

## “TRANSPORT – THE NEXT 50 YEARS”: Conference Review

### 1. Introduction

This conference was held in the Christchurch Conference Centre from July 25 to July 27 2007. Its main sponsor was the NZ Ministry of Transport and it was held in the recognition that the ways of the past would have to be abandoned soon for climate change reasons.

There were 656 delegates on the published list, plus an unknown number who wished to be kept off it for privacy reasons. Tables 1, 2 and 3 present a simple analysis of the delegates. “Industry” (Table 1) is intended to include lobby groups, transport operators and users. The Transport Minister Annette King was on the list and stayed for two whole days before an emergency took her back to Wellington; the NZ Prime Minister Helen Clarke was not.

Table 1 : Delegate breakdown by function

Regional/Central Government	210	32%
Industry	205	31%
Consultants or lawyers	110	17%
Local Government	96	15%
Academics	28	4%
Media	6	1%
Other	1	-
ALL	656	100%

Table 2: Delegate breakdown by geography

New Zealand	600	91%
Australia	24	4%
Western Europe	14	2%
Asia	12	2%
Other	6	1%
ALL	656	100%

Table 3: Delegate breakdown by gender

Male	529	81%
Female	127	19%
ALL	656	100%

### 2. Keynote speakers

The conference was organized into six plenary sessions (two per day), each with a “keynote” speaker, plus 84 papers delivered in 4 parallel sessions. Thus it was not possible to attend all presentations other than the plenary ones.

**Ian Goldin**, Director of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century School of Oxford University, was the opening speaker. He looked at “future trends and shocks”, of which he saw two principal ones – climate change and global pandemics. He did not think Peak Oil was very significant. He warned against believing any forecasts.

**Kevin Trenberth**, originally from Christchurch, is the Head of the Climate Analysis Section of the US National Center for Atmospheric Research and a principal author of the recent IPCC Report. He presented the science behind global warming in a compelling way and reinforced the message that “Global warming is unequivocal.”

**Jack Short** is the Irish Secretary-General of the ECMT, an EU Think Tank. His topic was what have we learned from the last 50 years. Transport had expanded as trade had expanded – the world was now much more productive than it was 50 years ago, thanks to globalization, and he expected this to continue (although more slowly than in the past). Don’t believe forecasts was one lesson. Like Ian Goldin, he thought our natural ingenuity would get us over Peak Oil fairly painlessly.

**Kent Jeffries, Don Chen, Ken Tremaine, Owen McShane** formed a Panel to discuss “Smart Growth”. Jeffries and Chen were Americans who did a lot of work for developers; Tremaine was an Auckland consultant and McShane was apparently included because he was responsible for a popular rural development that “broke all the rules”. The other three ended up ganging up on him, and the message that came across strongly was for the public and private sectors to talk instead of adopting adversarial positions.

**Paul Little**, the Australian MD of Toll Holdings, did a good job of promoting his company and explained its recent action in separating its logistics interests (Toll) from its infrastructure interests (Asciano). His presentation finished with an emotive video to promote road safety at level crossings.

**Bart Kuipers** from the Netherlands reviewed the future of the shipping industry. It had been revolutionised over the last 50 years by petroleum technology and the advent of the container, but nevertheless was now in crisis because of the “5 C’s” – containers, China, congestion, CO2 and (supply) chains. He looked at possible innovations over the next 50 years to overcome these – he foresaw more small ports and small vessels, more automation.

### **3. Other presentations personally attended**

My paper was in the short “Energy” stream. **Liz Yeaman** kicked it off, extolling the virtues of biofuels, followed by **me** with “What will our vehicles run on?”, an attempt to bring the findings of the Senate Inquiry to New Zealand. Or at least, the findings of the Interim Report, which were all that was available when I wrote the paper. I hope I left little doubt that no technology would come along to save the day, but the Kiwis are not very familiar with peak oil and seemed rather more interested in the papers immediately before and after mine. I was followed by **Darren Baars**, an environmental bureaucrat, who described the draft of the New Zealand Energy Strategy. After lunch **Mike Duke**

described how they had spent \$NZ150,000 developing a prototype one-wheeled electric car (what's wrong with electric bicycles?) and pleading for more R&D money now that the concept was "proven", and a **Belgian economist** described how maritime emissions in harbour were estimated. Not very interesting to me (more about SO<sub>2</sub> than CO<sub>2</sub>). I missed the last of the energy papers, on preparing for the hydrogen economy in New Zealand, as I don't think it's going to happen and I heard enough about hydrogen at the Australian-Government-sponsored conference in 2005.

The aviation industry was well served by **Justin King** from IATA, but the lasting impression was one of good management sustaining the unsustainable for longer than it deserved. **William Peet** from ONTRACK then made a case for the future of rail, then I switched to the land use/urban design stream to hear a comparison of fringe areas Campbelltown in Sydney and Northwood in Christchurch. Not a word about Campbelltown's role as the centre for the housing further out, or about its structural jobs imbalance which forces many to travel towards the CBD by train to work. **Nick Buchanan** (GHD) said he was going to compare metropolitan strategies for the two areas but didn't mention the "City of Cities". **Ina Meyer**, an Austrian economist, demonstrated convincingly that biofuels were insufficient to meet any targets. She used two modeling approaches which differed enormously in their findings (0.7 Mt of CO<sub>2</sub> versus 24.3) but these were presented with a straight face as the Low and High estimates respectively.

**Peter Stopher** (UNSW) seemed to adopt a highly simplified view of congestion (by comparing the present with the future, thus making the claim that full buses made congestion worse, and making some questionable assumptions about public transport spare capacity (much greater off-peak than peak)). **Jim McNeill** from GHD made a big song-and-dance about how they established a vision for a study of Timaru (without considering that some of his audience – ie me – had no idea where Timaru was) but the part of the study where that vision will be used is still going on. An economist, **Kel Sanderson**, tried to show the benefits of high urban density (mainly greater labour productivity).

A highlight of the second day was an unannounced address by the NZ Prime Minister **Helen Clarke**. It is the first transport conference I have been to deemed sufficiently important to warrant a visit by a Prime Minister. She reiterated that "more of the same" wasn't an option for New Zealand.

On the last day I listened to **John Parkin** from the University of Bolton give a good technical presentation about planning for the bicycle (he saw signage as the main problem – I see it as end-of-trip facilities). He was followed by Councillor **Celia Wade-Brown** from Wellington, a long-standing champion of walking. I then switched to the land use stream to listen to a guy called **Nick Carroll** from Taupo, on "Why Planners and Engineers should talk". This did not live up to the promise of the title as it was a fairly straightforward account of structure planning in a rural area. Finally **another Belgian** reported on a survey that their university had done to see whether making public transport free would cause much mode change among commuters (it wouldn't, thanks to the prevalence of company cars in Belgium), prompted by the intriguing finding that students

of French-speaking universities, where there are few concessions, make more use of public transport than students Flemish-speaking ones, where concessions are plentiful.

A Pom called **John Armstrong** described a scenario planning exercise for the British rail scene – his four scenarios were dubbed ‘Perpetual Motion’, ‘Urban Colonies’, ‘Tribal Trading’ and ‘Good Intentions’- each of which had implications for rail. **Tony Brennan** (now SKM) presented a provocative paper in which he ascribed much of current planning policy to Political Correctness rather than effective policy, and an AA journalist, **Peter King**, had the last word saying how the AA was very trusted in NZ and would never abandon the interests of its 1.2 million motoring members.

#### 4. Other presentations

By definition I don’t know what I missed in other sessions, because I missed them. Had the program been organized differently I would have supported the presentations of fellow Australians **Phillip Laird** and **Stephen Alchin**, and I would have listened to **David Wilmott** if only to hear a strong rebuttal of Peak Oil. And if the Youth Forum had been open to delegates I would probably have attended that too.

#### 5. General

**Alan Thompson**, the CEO of the Ministry of Transport, stood in for Transport Minister **Annette King** on the last day and closed proceedings. The Conference had included an evening cocktail function at the Antarctic Centre and a dinner at the NZ Air Force Museum, both near the airport. Charging around the rough course out the back of the Antarctic Centre in a Hagglund all-terrain vehicle was a memorable highlight.

Overall the impression was one of an optimistic and innovative population quite used to looking after itself, because of the country’s relative isolation, so even if the worst fears of the Peak Oilers are borne out my feeling was that New Zealand would accept the hardship and cope.

Congratulations are due to **Lisa Rossiter** and the rest of the Organising Committee for a very interesting and well-organised conference.