

**Moving to The Dark Side or Will The Force Be With Us?": Sustainability Trends in Transport in Australian and International Cities, 1996-2006.**

**by**

**Jeff Kenworthy**

The decade between 1996 and 2006 saw significant changes in the transport-related pressures facing cities all around the world. In addition to the local and regional scale impacts of transport from land consumption, emissions, noise, neighbourhood severance, visual intrusion and social isolation in car-dependent suburbs, the scepter of obesity from sedentary lifestyles became more prominent in wealthier regions. In developing cities, motorisation continued apace, especially in Chinese cities, with a growing list of problems arising from that, not the least of which was reduced food security due to urban sprawl consuming fertile food producing land. The realities of climate change became more dramatic with Al Gore's film "An Inconvenient Truth" having a significant impact on the general community and the widely broadcast troubling pictures of rapidly melting polar ice caps. The problem of peak oil in transport came more and more into popular thought with major articles in wide circulation magazines such as National Geographic, as well as talks and newspaper articles around Australia by prominent oil experts warning of the need to reduce oil dependence, especially in transport. This was then punctuated a short time after by the record prices for oil in mid-2008 and the growing use of public transport in response to that. The current global recession is closely linked to the domino effect that occurred after the sub-prime mortgage meltdown in the US centred on highly car-dependent US outer and fringe suburbs with few amenities, when people could no longer afford to run three cars and still pay their mortgages. This paper explores the differences in some key transport and land use factors in twenty-five metropolitan areas in the USA, Australia, Canada and Europe as well as Singapore in the year 2005-6. It also examines the trends in these factors to provide a sustainability report card on passenger transport in cities worldwide, with a special focus on the Australian cities and whether they are improving or regressing in transport sustainability. Some key policy conclusions are drawn.