Vinod Khosla - Give Him Your Ideas

Posted by Robert Rapier on July 27, 2006 - 8:50pm
Topic: Policy/Politics
Tags: alternative energy, sustainability, vinod khosla [list all tags]

No, I didn't sell out. I stand by my critique of Mr. Khosla's position on ethanol. However, a unique opportunity presents itself. I think the vast majority of us wish to make a difference. We would like to help steer society in the direction of responsible and sustainable energy. No matter your position on Mr. Khosla's ethanol ideas, I think we can agree that he is a very influential person. I am convinced that he is committed to improving our energy situation. He is someone who has the ear of high-ranking government officials. If only we could get him to focus on the right issues, we might be able to kick progress in the right direction.

Mr. Khosla and I have exchanged several e-mails now. He has asked to speak with me by phone, but I have delayed until I was sure that he clearly understood my position. It doesn't do much good if he preaches to me, and I preach to him. I want him to be prepared for what I will say, and I want to be prepared for him. He also asked me to read over a white paper draft on ethanol that he is working on, and I have finished that. He said he will try to call this weekend, but if he can't find a hole in his schedule, he said we would talk next weekend.

Therein lies the opportunity. I know what I plan to say to him. I have already sent him some indication of my intentions, and I have prepared talking points. One of the things that we will discuss is alternative transportation solutions. As I was making up my talking points on alternatives, I thought "What have I forgotten?" I then remembered Alan's crusades for light rail. I started to sum up the pros and cons, but realized that I don't know enough about it. That's when I thought "I need to hear from TOD readers."

So, if you are interested in getting an idea to Mr. Khosla, here is the opportunity. Please present a better alternative than ethanol, and a brief synopsis of the idea. You might briefly list pros and cons, and by all means let's discuss in this thread. I am going to filter through and try to present him with what I believe is the cream of the crop. However, I will also send him a link to this thread. This may be your big opportunity. I know that he favors a carbon tax, as do I. One of the things I plan on discussing with him is the best way to implement a politically palatable carbon tax. I plan to talk about solar, wind, and biodiesel. But I can't cover the entire spectrum of ideas without input from the well-rounded group that makes up TOD.

I understand that people will have greatly differing opinions. There are those who would be against any solution that does not involve putting a stop to suburban sprawl. There are those whose primary concern is affordable transportation, who couldn't care less about suburban sprawl. But let's keep it clean and respectful. There is a good chance Mr. Khosla or some of his associates may read this thread.

I will update TOD readers after I speak with him.

Update [2006-7-28 20:11:45 by Stuart Staniford]:

So by the time I got to this thread there were 249 comments and still rising. Thus I had no choice but to abuse my editorial privileges and tack my comment onto the end of Robert's story. Something we don't talk about much but that I've been thinking about a lot lately is the role of the Internet in all of this. Besides being the most important development in human culture since the printing press, I think the ongoing Internet revolution has tremendous potential to help alleviate peak oil. Since around 2/3 of US oil usage is for transportation, anything that improves the ability of people to work together remotely can soften the blow. Most Internet technologies help in some way, but an area that seems particularly important to me is that the telepresence experience of computers still sucks. Video-conferences with no eye contact don't work very well. We need better cheap video cameras with wider angle and more pixels (and preferably in pairs for stereoscopic). We need software post-processing of the video image to fix the eye direction, and/or different/better technology to pick up body language. Working collaboratively on documents is much more difficult than it should be. Can we please get a proper global distributed file system already? Can we have lots of little super-cheap video cameras that sit around conference rooms and hallways and allow two people to stay in contact as they walk around their respective offices and workplaces via mobile screens (without it being an up-the-nose shot?) Oh, and I love my 30" Apple screen, but I'd like it to be even bigger - but it has to curve to get any bigger than it is - ultimately it could be a super-lightweight semicircular thing that wraps around 180 degrees and sits on my U shaped desk as I swivel (with, say, four mounted video cameras for full body-language resolution).

Then when when we're stuck at home because we can't afford the ethanol to get to work, at least we'll have excellent toys to distract us! :-) And surely we can do this a lot faster than ripping out all the suburbs and replacing them with something else.