

Roads blocked by car haters

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Sir Rod Eddington's tunnel to save Melbourne from traffic gridlock has been opposed by green fanatics who hate cars and hate personal freedom

MELBOURNE is being choked by something worse than traffic. Try stupidity — an unthinking gut-hatred of cars.

We see that stupidity in full shame in this fierce opposition to Sir Rod Eddington's main proposal this week to ease the city's growing gridlock.

And guess the usual suspects. Hint: which kind of back-to-the-caves fools were also against the dredging of the bay's shipping channels, new dams for the dusty city and new coal supplies for our biggest power plant?

Which so loves the idea of our state going to a new Dark Age that they even campaigned for just that with Saturday's Earth Hour?

The biggest of the 20 ideas Rod Eddington put in his report for the Brumby Government was an 18km tunnel from the end of the Eastern Freeway, at Clifton Hill, to the western

suburbs and the Western Ring Road.

Yes, it will cost as much as \$9 billion, but no rational person could deny that this — or at least something like another bridge over the Maribymong River — is so critical that work on it should have started yesterday.

After all, the only real mass-traffic route at the moment from the city to the western suburbs and on to Geelong is over the West Gate Bridge, which gives us two big problems.

First, the bridge is already so clogged that peak-hour traffic usually slows to a crawl, with cars and trucks backed up for kilometres. The average peak-hour speed over it has halved in the past decade to just 40km/h.

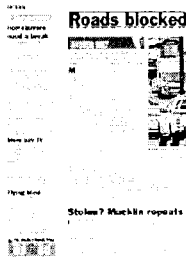
And peak hour isn't the only time of trouble now. I drove to the airport from the eastern suburbs at 3pm on a Friday last month, and the West Gate congestion was already so bad that the

traffic was down to walking pace all the way up the Monash Freeway to Toorak Rd. I hadn't seen a snarl like that even when I lived in Bangkok.

This will only get worse, of course. Eddington says the West Gate Bridge now carries 165,000 vehicles a day, and will have 235,000 by 2031 — which is about when any solution will finally be finished, given how green groups and red tape delay any project needed to keep Melbourne humming.

The other problem with the bridge is how vulnerable the city is with just this one main route direct to Altona, Geelong and beyond.

We saw that only two days ago when the bridge was closed to trucks, caravans and motorbikes for fear gale-force winds would blow them over or across. Whole streets of the city were



turned into car parks by trucks forced to wait, or line up for arthritic rat-runs through inner-western suburbs.

Sorry to go on so long about a problem most of you understand only too well — and which will no doubt have many wondering why it's taken the Government so long to start work on a solution that won't be finished until these problems turn into crises.

But I want you to understand just how crazy are the objections to Eddington's proposal, and how they could be made only by people with a religious mania or a contempt for the freedoms of fellow citizens.

Here's a sample. From Environment Victoria: "A new freeway would add millions of tonnes of greenhouse pollution every year for decades to come and would not be contemplated by any government seriously committed to tackling climate change."

From *Age* reporter Royce Millar: "Given the dire environmental situation we now find ourselves in, such a plan, surely, should be about slashing greenhouse emissions and dependence on cars."

From Melbourne Transport Forum: "This doesn't seem to tackle the greenhouse challenge we face."

From Melbourne University's Professor Bill Russell: "As the greenhouse clock ticks, do we really want to commit another \$10 billion to this illusion?"

From Greens MP Greg Barber: "Climate change would mean a tunnel now would be the road builders' last stand . . . (This would) soak up billions of dollars that could be used more efficiently moving people around by fast public transport."

But, for me, the stupidity is illustrated best by the editor of Australia's green Bible, Andrew Jaspan, who in his editorial in *The Age* said yes to more bikes and buses, but refused to endorse the tunnel.

"The question must be asked: does this plan make it easier for cars, thus generating more emissions, or is it about getting cars off the roads?"

How fiendishly clever of Jaspan.

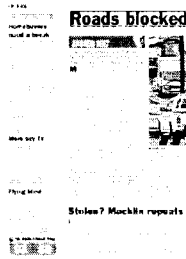
The contribution of Melbourne's traffic to global warming, even if you believe the wildest claims, is close to zero, but Jaspan believes useless gestures are so important in this holy cause that our cars must be culled. (Never mind — and he won't mention — that global warming actually paused in 1998, and many scientists wonder if we really are heating the world to hell.)

And now you know Jaspan's devilish plan — to make our streets so choked that you'll be *forced* to leave your car and take a train, bike or hike instead.

If a new freeway just makes it "easier for cars", it must be stopped. Drivers *must* be made to suffer until they can take it no more.

But why does Jaspan stop at blocking new freeways that make driving "easier"? Shouldn't he also demand we close the ones we already have to make driving even harder? How else can we meet his target of slashing emissions by 60 per cent?

The Age could even set an example by demanding we close Tullamarine Freeway, by which its printing presses stand. That would remove at least one road that's made it sadly "easier for cars" — and *Age* delivery trucks — and would help stop the spread of global warming panic, too. It's a win-win.



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But global warming is in fact just the latest excuse for resisting freeways.

There is something about the car — this symbol of Big Oil, Big Business and capitalism's freedoms — that enrages people of certain Noble Savage, finger-wagging mindset. The same sort of people, that is, who now follow the global warming faith.

How often we've already heard these same arguments that the cars of the masses should be resisted, not catered for, and that building freeways only encourages the polluting riff-raff?

That mantra is what persuaded the Cain Labor government to build the Monash Freeway with stop lights and restrict it to just two lanes from Toorak, so drivers would be discouraged from actually using it.

It didn't work, of course. The traffic built up so badly that the Kennett government and Transurban had to spend a fortune taking out the lights, widening the road and building new bridges that would have been far cheaper if built at the start.

Poor Eddington knew he'd face this same anti-car extremism, this time under the banner of global warming, and did his small best to head it off.

So his plan chats brightly about bikes and buses, offering millions in giveaways and, worse, makes the extravagant promise of \$8 billion rail tunnel from Footscray to Caulfield.

That hardly strikes me as a natural transport corridor of such mega-dollar priority, and I suspect it's simply offered to our public-transport fundamentalists as a deal -- their train tunnel in exchange for one for the cars.

But a concession only encourages them, Rod. They'll pocket their tunnel, and deny us ours.

These people don't just want more trains. They actually want fewer cars.

But, of course, cars give us what public transport never can. They give us the freedom to live far from our factories and offices, far from a train-line, far from hugger-mugger apartments and inner-city concrete

boxes, far from strict timetables, far from sardine tins of trains, and far from the soundtrack of some strap-hanger's earphone doof-doof.

They let us choose a new job miles from any station, or bring with us big packages, or go home at night not worrying about the time or the company in the seats opposite.

Simply, they help make us free.

Trains will never give all this, which is why most people don't use them and will stick to their cars, thanks, and rely on scientists to just figure out less gassy fuels, as Eddington suggests.

So a word of advice to the Jaspans of this world. Other people's dreams are boring to hear, and infinitely worse to have to live.

You don't like cars? Then give up your company-supplied own, but let other people have an easier road home. Someone's waiting for them at the other end of the tunnel, and who are you to tell them they must wait?

Join Andrew on blogs.news.com.au/heraldsun/andrewbolt



West Gate crawl: It will get worse until our road system totally seizes up if Sir Rod's tunnel is not built