



**Australian Government**

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**Chief Scientist**

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**INTRODUCTORY SPEECH AT ACOLA REPORT LAUNCH  
“DELIVERING SUSTAINABLE URBAN MOBILITY”**

**Edited extract of speech**

**7 October 2015**

***Keeping Australian cities highly liveable***

**National Portrait Gallery  
CANBERRA**

I'll begin my comments with a quote from Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull on September the 20<sup>th</sup>: He said, and I quote:

*“Now of course, we have a Minister for Regional Development and the Deputy Prime Minister, Warren Truss, but cities have been overlooked, I believe, historically from the Federal perspective. So within the Ministry for the Environment, I'm appointing the Honourable Jamie Briggs MP to be the Minister for Cities and the Built Environment, to work with Greg Hunt, the Environment Minister, to develop a new Australian Government agenda for our cities in cooperation with States, Local Governments and urban communities.”*

I think we all welcomed that at the time and we continue to welcome that. We look forward to seeing the fruits of your labours, Minister, and we encourage you, because we believe Australia is just catching up with the rest of the world when it comes to the sorts of issues you will address and that we hope this report will help you to address.

We know that millions of people in other cities have endured gridlock for decades.

Traffic congestion is not something we're familiar with in Canberra, except between 9.50 and 9.55am. But it does occur in Australia and it does mean Australia, like other nations, has to be ready to cope with these challenges in future.

By 2030 it is expected that 60 per cent of the world's population will live in cities, up from 50 per cent today<sup>1</sup>.

In addition, it is predicted that the world's car fleet of about 1.2 billion vehicles will double by 2030<sup>2</sup>. When you think that something like 4 per cent of the time cars are on the road and the other 90 plus per cent of the time they're parked somewhere, that means we have two issues to deal with: one is the roads for when they're in use, and the other is infrastructure for parking. Either that, or we ban cars completely... as long as I can have one.

There does come a point where you can't simply keep putting more and more cars on the road, or using trucks, which of course are mostly diesel, to deliver freight.

There does come a point where traffic congestion becomes so great that cities grind to a halt, and where pollution of particles from the internal combustion engine - one of the great inventions - but the pollution and particles that come from it make residents chronically ill.

And of course there comes a point where the greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles and radiant heat from roads are major contributors to the problems we have to confront in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Shannon Bouton et al., [How to make a city great](#), McKinsey & Company, September 2013

<sup>2</sup> Joyce Dargay, Dermot Gately, and Martin Sommer, "Vehicle ownership and income growth, worldwide: 1960–2030," **Energy Journal**, Volume 28, Number 4, 2007, pp. 143–70.

Some experts say we are starting to reach that tipping point in urban mobility and urgent action is needed.<sup>3</sup>

Technology and innovation will be key to meeting the challenge of urban congestion.

This could be through greater use of electric cars integrated into energy grids; it could be using “big data” and sensor technologies to better manage transport flows, or greater use of other energy technologies such as gas and fuel-cells to power vehicles.

But technology alone is not going to be enough. Meeting the challenge of urban transport and indeed of the urban built environment will require long-term, nimble policy development.

A challenge of this magnitude, which is presently costing Australia billions of dollars each year in lost productivity<sup>4</sup>, is crying out for far-reaching, co-ordinated action in cooperation with the states, the local government and urban communities, and of course the federal government having a leadership role.

It will need a large-scale national R&D effort and investment across government, industry and research sectors.

And the goal of “sustainable urban mobility” is an inherently multidisciplinary challenge requiring skills from engineers, climatologists, sociologists, economists, psychologists, and many others.

Which brings us to this major new report on the challenges facing Australia’s urban transport.

The timing is impeccable but we of course cannot claim credit for this - although as academics we like to try and claim credit for most things.

We did not know that about three weeks ago on 14 September Malcolm Turnbull would become the Prime Minister.

We did not know that on 20 September, Prime Minister Turnbull would announce a new ministry with Australia’s first ever Minister for Cities and the Built Environment.

And what do you know – Minister Jamie Briggs is sitting in front of me ready to launch a report called *Delivering Sustainable Urban Mobility*.

They do say timing is everything and for this report the planets have aligned.

I look forward to hearing Minister Briggs’ perspective on the report, but first let me put it into a little context.

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<sup>3</sup> Shannon Bouton et al., [Urban mobility at a tipping point](#), McKinsey & Company, September 2015

<sup>4</sup> ACOLA report, *Delivering Sustainable Urban Mobility*, Chapter 4, finding 1.

This report is the eighth in a series called *Securing Australia's Future*.

This series was announced in June 2012, and the intent, as I have said before, was simple: we can't know the future, we can't predict it with great certainty, but we ought to know it's going to be different, so we may as well think as constructively as we can about how to make it better.

The answers to the challenges we face, and the contributions that can be made, don't come from one discipline; they actually require disciplines to work together in different ways from the ways that we have in the past.

One of the things we didn't do was ask the expert groups who would author the reports to try and make recommendations. What we wanted to do was build an evidence base from which recommendations could be drawn.

In this report on urban transport, there are 26 key findings. We will now gather together a small group of people to turn them into recommendations, that we will take through the processes to get to the Minister and the Government.

I think it's important that this work is done; I think it does allow us to think ahead and look to the horizon rather than at our toecaps. That's important when we think about what Australia will be like when we hand the baton on to the generations that will come after us.

This report is a wakeup call if we want Australian cities to continue to be some of the most liveable in the world. If I can paraphrase the Prime Minister in some of his early remarks, he said there is no place for ideology.

Australia has to be a great place to live and I think that's what we're trying to achieve.

Thank you.