

Sender- M. Yonwin,
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Dear Sir,

Without needing precise analysis, we know the impact of high fuel prices is substantial, and harmful. The problem becomes, how to reduce this impact.

Direct action against prices, by subsidies or price controls, does not look promising. Yes, it can be done quickly, but consumers have to pay for subsidies through taxes, while price controls tend to lead to shortages and black markets.

Other options take time. increasing effective supply, by using ethanol, is being considered, I understand. There is also the possibility of developing shale oil reserves, or even of hydrogenating coal. These things may well be worth doing, but we should not expect them to be quick, or cheap.

Reducing demand both reduces pressure on prices, and their impact. This might be done either by changing the form of transport used, by using less transport, or by changing the energy source of existing forms of transport.

The first course is mainly a matter of encouraging the use of public transport, especially electric rail. Buses burn fuel. Some important centres around Brisbane are not served by rail; Capalaba is a local example. Linking these to the rail network would increase the number of potential passengers, and the number of available destinations. If extensions to the network were funded by high-rise residential developments over railway stations, it would both bring public transport to the people, and bring people to public transport. Since these people would not need to drive to the station, it would reduce total transport too.

Car pooling and working from home are other ways of using less transport. It may be possible to reduce shopping travel by arranging for joint ventures to convert corner stores into virtual shopping centres, but this would take much organising. There might even be a few people who could swap jobs- or houses- to mutual advantage; but no dramatic savings is likely from such measures.

An alternative energy source for cars is electric power. It isn't used, because electric cars have short range, and take hours to recharge, which is inconvenient. But this drawback can be overcome by making it easy to remove the battery pack, perhaps with a forklift, and having a system of service stations where batteries can be exchanged. The driver would pay for the charge he bought, and the battery would be recharged and passed on to another car. This drop-in, lift out battery system- call it DILLO- would be as convenient as using petrol, with the advantage to the driver that if he parks for any length of time near a power outlet, he can recharge, which you can't do with petrol.

Both DILLO and extended electric rail use electric power, and this has to be generated. Ideally, it should come from the megawatts of solar power that falls uselessly on roofs and other structures. Cost is the main barrier to more extensive use of solar power, and this ought to fall if economies of scale became available. Unlike petrol, the more

of it we use, the cheaper it should be.

To attain this, one might require projects costing more than a base amount (set to exclude the cheapest dwellings, for social reasons) to instal solar panels on "appropriate sunward surfaces", as part of building regulations. Alternatively, one might impose a tax on projects or structures, with exemptions where solar panels were installed, and proceeds to be used to fit government structures with solar panels.

I trust you find the foregoing of interest.

Yours Sincerely,

Yonwin

(MICHAEL F. YONWIN, B.BUS)

