research, although we are constrained both by difficulties of communication over long distance and by limited resources. It seemed to me that in other countries which do not suffer these problems – and notably Italy – much effort is wasted in developing thoroughly obscure projects which would never excite any conceivable Minister of Transport in Australia.

As an update on what is happening around the world the conference was very useful. A UK delegate commented that in the UK people hardly ever hear about what is happening beyond the national border, never mind the EC. My view is that Australian transport engineering professionals do take a much broader approach and need the feedback from conferences like this to monitor current trends.