

BIC Column October 2014

In our policy and research work the BIC tries to steer clear of vast conspiracy theories and fad thinking. When the discussion was being had about peak oil we focussed on the energy security debate at a national level and in the climate science debate we focussed on the emissions reductions that public transport can produce.

A new trend that is emerging in research is “peak car” which tells us that across the world people are driving less. Peak car is measured by looking at vehicle kilometres travelled per person in a city or country. This figure can be produced by taking the vehicle kilometres travelled by the light vehicle fleet in a city or country and dividing it by the number of people.

What the data is telling us, including research produced by the Federal Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics, is that peak car is happening all around the world, across every continent and in developed and developing countries. It’s happening here in Australia as well.

There are a range of causes of this phenomenon, too many to list them all in this month’s column, but basic economic choices as well as cultural and social factors are driving this shift away from cars.

An example is driving and licensing rates amongst young people. Recent research from Professor Currie at Monash University showed that licence rates amongst under 25 year olds in Victoria fell by 10 per cent in the decade to 2012. Only two thirds of young Victorians hold car licences currently. A seismic shift in behaviour if you think about our generation and obtaining a licence the day you were eligible. It was 16 years and nine months old in my case.

High speed internet is also driving this change across all age groups. Surveys are reporting that the a vast majority of people use online contact as a substitute for physical trips in a car to meet friends and family that they would have made in the days before Skype and other internet communication mediums. No to mention the trend for Gen Y to want to use their devices when travelling and seeing public transport as a “hands free” mode of travel.

What does this mean for the bus industry? Simply that we have a big job ahead of us as in meeting demand for public transport as Generation Y grows up and their children adopt travel behaviours which are very different from their grandparents who saw the car as an essential part of their identity.

There is a huge opportunity for the Australian bus and coach industry in driving demand for good public transport services and capturing the emerging market of people who are looking for ways to travel that allow them to live a car free lifestyle.

This is an emerging issue for policy makers and an area of research that the BIC will cautiously engage in. Professor John Stanley has already raised it in the BIC’s recent series of *Moving People: Solutions for Policy Thinkers* publications that are available on the Ozebus website.

These new policy ideas, challenges and solutions for how the bus industry can address them will be a key feature of the program at the 2015 BIC National Conference in Singapore.

The National Conference will run from November 8-11 and will be a unique opportunity for industry, government and policy thinkers to share knowledge about world’s best practice in operating and building public transport systems. Mark it in your diaries and start your planning early to join the discussion in Singapore in 2015.