

Four Items in this Friday Digest

NOTE: This is a short digest because, for formatting reasons, the Centre shall soon (probably Monday) distribute two special items, an Op. Ed. on "Dealing with Depression" and a longer essay "Double-Bubble, the Oil and Trouble."

Items.

Item 1: How are Drivers Actually Responding to High Gas Prices in the US?

Item 2: The American Experience of Privatisation and Public Private Partnerships.

Item 3: Dealing with Earthquakes – Could this be Wellington's next Tourist Attraction?

Item 4: Basil Walker Files Injunction to prevent the Labour MPs Passing the ETS into Law.

Fundraising.

Item One: How Are Drivers Actually Responding to High Gas Prices in the US?

Robert Poole's August issue of the *Reason Foundation's* excellent "[Surface Transportation Innovations](#)", contains a useful short essay which begins by reminding us that "the plural of anecdote is data" and continues:

"Nearly all the media coverage of how drivers are responding to \$4 per gallon gasoline has been of that nature—and therefore hardly representative of any real trends.

But we now have at least one statistical look at how drivers in three metro areas—Austin, Dallas/Ft. Worth, and El Paso—are coping.

NuStats, a respected survey research firm based in Austin, did a telephone survey of 500 households in those three metro areas during the week of July 21, 2008 (results at www.nustats.com). Researchers asked them two open-ended questions: what changes in driving have they done in the last 12 months, and what do they plan to do that they haven't done yet? I'm naturally skeptical of the latter, since people are inclined to tell pollsters politically correct things on that kind of question, but are more likely to accurately report what they have actually done. So I will focus on the actual changes in this summary.

As you might expect, two-thirds reported some reduction in the amount they drive. The most common means of doing this (66%) was to combine multiple trips into a single trip. Some 39% said they have eliminated some trips, while a surprising 21% said they had downsized to a more fuel-efficient vehicle (3% switched to a hybrid). But where it really gets interesting is in the alternatives to driving to and from work. The most popular of these was telecommuting (12%), followed by joining a carpool (9%), walking (9%), bicycling (4%) and using public transit (4%).

That last point squares pretty well with my own and several other analysts' number-crunching to estimate what portion of reported decreases in VMT might equate to reported increases in transit boardings. And overall, the results demonstrate people's continued preference for automobile travel, thanks to its convenience and flexibility, despite higher gas prices.

To be sure, these results come only from Texas, and a similar survey in other metro areas might produce different results. But I suspect they'd be broadly similar in most large metro areas, where suburb-to-suburb commuting is the dominant pattern."

ENDS

Notice that the "alternative means of commuting" put telecommuting at the top of the list. Now you would think that the Greens would be promoting telecommuting from the rooftops because it is surely the most Green response of all.

What more it makes it easier for single mothers on the DPB to train and work from home without having to leave their children or carry out their multi-tasking responsibilities. And yet they are silent.

I can only conclude that the Greens really do regard riding on public transport as a moral virtue in its own right, and that telecommuting is actually a means of avoiding one's personal obligation to provide fare-paying customers for public transport operators in the region. In other words they don't like the competition.

Item Two: The American Experience of Privatisation and Public-Private Partnerships.

Anyone interested in public private partnerships and funding of infrastructure should take the time to visit the Reason Foundation site and read the [Reason Foundation's 22nd Annual Privatization Report](#)

A few of the Annual Privatization Report's notable points are:

- Today, there are over 70 public-private partnership infrastructure projects worth \$104 billion at various stages of development in the United States.

- In the 2007-08 school year, 347 new charter schools opened in 40 different states.

- The five states with the largest school choice programs are Florida (39,000 students), Pennsylvania (38,000 students), Arizona (28,000 students), Wisconsin (19,000 students) and Ohio (14,000 students).

Other topics explored in the report include toll roads, airports, airport security, telecommunications, municipal broadband, water systems, and prisons.

Item Three: Dealing with Earthquakes – Could this be Wellington's next Tourist Attraction?

As an architect I could not resist spreading this around. This is an excellent reminder that in all structural problems there are two classes of solution – the static and the dynamic. While most of us would like to see one of these dynamic systems dealing with an earthquake we would rather not be on the spot.

Some cool customer was and captured [this amazing video](#). It is still something I would rather watch from the desk. That ball is 728 tonnes, and it really moves, and yet this building in Taipeh was responding to the great earthquake in the Sichuan province of China. The shocks in Sichuan must have been horrendous.

Item Four: Basil Walker Files Injunction to prevent the Labour MPs Passing ETS into Law.

As well as being a retired property developer, Basil Walker was a chemical engineer with the industrial research division of the DSIR. The mainstream media have largely ignored this rather remarkable legal action, presumably because it goes against the notion of the "scientific consensus". The *Christchurch Press* has issued a [short report](#) which concludes "It will not work."

It will be interesting to see how the news media report the story in the event that Walker does succeed in injunctioning "All New Zealand Labour Party Elected Members of Parliament", given that most of their readers will not be aware that

the injunction has even been filed.

The Court has issued a notice of a date of hearing set for Monday, 22nd September, "For Mention Only". This presumably gives time for a mediated settlement if possible.

The question is whether this prevents Labour passing the Bill while this matter is before the Courts. The 22nd September leaves little time.

The Centre has a copy of the injunction if anyone wants to read it in full. I am rather hoping it will be up on some web page shortly so we can just link to that, because a multitude of attachments causes many problems for some readers.

Funding.

It's that time of year again. Never has the Centre been asked by so many to do so much. And we try to oblige. However, everything costs money and the Government is remorseless in its demands for provisional taxes and GST. Many of our normal sponsors are seriously hurting from the downturn in property and development. We really don't want to fold our tent and creep away so your donations are essential to our ongoing efforts. The Centre donation form is attached.

Remember – even a dollar helps!