Energy Prices and Social Health:

Evidence presented to Senate Select Committee on Fuel and Energy, Public hearing, Adelaide 29th March 2010

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Recommendations

1. Australia to take a positive leadership role among the well resourced nations in cutting 'carbon' emissions, to enable a platform for global cooperation in emissions reductions;
2. Deliver well-designed intervention mechanisms to counter the regressive aspects of fuel and price rises;
3. Prioritise planning and development for an era of higher fuel & energy costs;
4. Prioritise the rollout of transport options for social inclusion, social health, and broader measures of economic efficiency.

Context to our submission

The science

The Uniting Church regards human induced climate change as a most serious threat[1]. This position is consistent the assessments of the world's major scientific academies[2] and research organisations, including the CSIRO[3].

These assessments are informed by the convergence of multiple lines of evidence. This evidence has withstood unprecedented scrutiny.

The impact

It is of particular concern that harmful impacts of climate change are likely to fall disproportionately on many peoples in the most vulnerable situations:

> "Africa is likely to be the continent most vulnerable to climate change. Among the risks the continent faces are reductions in food security and agricultural productivity, […] increased water stress […] and, as a result of these and the potential for increased exposure to disease and other health risks […]
>
> Approximately 1 billion people in South, South-East, and East Asia would face increased risks from reduced water supplies […] decreased agricultural productivity […] and increased risks of floods, droughts and cholera […]
>
> Tens of millions to over a hundred million people in Latin America would face increased risk of water stress […]
>
> Low-lying, densely populated coastal areas are very likely to face risks from sea-level rise and more intense extreme events."
>
> - (IPCC 2007, WG2 chapter 19 pg. 791).

Of the rich nations, Australia is among the most vulnerable to climate change with our relatively high temperatures, highly constrained access to inland water, and our low lying infrastructure and coastal cities.

The exceptional vulnerability of our small island Pacific neighbours to sea level rise adds another dimension to our responsibility for meaningful and cooperative mitigation.

The appropriate response

The Uniting Church in Australia supports international cooperation for a global solution and mitigation against dangerous human induced climate change.[4]

Our cooperation in mitigation is essential for global cooperation. We thus reject that argument that Australia's "carbon" mitigation will have an insignificant impact at a global level. This assessment is based on both the principle of fairness (associated with our high per capital carbon dioxide emissions); and also our rich status in world terms and thus our ability to accommodated a leading role in mitigation.

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[1] Uniting Church in Australia, 2008, Submission to Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme – Green Paper, pg. 4.
[2] G8+5 Academies' joint statement, 2009, Climate change and the transformation of energy technologies for a low carbon future
[3] CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology, 2010, State of the Climate, http://www.csiro.au/files/files/pvfo.pdf
[4] Uniting Church in Australia, 2008, Submission to Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme – Green Paper, pg. 9.

Evidence

Terms Of Reference item ‘e’: Federal and state government regulatory powers as they relate to fuel and energy products:

Low income households are more vulnerable to rises in fuel and energy price rise.

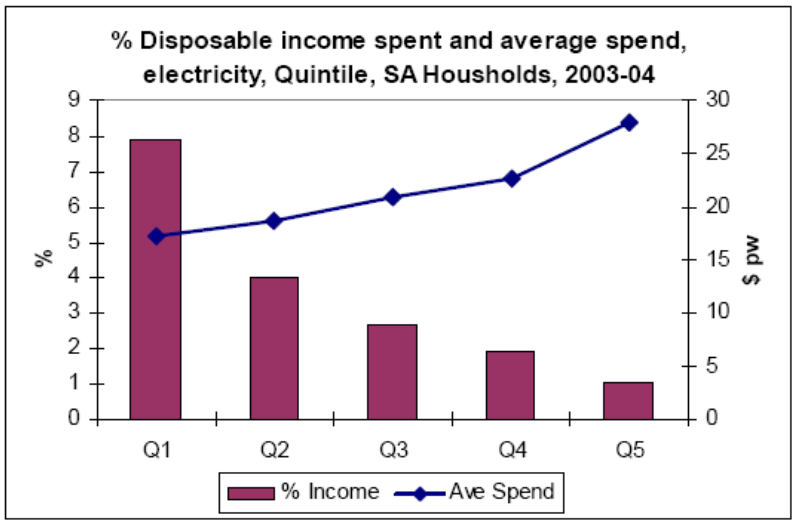


Figure 1: (Data source, ABS) where Q1 are households with the lowest 20% of income, and Q5 are the households with the highest 20% of income.

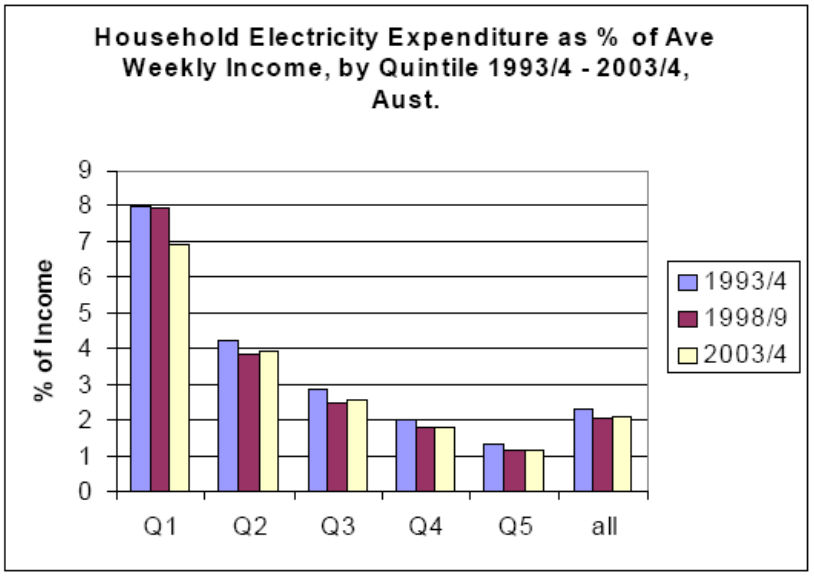


Figure 2: (Data source, ABS) This relationship has been consistent over a decade.

The impact of higher fuel and energy prices on families, risks being a regressive burden. Graphs 1 & 2 show that households with lower incomes spend a greater proportion of their income on electricity. The regressive nature of this impact can be countered or reversed with well-planned market intervention by government.

The burden of energy costs is not insignificant. For the poorest 30% of households, more than 35% report not being able to pay electricity bills on time (figure 3).

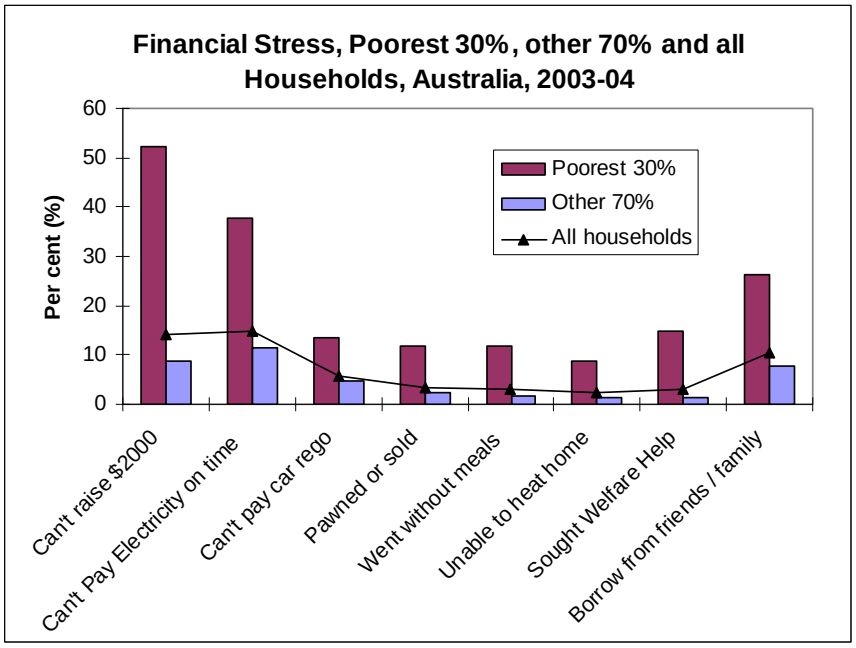


Figure 3: (Data source, ABS 2007[5]) shows the "Financial Stress" indicators for different distributions of household income.

The costs of electricity are significant yet the cost of transport is 4 to 5 times higher than domestic fuel and power (figure 4). Transport expenditure is in the top three items of expenditure along with housing and food.

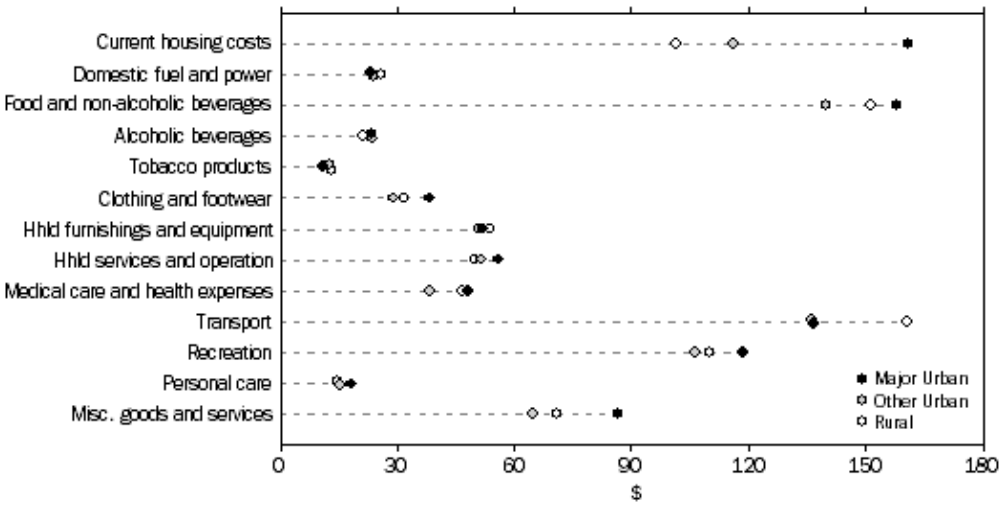
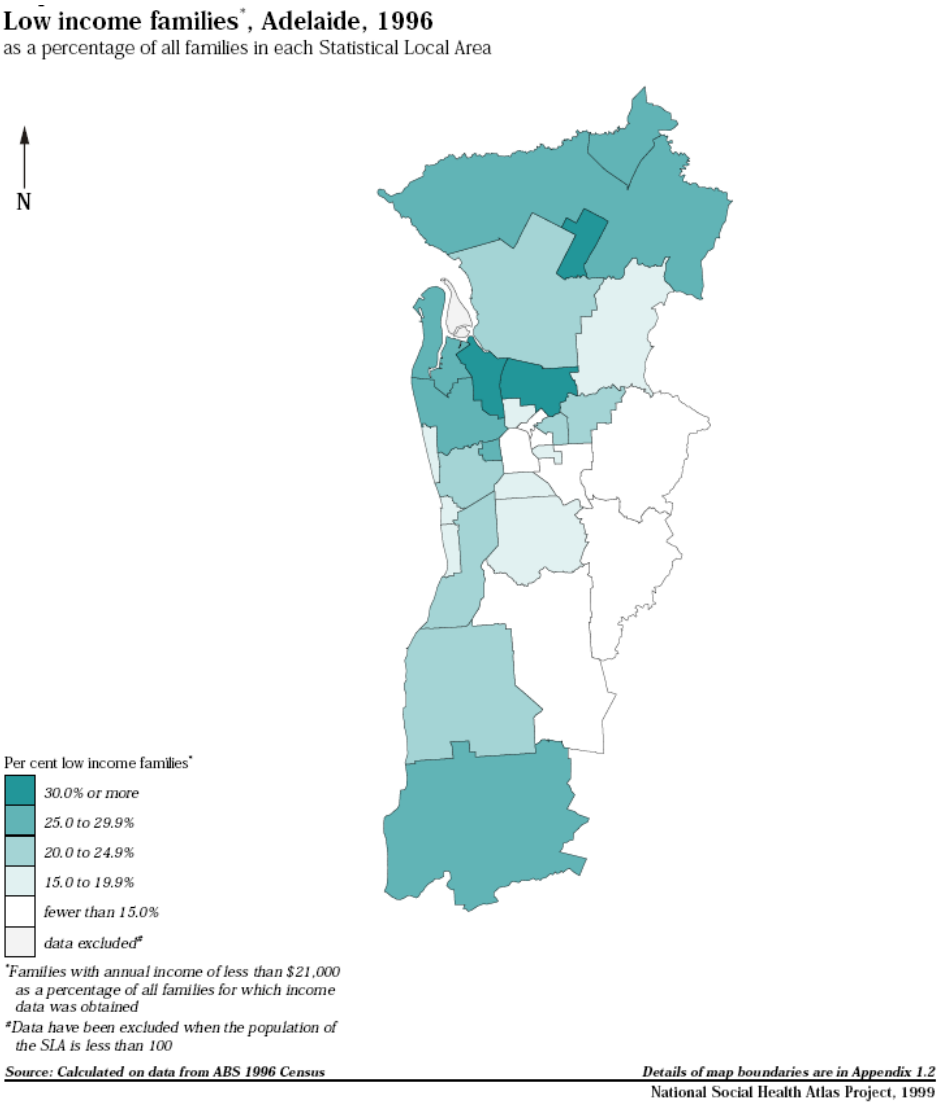


Figure 4: Average Weekly Household Expenditure By Broad Expenditure Group, by Section of State, Australia, 2003-04: **Household Expenditure Survey, 2003-04**, (1380.0.55.003 - Perspectives on Regional Australia: Household Expenditure throughout Australia, 2003-04)

The dominant development of cities over the last four decades has been based around the use of private cars and relatively cheap fuel. The large majority of Australians live in large sprawling cities (ABS 2004; Antcliff 2003; Firth 2004; Salt 2008). In many of Australia's

[5] ABS 2007, Australian Social Trends.

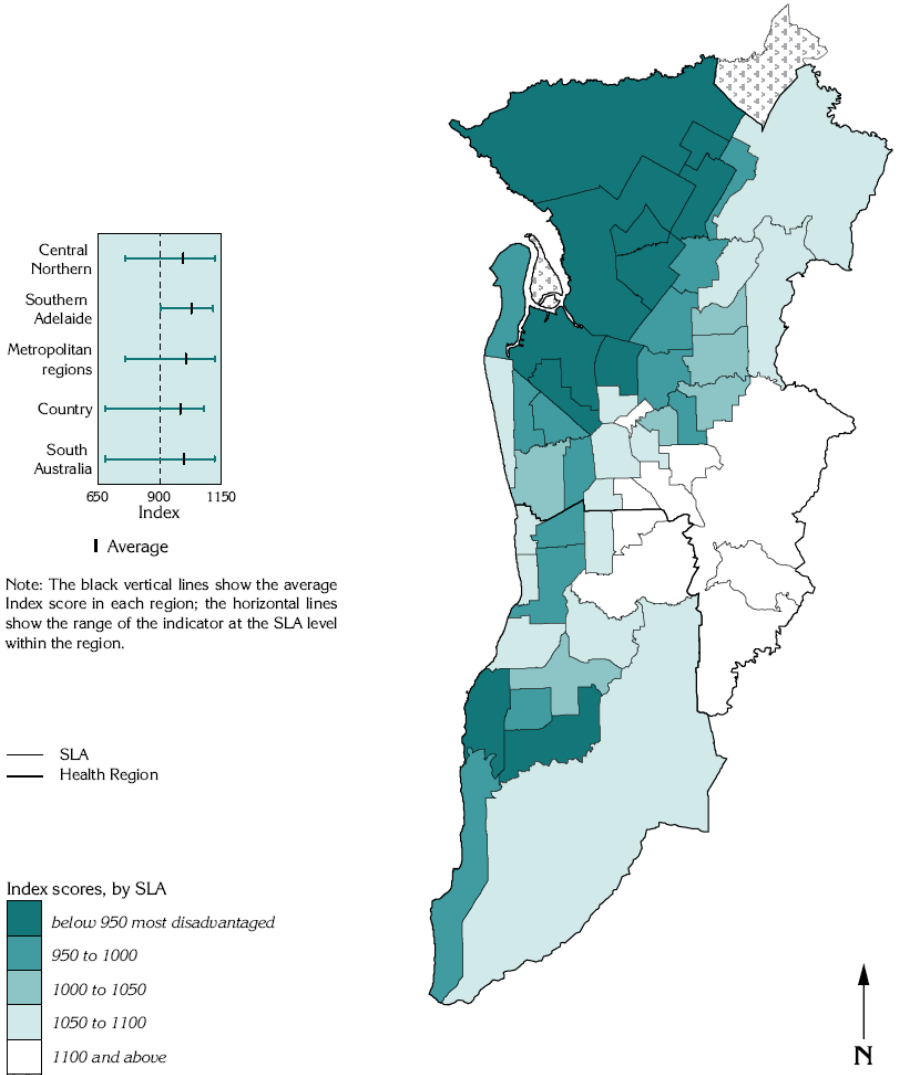
urban settings, people with lower incomes and lower wealth tend to live in suburbs more distant from city centres and service hubs (Newman and Kenworthy 2002; Dodson and Sipe 2005).



Transport disadvantage in Australia's outer urban areas has been recognised as a significant problem for more than a decade:

> 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 boom which has delivered inflationary gains to some households, typically the better off, while lower-socioeconomic status households have gained relatively less (Burke and Hayward 2000). (Dodson and Sipe 2005)

Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage, metropolitan regions, 2001



Source: Calculated on data from SEIFA 2001 — Details of map boundaries are in Appendix 1.2

A Social Health Atlas of South Australia, 2006

Within Australian cities, the travel patterns reflect different opportunities and different infrastructure. Table 1 shows that far fewer transport diversity options in use as a population's resident distance increases from urban core to urban fringe.

Table 1 . 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.

Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities

Fewer transport options and higher fuel prices impact disproportionately on rural and remote communities. In 2008, UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide gathered data on the retail cost of fuels in some APY communities and compared that data with the average retail cost of comparable fuels across South Australia[6].

> In September 2008, across the APY Lands, the retail cost of petrol (Opal fuel)[7] ranged between $2.20 and $2.40 per litre. In comparison, the average price of unleaded petrol across South Australia at that time was less than $1.55 per litre.
>
> In September 2008, across the APY Lands the retail cost of diesel fuel ranged between $2.20 and $2.60 per litre. In comparison, the average retail price of diesel fuel across South Australia at that time was about $1.70 per litre. (UnitingCare Wesely Adelaide, 2008)

Transport and Social Inclusion

It is harder to provided services and assistance to people who have inappropriate transport options. It is also harder for job seekers to find employment and harder to fund expensive commuting. People facing financial vulnerability are at risk of social exclusion through transport poverty.

[6] UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide, 2008 Submission to the INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT OF PEAK OIL IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA, 13 November 2008

[7] Opal fuel is an unleaded replacement fuel developed by BP Australia in an effort to combat petrol sniffing in remote Aboriginal communities. Financial support from the Australian Government is intended to allow Opal fuel to be sold a at "an equivalent local price to regular unleaded fuel" (see BP Australia, February 2005, "Opal: a safer petrol for remote communities" Fact Sheet. Available at: http://www.users.on.net/~tangcnl/data/caylus/Info%20on%20Opal/Opal_factsheet.pdf Accessed: 13 November 2008.

Recommendations

1. Australia to take a positive leadership role among the rich nations in cutting 'carbon' emissions, to enable a platform for global cooperation;
2. Well-designed intervention mechanisms to counter the regressive aspects of fuel and price rises;
3. Planning development for an era of higher fuel costs;
4. Prioritising the funding of transport options for social inclusion, social health, and broader measures of economic efficiency.

Recommendation 1: Australia to take a positive leadership role among the rich nations in cutting 'carbon' emissions, to enable a platform for global cooperation. Our considerations informing recommendation 1 is summarised on page 2 of this document.

Recommendation 2: Deliver well-designed intervention mechanisms to counter the regressive aspects of fuel and price rises. This recommendation is based on the evidence we presented on the disproportionate impact of higher fuel prices on households with low income. Garnaut 2008 identified potential mechanisms that contributed to or are consistent with this recommendation s:

> … Policy instruments for returning rents collected from households could include adjustments to the social security and income tax systems, and, assistance through information or capital subsidies to support efficient household adjustment to higher energy prices. (Garnaut 2008a, p. 48)
>
> …If governments were to decide to assist households for the impact of this on their disposable income, assistance could be provided through the tax and welfare system or by assistance to household's adjustment to greater efficiency in energy use, or through support for new technologies to reduce dependence on emissions-intensive goods and services. (Garnaut 2008b, p. 18)

Other existing mechanisms include:

> [E]nergy efficiency measures; in South Australia this is the Residential Energy Efficiency Scheme, a program supporting energy efficiency which is a regulatory requirement placed on retailers, who then 'smear' the cost of the program across all consumers.[8]

Note: we recommend an adjustment to the funding mechanism of the renewable Feed-in tariffs:

> Feed-in tariffs which encourage households to utilise renewable energy and therefore have an important role to play. However in equity terms, these policies can mean that low income households, who are unable to contemplate the costs of domestic solar or wind generation, end up subsidising higher income households. This occurs where the value of feed-in tariffs are recovered from electricity charges.[9]

[8] UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide, 2009, Submission to Federal Government Energy White Paper.
[9] ibid

We also recommend investigating the potential of a carbon consumption tax displacing part or all of the Goods and Services Tax. Anti regressive mechanisms compatible with carbon tax and worth investigating include the tax and dividend model, where the dividend can be allocated in an anti-regressive way.

Recommendation 3: Prioritise planning and development for an era of higher fuel & energy costs. We identify a number of factors that will increase the cost of fuel and electricity to consumers, over various time frames including:

- constraints on growth in oil production[10];
- growth in global demand for energy; in particular gas, (an increasingly important fuel for electricity generation)[11];
- potential ongoing impacts of the drought which has reduced hydro-electricity generation for the national grid, and has increased the cost of operating some generation facilities which need freshwater for effective operation.[12]

Recommendation 4: Prioritise the rollout of transport options for social inclusion, social health, and broader measures of economic efficiency.

Policy and infrastructure decision relating to urban planning and transport will have a significant impact on social inclusion of vulnerable peoples as we move into a era of higher costs for energy and fuel. As we move into an era of higher fuel cost, born disproportionately by lower income households, decision makers need recognise and develop broader measures of "economic efficiency":

> People who are economically, physically, and socially disadvantaged are harmed by transport policies that focus on economic efficiency (narrowly defined) and by automobile-focussed transport priorities that do nothing to meet their travel needs. They also tend to suffer a disproportionate share of external costs, since they can afford less protection against traffic impacts. Increased dependence on private motor vehicles tends to displace non-motorised transport and reduce the variety of public transport available to the poor. (Rahman & Barter 1998).

Infrastructure policy, urban planning and housing policy are integral to transport and social inclusion. Responding to these policies in a integrated way may provide new perspectives in addressing the combined challenges of ring fuel prices, rising energy prices, housing affordability and inequality. The task of tackling such complex challenges can benefit from interdisciplinary approaches.

[10] Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council, 2008, REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE IMPACT OF PEAK OIL ON SOUTH AUSTRALIA. November 26, 2008.
[11] UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide, 2009, Submission to Federal Government Energy White Paper.
[12] Ibid.

Distribution of benefits of urban development for low income people

Transport infrastructure is important for social and economic inclusion. When considering funding models for infrastructure development, it is relevant to factor in the differential in benefit from public infrastructure. Appropriate development of a light rial corridor will improve social inclusion of disadvantaged populations; it will also drive demand in property values. Gibbons, and Machinb (2005) find that the enhanced value households gain from rail access are large compared to the value gained from other local amenities. Furthermore, Debrezion et al. (2004) found evidence that commercial properties enjoy a higher positive impact compared to residential properties.

These benefits are not shared equally. The several studies have found that the rise in value is greater for properties closer to transit stations (Benjamin & Sirmans 1996; Mayor et al. 2008, Agostini and Palmucci 2008). Even planning for lighting rail investment (Knaap et al. 2001) or planning for Rapid Transit line (Mcmillen & Mcdonald 2004) is associated with a rise in land value in proposed station areas.

Mcmillen & Mcdonald (2004) estimate the aggregate enhanced increase in property values within 2.4km of Rapid transit line ($216 million [in 1997 dollars] from 1986 to 1999) was equivalent to half the cost of constructing the 18 km transit line.

Definitions:

- Rapid rail and commuter rail: usual built to main line (heavy) rail standards, E.g. Metro rail.
- Light rail: generally has a lower capacity and lower speed than heavy rail and metro systems, but higher capacity and higher speed than traditional street-running tram systems. Light rail typically operate mostly in dedicated rights-of-way separated from other traffic but sometimes, if necessary, mixed with other traffic in city streets. Sometimes designated as "supertrams". (Wikipedia)

Study	Property impact	Notes
Hess and Almeida (2007): Buffalo, New York where light rail has been in service for 20 years, but population is declining and ridership is decreasing	Homes located within one-quarter of a mile radius of a light rail station can earn a premium of 2-5 per cent of the city's median home value.	Effects are not felt evenly throughout the system. Proximity effects are positive in high-income station areas and negative in low-income station areas.
Agostini, & Palmucci, 2006: New metro rail line, Santiago de Chile.	Enhanced capitalization on housing prices of 4.5 to 5.7% Between 2000 and 2004 depending on distance to station.	Property tax collection increases if landed property is reassessed according to the price rise could stand for a minimum between 14% and 20% of investment in the new metro line
Armstrong and Rodríguez (2006) Commuter Rail in Eastern Massachusetts using Spatial Hedonic Price Functions'	Properties located in municipalities with commuter rail stations exhibit values that are between 9.6% and 10.1% higher than properties in municipalities without a commuter rail station.	
McMillen & Mcdonald (2004): New rapid transit line from downtown Chicago to Midway Airport. Open in 1993.	The house price gradient (within 2.4km of Rapid transit line) with respect to distance from the nearest transit station rose in absolute value by 9.8% between 1986 and 1999.	Aggregate enhanced increase in property values within 2.4km of Rapid transit line ($216 million [in 1997 dollars] from 1986 to 1999) was equivalent to half the cost of constructing the 18 km transit line.

Study	Property impact	Notes
Armstrong, Robert J. 1994. Impacts of Boston's Fitchburg Commuter Rail [cited in Parsons Brinckerhoff (2001)]	Residential homes located within census tracts that have rail stations commanded a 6.7% premium for home sale prices.	Homes within 120 metres of the line suffer an approximate 20 percent decrease in value. Armstrong cautions that firm conclusions cannot be drawn from this finding due to the fact that the commuter rail line shares the line right-of-way with a freight system.
Voith 1993 [cited in Parsons Brinckerhoff (2001)]: Philadelphia, Rapid rail.	A premium for single family homes with access to rail stations of 7.5 to 8.0% over the average home value.	

There are some negative impacts of transport developments. Kilpatrick et al. (2007) find that "proximity to the transit corridor alone without direct access conveys a negative impact on nearby housing values." Debrezion et al. (2007) found a similar result, and that properties in the immediate proximity of a station suffer negative price effect.

> Proximity to railway line as differing from proximity to station, explaining the noise effect, has negative effect on prices. At the same time the immediate neighbourhood of the station is affected negatively from externality of the station. (Debrezion et al. 2007)

The principle of fairness would be consistent with recipients of windfall capital gains, sharing part of that windfall with the public who fund the development. Property taxes of various forms may be considered in pursuit of an efficient mechanism for part funding of transport development.

UnitingCare advocate progressive/anti-regressive measures to promote social inclusion and redress the current inequitable allocation of transport opportunities. This includes both a progressive taxes (eg. Land or property tax) and measures to ensure transport development is equitable in terms of distribution of benefits to low-income communities.

In the United States Title VI of the Civil Rights Act requires that assessment of certain development plans to ensure that minority and low-income communities in the region share equitably in the Plan's benefits without bearing a disproportionate share of the burdens. (MTC 2009, p. ES1).

With minority and low-income communities sharing equitably in the benefits without bearing a disproportionate share of the burdens means the development should not be regressive.

The analysis by the (San Francisco Bay Area's) Metropolitan Transportation Commission measures equity in two different ways: equity of the development's financial investments on a per-household basis, as well as selected travel-related outcomes related to the investments. The five equity measures analysed are:

- Financial analysis of Plan investments;
- Access to low-income jobs by auto and transit;
- Access to non-work activities by auto and transit;
- Vehicle emissions;
- Housing and transportation affordability (test measure).

Terms of Reference item (f): the role of alternative sources of energy to […] petroleum and diesel […].

On the public subside for conversion of petrol automobiles to LGN, we recommend investigating the extension of this subside to include subsidised conversion to electric power, which has a new but growing market.

Appendix A

Senate Select Committee on Fuel and Energy A*mended* Terms of Reference *(As amended on 16 June 2009)*

(e) the existing set of federal and state government regulatory powers as they relate to fuel and energy products;

(f) taxation arrangements on fuel and energy products including:
   i. Commonwealth excise,
   ii. the goods and services tax, and
   iii. new state and federal taxes;

(g) the role of alternative sources of energy to coal and alternative fuels to petroleum and diesel, including but not limited to: LPG, LNG, CNG, gas to liquids, coal to liquids, electricity and bio-fuels such as, but not limited to, ethanol;

(h) domestic energy supply and the domestic oil/gas exploration and refinement industry, with particular reference to:
   i. the impact of Commonwealth, state and local government regulations on these industries,
   ii. increasing domestic oil/gas exploration and refinement activities, with a view to reducing Australia's reliance on imported oil,
   iii. other tax incentives, and
   iv. securing Australia's future domestic energy supply

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