

Letter to the Age

A slightly edited version of this letter was published in the Age Friday 21st April:

Oil prices break yet another record and Melburnians are either squeezing onto our over-stretched public transport system or driving from petrol stations without paying. We may think we are doing it tough now but there is likely worse to come.

The price pain we are feeling now is a pointer to a future when oil will not flow as fast and freely as it has in the past. Within a few years we will reach the peak of oil production and we will be faced thereafter with shrinking supplies. This will increase fuel prices even further and will force us to change our transport systems and the way we work and live.

A study by Griffith University academics showed that Melbourne was much more vulnerable to high oil prices than other Australia cities. Those most at risk are in the less well-off suburbs on the outer fringes of the city, far from accessible public transport. People in these areas are more dependent on their cars and have further to travel to access facilities and services than their inner-city counterparts.

If those in the outer suburbs and regional Victoria are to avoid becoming the collateral damage of an oil-scarce future, then we need to start making changes now to reduce our oil dependence. We need to ensure all of Melbourne and regional Victoria have real public transport options and we need to encourage more fuel-efficient vehicles instead of subsidising 4WDs with tax-breaks. Further into the future alternative fuels may become available but in the short-term conservation and efficiency will bring the greatest gains.

This is a challenge above all for governments investing in our future infrastructure, but also for individuals making choices in where they live and work, what transport modes they use, and what car they drive. It will be far easier and cheaper for all of us if we start making changes now rather than waiting until runaway oil prices force change upon us.

Dr Sherry Mayo

ASPO Australia - The Australian Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas