

APPROXIMATION OF SPEECH MADE TO PEOPLE FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT
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In September I undertook a study tour in North America to, amongst other things investigate mass transit systems, visiting Boston, Los Angeles, and Portland (Oregon) in the United States and Vancouver and Toronto in Canada.

As expected, the US demonstrated its car dependency with Portland being the exception which proved the rule about the US. I was in the US in 1999 on a private visit and visited three cities then; my trip in 2000 confirmed my initial observations about car dependency.

There is an assumption that one will have a car for intercity commuting. I visited Palm Springs to look at wind energy, and the operators of the wind farm tours were aghast that I was returning on a Greyhound Bus to Los Angeles (having travelled in the reverse direction in the morning).

The public transport system in Vancouver was an impressive one, and the best of the five cities visited.

In all of these cities, it was light rail which was attracting commuters away from the car. Here in South Australia the Government argues that it is better for us to opt for more buses. So what is the comparative cost effectiveness of bus versus rail?. 1996 Figures from the US magazine "Railway Age"

commuter (heavy) rail	27c/passenger mile
(light) rail rapid transit	30c/passenger mile
bus	54c/passenger mile

argue against the position taken by the South Australian Government.

Pittsburgh

One of the places I didn't visit was Pittsburgh where a new West Busway is under construction. The powers-that-be decided that rail was too costly for their new transport system after consultants told them it would cost only \$320m for a busway (and we all know how we can trust consultants).

Reality set in when the tender process set the starting price of \$515m - that is for construction alone with no rolling stock in in that price! It will cost \$40m/km without the buses! Meanwhile the proponents of LRT say that their system would have cost \$13m/km with rolling stock included!

This decision was made, despite the fact that an earlier busway constructed in the '70s had a peak ridership of 20,000 passengers/week in 1980 which has since dropped to 14,500. In the same area a light rail system's patronage grew in the same time period from 24,000 to 36,000.

Pittsburgh didn't learn from its mistakes - or even its successes.

Portland

By contrast, Portland is regarded by the proponents of public transport in the US (light rail in particular) as the standard for the rest of the country.

Portland's Tri-Met began with 15 route miles of light rail, know as MAX, but it proved so popular it has been extended to cover 33 route miles. (This is a far cry from the 110 miles in place in 1890!) It is performing beyond expectations: it was expected that, by the middle of 1999, 50,000 passenger journeys/day would be made, but it was dramatically exceeded with a figure of 61,800.

The demand is such that another 6.5 miles of track is being built in 2000, and a further 6.5 miles will be constructed in 2001. A 5.5 mile extension of MAX to the airport is almost completed.

Urban planning is an essential part of Oregon's transport system and 6000 housing units are being built within walking distance of train stations. The *Statewide Land Use Planning Act 1973* required every urban area in the state of Oregon to create an urban growth boundary.

Documentation from Tri-Met observes that without the light rail system with all its efficiencies, the city of Portland would have had to build 2 new lanes on each highway leading into town, and eight 42-storey parking stations.

Even though it is the best that the US has to offer, Portland still has its problems, and we experienced peak hour bumper-to-bumper traffic when leaving the city to get out to the airport. The solutions have been the creation of high-occupancy vehicle lanes, and free parking for the first four hours of the day for HOVs.

Toronto

I was told before I left Australia that Toronto was the star of public transport ten years ago, but it has rested on its laurels since then. Toronto was a disappointment to me because I had just come from Vancouver, but it was better than Los Angeles or Boston.

Gary Webster, Director of Operations of the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC), described the subway system as "the backbone of the city". The subways runs trains at a 2.5 to 5 minute frequency for 20 hours/day.

The fleet consists of 1800 buses, 600 heavy rail cars, 196 streetcars and 52 newer articulated LRTs. The streetcar project began in the 1980s, and has been involved in 120 accidents over a three year period because the city council would not allow the TTC to construct a kerb barrier between the line and the road. This is now happening.

A similar problem exists in Boston with their "Green" Line to Jamaica Plain, but their solution has been to close down the line.

Toronto is bidding for the 2008 Olympics and Gary Webster was to visit to Australia, and Sydney in particular, the following week after I met with him. He is aware that the TTC will have to upgrade the system if they are to present adequate credentials to be awarded the Games.

Vancouver

Vancouver was the shining star of public transport in the five cities I visited. Vancouver is the sixth most rapidly growing area in North America with a projected population increase of another one million people by 2021.

The stated aim of Vancouver Roads and Transport is to have people both live and work in same area and to channel people into growth concentration areas, and this cannot be done without public transport. Translink is the public transport part of the Vancouver Roads and Transport entity.

Pride of place in the public transport portfolio is the "Skytrain", a driverless light rail system which has been running for 15 years. Passengers took to it enthusiastically, and its immediate use was 10% greater than projected.

The province of British Columbia, of which Vancouver is the capital, has a "Livable Region Strategic Plan" which is mandated for update every 5 years. In the early 90s a public consultation was held called "Creating Our Future". An outcome of this was an acceptance that the transport system had to be financially self-sufficient, and this is achieved in a number of ways.

The province collects a 15c/l fuel tax of which Translink gets 8c, which will increase to 10c by April 2001. Parking fees include a 7% tax collected on behalf of Translink and this will triple by 2005. Fares had been increased just a short time before we arrived, and there were a significant number of Translink posters in their vehicles and on platforms promoting the value of the increased fares in terms of what this was going to deliver to customers. Translink has the power to access property taxes, but this is not contemplated at present.

At the time of our stay in Vancouver a controversial new vehicle charge had been proposed. With this in mind, a new round of public consultations was under way (the "ritual floggings" as the Translink Manager described it) to determine how to achieve financial self-sufficiency, meet greenhouse gas commitments, and provide at least an adequate level of service.

Three scenarios were being outlined to public meetings: the "Wait a Minute" scenario, the "Current Path", and "To Boldly Go".

There has been negative coverage in the local suburban papers which have taken the position that the money going into the mass transit systems is being "stolen" from the car drivers. But the road transport lobby is behind Translink, because they see congestion on the roads by cars as messing up their economy.

Based on the feedback from the meetings up until the time I visited, it appears that Translink will be headed somewhere between "Current Path" and "To Boldly Go".

What impressed about Vancouver was the frequency of service, safety and security. The stations are designed to foster that sense of safety and security, with remote cameras on all platforms. The "walls" of the stations are a heavy steel mesh which are graffiti-proof and vandal-proof.

The interlinking of light rail, heavy rail (going beyond Vancouver), buses and ferries is exceptional, with all within something like 200 metres at one point near the wharves. Everything about Vancouver's Translink system encourages its use.

Boston

But in Boston I saw the exact wrong way to go, with the emphasis on supporting car dependency through what has become to be pejoratively known as "The Big Dig". Begun in 1993 and planned to be finished in 2000, this seven mile tunnel was designed to provide more room for cars, and was estimated to cost \$2bn. Seven years later, it is way behind schedule and not expected to be completed for another 4 years at least, with the projected cost now having escalated to \$14bn. i.e. **2billion dollars per mile!**

Conclusion

In concluding I observe that we in SA should learn from the mistakes of others. I have already mentioned the cost blowout of the Pittsburgh busway, and recent figures from the UK back this up. For '97-'98, patronage on their national rail network was up 6%, light rail was up 7%, the London underground was up 8%, but bus usage has remained steady. Nowhere in the world are people flocking to use buses.

Gary Webster at the Toronto Transit Commission said that the City Council had **not yet** (my emphasis) made the choice for Toronto to be a transit city. I may be optimistic, but implicit in that comment is a view that it could be, and maybe even should be.

Imagine our Government committing to consult with the public about its transport needs as has occurred in Vancouver; imagine if our Government was visionary enough to declare Adelaide be a transit city; imagine if the Government was responsible enough to recognise our international commitments to greenhouse gas reductions and enlarge and extend our tram system.

These are the things of which dreams are made, yet I have seen it in action. The message is that it **is** possible. **All** it takes is vision and political will.