

Submission

To: Senate Select Committee on Fuel and Energy

From: *UnitingCare* Wesley Adelaide

Date: 25th Aug 2008

UnitingCare Wesley is please to make this submission on fuel and energy. The current submission is focused on automotive fuel, but we are currently working on a substantial project regarding electricity and low income households. If the committee is agreeable we would be happy to add an addendum to this submission by September 30th.

Who is UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide

UnitingCare Wesley was formerly the Adelaide Central Mission and is a community service organisation with over 100 years experience in providing over 50 different services to low income and disadvantaged people in South Australia.

The service experience that informs the comments in this brief submission includes the following:

UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide has, for many years, provided services to assist people who are struggling financially and has been at the forefront of supporting financial (and other counselling) in South Australia.

Our financial Counselling is available to anyone, although the service focuses mainly upon low income and disadvantaged people. The service conducts an average of 68 interviews each month. The work of Financial Counselling is vast, covering budgeting advice, advocacy and community education.

Counsellors support clients through the trauma of bankruptcy, and intervene with creditors to negotiate satisfactory arrangements.

The Central Community Legal Service is run by UnitingCare Wesley and is a community organisation set up to provide legal information, advice, referral and assistance. Assistance is provided by qualified legal practitioners. Advice is offered in areas including consumer issues, debt and tenancy.

The Low Income Support Program also assists agencies and community groups to work with local people to understand the impact and consequences of poverty and to identify strategies and resources which can help manage or alleviate the effect of poverty on individuals and families.

The organisation has also been a provider of home energy audits and energy use advice to low income households through the State Government funded "Energy Friends" program that was de-funded in 2007.

Impact of Peak Oil

The term of reference that is of most interest to UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide and the one that we will focus on in this brief submission is:

- (a) the movement of people around the State, including –
 - i. The rising cost of petrol and increasing transport fuel poverty in the outer metropolitan area, the regions and remote communities.

Figures from ABARE state that the rate of production for the sum of all Australia's oil fields has peaked:

...after reaching a peak in 2007-08, Australian oil production is projected to fall by 0.3 per cent a year over the rest of the projection period. (ABARE 2006, p.45)

Oil production peaked in the USA in 1970 (Kerr 1998; Duncan and Youngquist 1999; Bartlett 2000). Global oil reserves peaked in 1985 (ASPO) and since then global production has exceeded growth in new reserves. Analysts are now predicting the peak of global oil production. Many analysts calculate that global peak oil is likely to occur before the year 2010. Only the most optimistic analysts put the peak further than 2016 (Hirsch 2005).

UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide is of the view that world oil supplies are at or near peak production levels and if production is not declining now it soon will be. The actual date does not matter, but we are needing policy responses that accept that "peak Oil" has been reached

Peak oil means that demand for oil exceeds the rate at which oil can be extracted and delivered. This produces a price rise, which effectively rations the scarce oil through price. Some people will be forced to use less oil products. It is anticipated that this will delay the transition to oil for some people in industrialising countries, and reduce the oil consumption of some people in oil dependant societies.

We are also acutely aware that a series of monumental global economic shifts are underway. The growth of the Chinese economy and its associated demand for energy is now fairly well-known in Australia. However, the economies of India, Brazil and Russia are also growing rapidly or are anticipated to grow rapidly in the future. Each of these growth economies will also be major demanders of energy.

Peak oil means that supplies of oil will diminish while the demand for energy from fast growing emerging economies, and steady growth in other economies, means that price rises for all energy sources, including oil, will continue. Indeed, the widening gap between demand and supply will result in a continual shift in price along an upward sloping, and quite possibly exponential shaped demand curve.

The critical issue for UnitingCare Wesley is, "in the face of continually growing energy costs, how can low/modest income households acquire the energy they need?"

Impacts on Low Income Households

Financial Stress

The following table shows the various indicators of financial stress, for Australia, for 2003 – 2004.

	Poorest 30%	Other 70%	All households
Unable to raise \$2000 in a week	52.1	8.6	14.3
Can't pay electricity on time	37.8	11.5	14.9
Can't pay car rego on time	13.5	4.6	5.7
Pawned or sold something still wanted	11.7	2.3	3.5
Went without meals	11.8	1.8	3.1
Unable to heat home	8.9	1.2	2.3
Sought Welfare agency help	14.7	1.2	2.9
Borrowed from friends or family	26.4	7.8	10.3

Source ABS, Australian social trends 2007

It is significant that four years ago (the most current available data) 15% of all Australian households were unable to pay the electricity bill on time, while 5.7% were struggling to keep the car on the road and 2.3% could not heat their homes.

For the poorest 30% of households, it is safe to assume that nearly two in five were struggling to afford to meet their energy needs.

Since 2004, petrol prices have more than doubled and current expectations are that electricity prices will also double in the foreseeable future. We do not have current data about financial stress or fuel poverty, but our services report that growing numbers of people are struggling financially, with energy costs just one part of their stress.

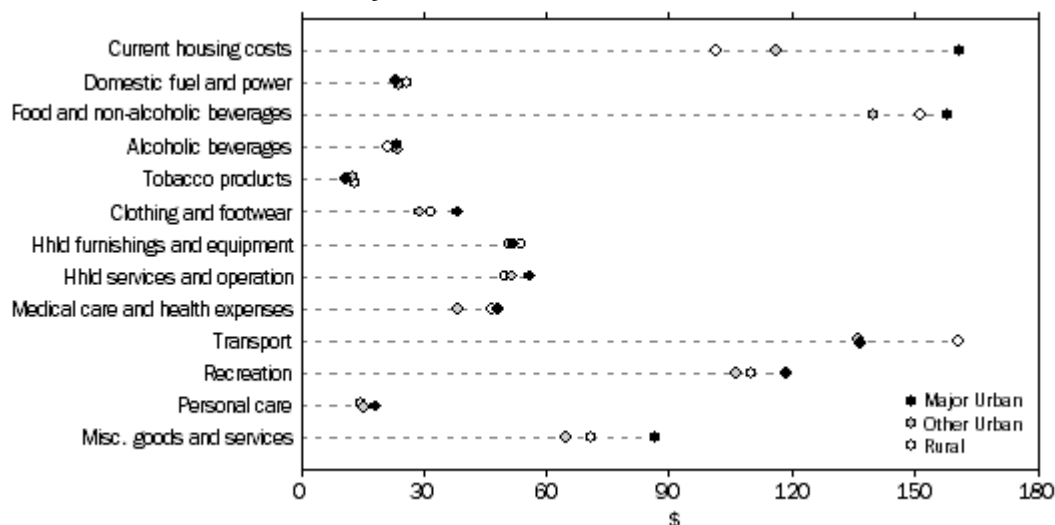
Transport Stress

The recent interim Garnaut review found transport vulnerability of low income household in Australia.

... variations in the provision of public transport in different regions may have equity implications. Research by Dodson and Sipe (2006) has indicated that some outer suburban regions with low levels of public transport services have high proportions of car-dependent low-income households, which expend a significant proportion of their income running two or more vehicles. Rising fuel prices may disproportionately impact on households in these suburbs. In contrast, households in those inner-urban areas that are well serviced by public transport and often have higher average incomes may be less vulnerable to rising fuel prices. (Garnaut 2007 p.6).

Transport costs are a big part of the day to day expenditure for households in Australia. In 2003/04 transport costs were the highest cost in weekly expenditure for rural Australians. In urban Australia the weekly household expenditure on transport are close to the expenditure on either food or housing (ABS 2006a).

AVERAGE WEEKLY HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURE BY BROAD EXPENDITURE GROUP, by Section of State, Australia, 2003-04



Source: **Household Expenditure Survey, 2003-04**, (1380.0.55.003 - *Perspectives on Regional Australia: Household Expenditure throughout Australia, 2003-04*)

The following examples of transport exclusion were identified in the UK by the Cabinet's Social Exclusion Unit.

Access to work: Two out of five jobseekers say lack of transport is a barrier to getting a job. One in four jobseekers say that the cost of transport is a problem getting to interviews. One in four young people have not applied for a particular job in the last 12 months because of transport problems.

Access to learning: 16–18-year-old students spend on average £370 a year on education related transport, and nearly half of them experience difficulty with this cost. Six per cent of all 16–24-year-olds turn down training or further education opportunities because of problems with transport.

Access to healthcare: 31 per cent of people without a car have difficulties travelling to their local hospital, compared to 17 per cent of people with a car. Over 1.4 million people say they have missed, turned down, or chosen not to seek medical help over the last 12 months because of transport problems.

Access to food shops: 16 per cent of people without cars find access to supermarkets difficult, compared to 6 per cent of the population as a whole.

Access to social, cultural, and sporting activities: 18 per cent of people without a car find seeing friends and family difficult because of transport problems, compared with 8 per cent for car owners. People without cars are also twice as likely to find it difficult getting to leisure centres (9 per cent) and libraries (7 per cent). (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003).

What can be done?

The following explore some government and community responses to rising energy prices, with particular, but not exclusive, reference to peak oil

Categories of response that we wish to consider are:

1. Joined up policy
2. Energy pricing principles
3. Demand reduction
4. Public transport
5. Concessions
6. Tax Policy
7. Urban Planning
8. Research and Development

1. Joined up Policy

We believe it is essential that responses to “peak oil” are located in a broader energy framework. There is a significant range of related policy / program ideas, that relate directly or indirectly to energy costs under consideration at the moment, including:

1. FuelWatch , at Federal Government level
2. Emissions trading scheme / which will be informed by the report by Professor Garnaut
3. CO2 emission reduction targets
4. National Smart meter roll out for electricity
5. Demand management strategies, NB “feed in tariffs” for subsidies for capital costs for Solar Hot water and PV cells as well as Direct Load Control in SA
6. Energy Audit / energy efficiency / retro-fitting, in particular REES (Residential Energy Efficiency Scheme) in SA

We observed that there is little connection between the various aspects of responses to energy production, regulation, greenhouse impacts on remediation strategies across government departments and also between Federal and State tiers of government.

We propose that, for South Australia, a Ministerial Energy Council is established to ensure that there is regular communication between all groups involved with energy issues and to ensure that consumer implications are integral to all decision making. The Ministerial Council would be chaired by the Minister for Energy and include other relevant ministers, senior

government officials, energy producers, consumers and regulators. We believe that the council should be supported with administration, data and research by the Essential Services Commission of South Australia. (ESCoSA)

Recommendation 1. That a higher level of ministerial energy Council be established in South Australia to ensure that all aspects of energy policy are managed in an integrated and informed manner, with all key stakeholders engaged in the strong focus on minimising adverse impacts for consumers, particularly low income and disadvantaged consumers.

UnitingCare Wesley recognises three broad sets of strategies, open to government, that can impact on the triple goals of: managing demand for energy, reducing adverse environmental impacts and minimising adverse impacts on low income households. These three broad strategies can be considered as:

- Pricing
- Demand Reduction
- Concessions

2. Energy Pricing Principles

We have no doubt that there will be continued upward movement of all energy prices in the foreseeable future. We also recognise that, particularly for environmental reasons, energy needs to be managed in such a way as to ensure that it is used judiciously and only for necessary activities. Pricing is a critical mechanism in achieving “a culture of scarcity.”

Energy sources are also Essential Services for consumers.

The central policy challenge is “how to price energy in a manner that sends the requisite signals for judicious use, while ensuring that it is affordable for essential application, particularly for low and modest income households?”

We suggest that a starting point is to establish some pricing principles that enable the policy challenge to be managed.

We propose the following energy pricing principles:

1. Energy provision services are recognised as essential Services
2. A ‘lifeline’ quantum of essential energy sources (Petrol and Electricity) be available for all households at an affordable price
3. Energy pricing increase, beyond the “lifeline price” so that price increases as use increases, as a disincentive for energy use that is not environmentally sustainable. – Inclining Block Tariffs
4. Energy tariffs be set so that the combination of ‘lifeline’ and higher tariffs will be the basis to establish return to retailer.
5. Prices for essential energy provision be regulated by an independent regulator. – ESCoSA in South Australia
6. Pricing processes and prices be transparent for all customers

7. Prices should be cost neutral for government.

Pricing Principles and Electricity

The following discussion has been produced by Gavin Duffy of St Vincent De Paul Society in Victoria, to apply the above pricing principles to the Victorian electricity market.

“It suggested that the government could introduce pricing principles that would allow it to maintain its commitment to industry and deliver further deregulation in the energy sector, while maintaining social equity objectives and promoting environmental outcomes.

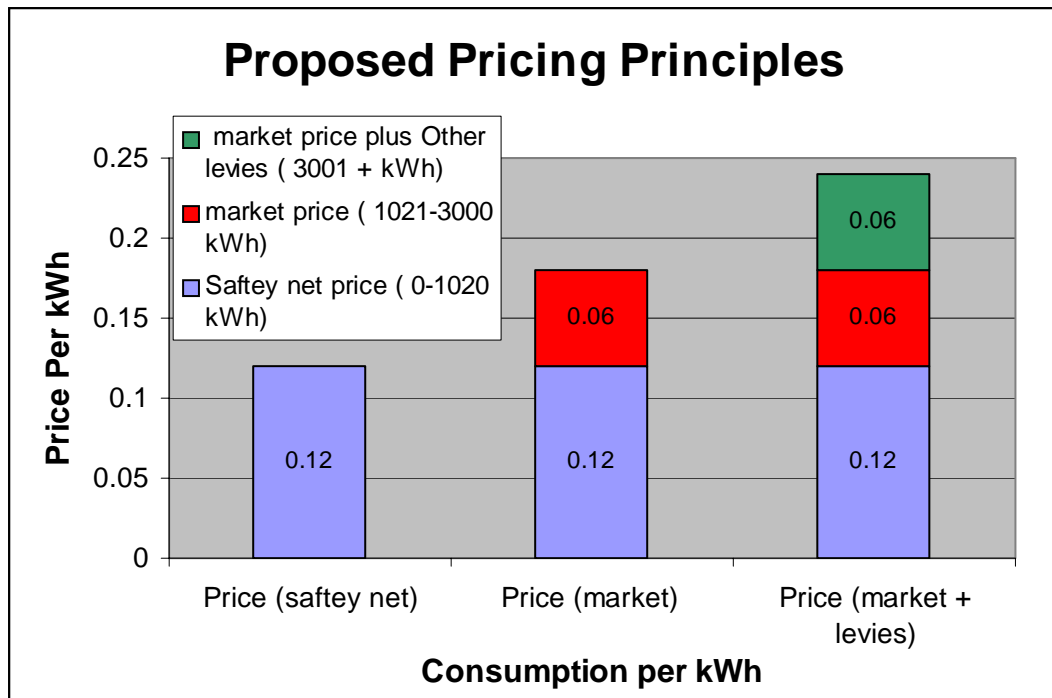
It is proposed that a specific amount of energy consumed per quarterly be capped at a fixed price, delivering a “lifeline” price cap. This price would be set at a level that minimizes the companies profit level.

The rationale for this is that electricity is an essential service and as such there should be limited ability to profiteer on this component. Price setting for consumption post the “lifeline” price cap would be left to the individual retailers to determine, thus allowing the government to deliver their policy commitment of deregulation in energy pricing.

In conjunction with a regulated price with minimum “headroom” for companies in the “lifeline” of energy usage, it is proposed that the fixed charge also be capped as proportion of the regulated energy consumption component, say at a ratio of 80% consumption-20% fixed charges.

For example, if the regulated energy consumption component was set at 14 cents for a total of 1020 Kwh per quarter (a total quarterly energy cost of \$142.80) then the fixed cost could not be more than \$28.56.

It is believed that the overall effect of establishing a “lifeline” tariff with minimum room for profiteering, while uncapping prices at the average/high consumption end effectively results in the industry implementing a two-part inclining block tariff. This occurs as governments have reduced/minimized the ability of companies to in the fixed and first block of energy charges and such they will seek to profiteer in the unregulated components.



Impact of 80:20 ratio on the fixed charge:

By establishing a ratio between the fixed versus a set amount energy consumed this allows governments to deliver incentives that prioritize energy conservation. This occurs as any reduction in energy consumption is rewarded with a greater reduction in bills size this occurs, as the fixed component is less of the total bill than is offered in the current pricing structures.

It enhances social policy objectives as low volume consumer (often low income households) are offered an overall price discount relative to the current safety net tariffs.

It reduces cost for the government, as by reducing the fixed charge there will be reduced claims in the supply charge concession.

Impact of imposing fixed electricity charges for an essential usage with minimum profit level

It enhances social policy outcomes through increasing affordability of energy for low volume consumers.

It reduces the government's outlays to low volume consumers via the Winter Energy Concession, this occurs, as the "lifeline" charge will be less than the current price caps.

Broader implications of proposed pricing principles

These price principles provide a framework that is consistent with and supportive of the governments stated and implied policy objectives.

These pricing principles are cost neutral to government.

They provide certainty to both the Victorian community and Investors in the energy market.

They provide a context/ framework in which new tariff design and innovation (which will occur with the introduction of interval meters). Thus avoiding price shock and any other unintended outcomes.”

Pricing Principles and Petrol

Applying these pricing principles to petrol, the main consumer product directly derived from oil, is more difficult to conceptualise than for electricity.. Petrol is generally purchased more regularly than electricity (or gas), from a range of retailers and does not pass through a single meter.

However, there is opportunity to apply a “lifeline” to tariff, albeit using a different delivery mechanism to electricity or gas.

“Mechanism to deliver a “lifeline” petrol price.

We are proposing a two-step price for petrol, a “bowser” price and a “lifeline” price.

The “bowser price” would be set at market price, (long run marginal cost) plus an adjustment to offset the ‘lifeline’ price. The market price could change on a regular basis, as is the current case, and would be set by each retailer, to ensure competition.

The “lifeline” price would be set as a fixed percentage reduction taken from the “bowser” price, say 15%. This reduction would be achieved by a reduction in government taxation, for example the GST on petrol excise, for ‘lifeline’ petrol only, coupled with a reduction, ‘cross subsidised’ by the ‘bowser’ price which is set above the market price, to allow for the ‘lifeline’ price.

Each person would be allocated an annual quantum of petrol, at the ‘lifeline’ price, say 3000 litres per year, which may be broken down into a monthly allowance. ‘Lifeline’ price petrol would be claimed through a card, which would be issued annually through the Australian Tax Office, following from lodgement of tax returns (this avoids attempt to rort the system by individuals claiming additional cards). When petrol is purchased, the card is presented and scanned, and the available ‘lifeline’ entitlement reduced by the amount purchased. Petrol purchases were paid at bowser prices where no card was presented at point-of-sale.

We observe that this type of system exists already with reductions in retail petrol price offered to holders of specific grocery shopping docket petrol

offers, while BP has a card which reduces the price of gas by two cents per litre, so there is no technological barrier to implement in this proposal.

Further negotiation will need to be undertaken about cash transfers between retailers, wholesalers and the tax office, but we cannot see any significant barrier to this occurring in an efficient and expedient manner.

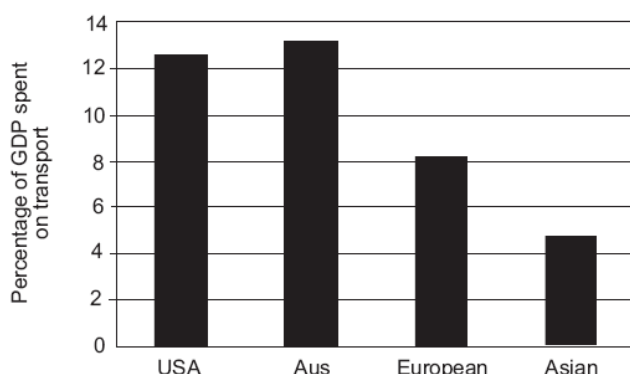
Recommendation 2. That the SA Government adopt the Pricing Principles outlined above.

Recommendation 3. That the SA Government work with the petrol industry and Commonwealth Government to establish a mechanism to establish a 'lifeline' tariff and allocation allowance.

3. Demand Reduction

Transport expenditure is high in Australian cities, by international comparison, as indicated in the following graph. This indicates that strategies to reduce demand have a good chance of being effective.

Figure 5 Average percentage of city based GDP spent on transport for 29 international cities (1990)



Source: Kenworthy, JR. and Laube, FB. et al 1999, *An international sourcebook of automobile dependence in cities 1960-1990*. University Press of Colorado, Boulder.

UnitingCare Wesley considers public transport to be a critical factor in responding to peak oil and allied environmental issues, so this is considered separately in the next session. In this section we simply outline a selection of strategies that are likely to be effective in reducing the use of petrol for transport, the largest single use of oil derived fuel in SA:

- a. Incentives for Householders to Purchase cars using less petrol. This can be achieved through a range of measures, including direct subsidies for transferring to a smaller vehicle or on purchase of new four-cylinder (or less) vehicles. Registration and licensing fees can be used to give significantly lower rates for smaller vehicles that use less petrol. Similarly, additional surcharges can be applied to registration (and insurance) fees for higher fuel use vehicles.
- b. Incentives for gas conversion. This subsidy currently exists and an

extension of this scheme would be useful, as it provides the cost-effective approach for reducing fuel use and fuel costs for low income households, particularly those that have six or eight cylinder vehicles.

- c. Carpooling. Carpooling is an effective strategy to reduce petrol use and mechanisms to encourage carpooling should be endorsed.
- d. Bicycle use. This is a really important strategy for shorter trips that not only reduces petrol use but also improves physical health. An improved and extended bike-lane network is essential. Consideration should also be given to encouraging banks of community used bikes to be developed and maintained, possibly through local government, particularly in areas where shorter trips are frequent and where bikes make ideal transport, for example the CBD, Port Adelaide, Elizabeth and Salisbury and Noarlunga centres

Recommendation 4. That the proposed Ministerial Energy Council investigates appropriate incentives and penalties, to encourage households to use cars with smaller engines and alternative fuels.

Recommendation 5. That the review strongly recommend a significant extension of bike lanes and strategies to increase bicycle use

UnitingCare Wesley is cognisant of the current development of REES, the residential energy efficiency scheme, which focuses on demand management for electricity for low income households. We have responded separately to proposals regarding that scheme, and so do not broaden their comments to include demand management for electricity (or gas), for this inquiry.

4. Public Transport

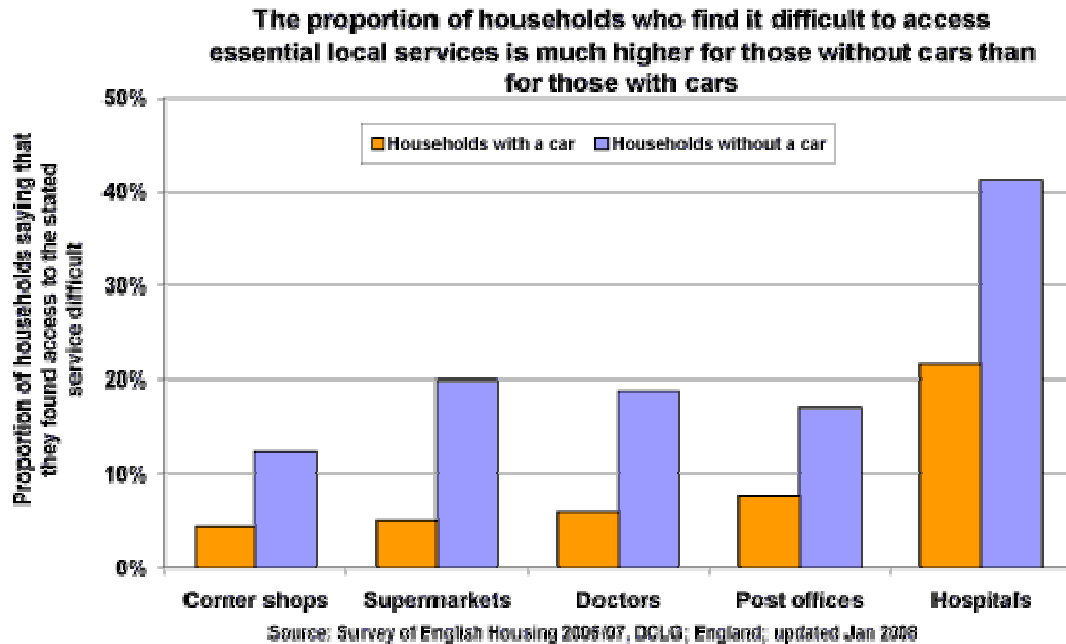
The following graph from the United Kingdom, shows that households without cars have greater difficulty accessing essential services, than households with cars. We have little doubt that the situation would also apply to Australia, although we are not aware of any Australian research to replicate this UK study.

We are also convinced that an efficient, regular and affordable public transport system is one of the most effective, longer-term strategies to ameliorate the impacts of “peak oil” and other factors affecting the price of energy, including petrol.

We therefore strongly recommend that this inquiry make recommendations about improving public transport for South Australia a priority for equity, efficiency and environmental reasons.

We recognise that public transport infrastructure is expensive, with most of the benefits occurring beyond the term of any government. However, investing in public transport is a State imperative, and it is the right thing to do. Investing in public transport is also comparatively affordable, in the current

economic climate as evidenced by the May 2008 Federal budget, where a Building Australia Fund was established. We anticipate that South Australia will be able to access a share of this fund, for public transport infrastructure. We think it is also appropriate for the State government to hypothecate a percentage of new tax revenues from mining industry development in South Australia, to service loans for public transport infrastructure.



We understand that the most energy efficient public transport system is light rail. We also observed that the current Adelaide public transport has a range of approaches that have been developed, in an ad hoc manner, over time. There is 1 tram line, 1 O-Bahn, 3½ rail lines (the former Adelaide Hills suburban rail service has terminated at Belair and is also failing to service the growing Hills communities, particularly Mount Barker) and a series of bus companies. Considerably enhanced public transport services are desperately needed in and between rural communities. We know that country rail services were wound back considerably during the 1970's and 1980's.

We strongly believe that the long-term transport plan for Adelaide, and South Australia, is urgently needed. We suggest that public transport services, based on an extensive light rail network, is likely to be the best option, supported by regular rail links with all regional centres.

Recommendation 6, that planning commence promptly for a comprehensive, efficient, low emission public transport system for rural and regional South Australia as well as the city of Adelaide.

5. Concessions

Noting that energy costs, and particularly petrol costs, are rising at a rapid rate, and are likely to continue to rise, careful consideration should be given to

establishing a broad-based energy concession, targeted to assist low and modest income households in SA.

The broad-based energy concession would recognise the combined energy needs and costs of low and modest income households, considering petrol/diesel, electricity and gas costs for households.

To assist in applying a broad-based energy concession, we suggest that aggregate household energy use benchmarks established, (we suggest by EScSA).

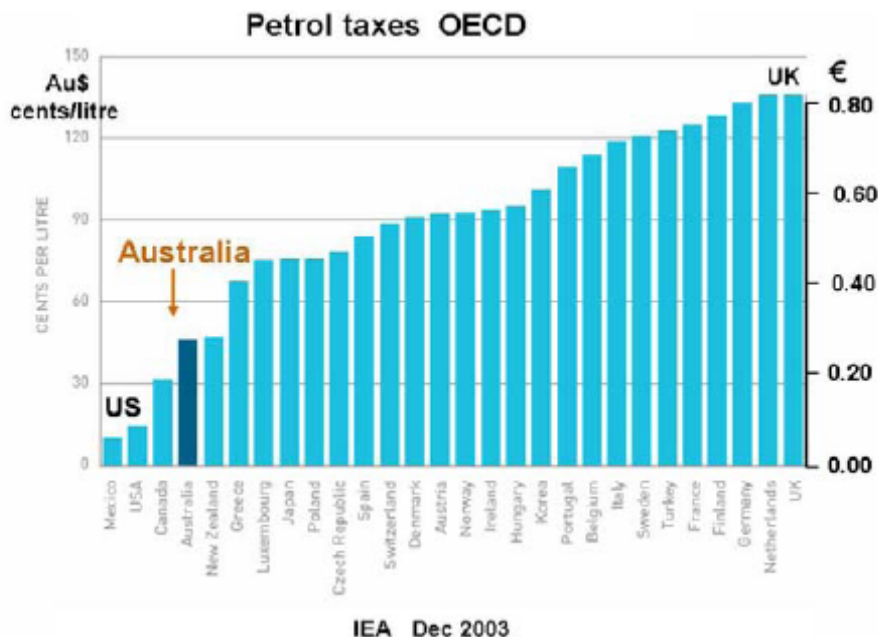
Consideration of aggregate energy use for households would enable energy concessions to be targeted to reduce the emergence of fuel/energy poverty.

We suggest that the proposed energy concession would replace current concessions, mainly dealing with electricity use. We also highlight the need for the proposed concession, and indeed all existing concessions, to be adjusted at least annually, so as to meet a constant proportion of the target costs, rather than having concessions reduced in value over time, as the cost of the target commodity increases significantly. This reduces the effectiveness of concessions assisting those people most in need of help.

Recommendation 7, that the review recommend establishment of a consolidated, energy concession, targeted to assist low modest income households facing energy stress and indexed to maintain real value.

6. Tax Policy

UnitingCare Wesley recognises that petrol taxes in Australia are low, compared to other OECD jurisdictions, as indicated in the graph below



We understand that this graph does not take into account the recent increases in the price of petrol, and hence the tax revenue derived. However, we expect that Australia is still a comparatively low petrol taxing country.

Current concerns about petrol prices, coupled with “peak oil” considerations mean that a review of fuel taxation measures, including rebates and subsidies, is required. We note that our proposal about establishing a “lifeline” petrol allocation and price, for households, has taxation implications, which should be considered as part of a review of fuel taxes, which we expect to be a part of Australia's Future Tax System Review.

We also note the Diesel Fuel Rebate Scheme, and suggest it is time that the subsidies afforded to specific groups through the scheme are also reviewed.

7. Urban Planning

The large majority of Australians live in large sprawling cities (ABS 2004; Antcliff 2003; Firth 2004; Salt 2008). In many of Australia’s urban settings, people experiencing higher socio-economic disadvantage tend to live in suburbs more distant from city centres and service hubs (PHIDU 2006; Newman and Kenworthy 2002; Dodson and Sipe 2005).

Transport disadvantage is a critical issue in Australia’s cities. In addition to being highly car dependent, Australian cities are marked by strong spatial socio-economic differentiation. The combined effect of ongoing restructuring of housing and labour markets has been to create an urban geography in which higher income groups are largely concentrated within inner locations and the most highly disadvantaged households are situated in middle or outer suburban localities (Maher 1994; Murphy and Watson 1994; Wulff and Evans 1999; Wulff and Reynolds 2000; Yates 2002; Yates 2002). These divisions appear to have been exacerbated by the recent house price ... (Burke and Hayward 2000). (Dodson and Sipe 2005)

The following table relates to Melbourne, but shows very clearly differences in wealth and travel patterns based on where people live in cities. We anticipate similar results for Adelaide.

Table 3. Differences in Wealth and Travel Patterns from the Urban Core to the Fringe in Melbourne

	Core	Inner	Middle	Fringe
Percentage of Households earning >A\$70,000 per year	12	11	10	6
Car Use (trips/day/capita)	2.12	2.52	2.86	3.92
Public Transport (trips/day/capita)	0.66	0.46	0.29	0.21
Walk/bike (trips/day/capita)	2.62	1.61	1.08	0.81

Source: Newman and Kenworthy 2002.

Note: Core areas are the central business district and immediately adjacent areas. Inner areas are the next ring of suburbs developed before 1939 (pre-automobile suburbs developed on the basis of transit). Middle suburbs are the post-World War II suburbs surrounding the inner area and beyond, apart from the fringe suburbs, which are those far-flung outer areas of the metropolitan region developed at very low densities.

The conclusion that we would draw from this research and anticipated similar results for Adelaide, are that low income households are much more likely to live in the city fringe, with limited public transport options and high (and expensive) levels of car use.

Significantly improving public transport, particularly to fringe suburbs, is important. We also suggest that increased focus on urban planning is a priority, to focus on strategies to increase the range of housing options nearer to the CBD, with development of affordable housing in nearer city suburbs, a priority.

8. Research and Development

Responding to peak oil, and associated energy demand and environmental considerations is going to require a comprehensive set of measures, which will include new technologies. Supporting research and development in new technologies to reduce oil dependence should also be addressed by the review.

Tax concessions for energy based R&D will need to be a part of the tax review, mentioned above. We also recommend that the State government provide research scholarships and research grants to help establish South Australia as a research centre for new fuel and sustainable energy research. In particular research is needed into the development of 'bio-fuels', engines using 'biofuels' and electricity generation using sustainable energy sources.

We also propose that the Ministerial Energy Council that we refer to in Recommendation 1, includes a data gathering and dissemination function, collecting data related to "peak oil", and other energy matters. Of particular concern to UnitingCare Wesley, is that there is prompt attention given to

collecting data to identify benchmarks, incidence and changes in fuel stress and fuel poverty in South Australia.

Further Comment

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