



Peak Oil On The Campaign Trail: The Black Hole Of Rail Funding

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It's election time in New Zealand and Finance Minister Michael Cullen has mentioned Peak Oil in a [campaign speech](#) he gave on Wednesday, decrying the state of funding for rail transport and declaring "a new era in the rail industry".

Given the energy challenge we face in coming years, the so-called black hole of rail funding looks more like a pot-hole that urgently needs filling.

In 1908 our predecessors built the North Island Main Trunk line because they had a vision for a much more populous New Zealand and for opening up the North Island to settlement and economic development. The Main Trunk justified the faith of the settlers for more than 50 years, before the rise of road and air transport – helped by cheap oil prices – diminished its role as a carrier of both freight and passengers.

Today we have to come to terms with a new set of circumstances – the emerging reality of Peak Oil and the impact rising fuel prices have on our economy. Rail's energy efficiency has a new relevance and a new importance.

Apparently this is the first time he has publicly made any statement on Peak Oil.

The NZ Green Party followed this up with the following [press release](#).

Peak oil and public transport: Cullen's revelation

The Green Party have challenged Labour to redirect the billions of dollars earmarked for New Zealand's largest ever roading programme into public transport, following Dr Cullen's admission yesterday that people will choose public transport if it is provided and that Peak Oil is real.

In a speech yesterday, Dr Cullen admitted both that "we have to come to terms with a new set of circumstances - the emerging reality of Peak Oil," and that "we can get people out of cars and onto public transport."

Green Party Co-Leader Jeanette Fitzsimons says: "This is a significant turnaround from Cullen's comments to me in the House just last year that "One thing I do not share with the member, I suspect, is a view that higher oil prices will lead to an abandonment of the private motorcar".

"The Greens - and most of New Zealand - welcome the extra \$121 million for rail, but this figure is peanuts compared to \$2 billion going on a single tunnel in Auckland, and the \$1 billion going on a new motorway in Wellington - as Dr Cullen himself admitted yesterday.

"I challenge Dr Cullen to be consistent in his views and actions on transport. He must redirect the billions about to be flushed away on new roads into the affordable, reliable public transport system people desperately need, and which he now admits will alleviate the traffic problems around the country.

"It is a significant breakthrough for Dr Cullen to admit that expensive new motorways won't be needed in an oil-scarce world, and that better public transport and rail will.

On a personal note I think the view that personal (car based) transport is doomed and the future will only consist of rail and other forms of public transport is rather misguided.

We are already seeing the beginnings of a switch to hybrid and electric cars, and this is a trend that will get stronger and stronger in the coming years.

What we will see is an increase in the importance of mass transit, changes to urban design that increase the use of walking and cycling and a switch to electric vehicles.

It isn't an either/or choice - we need to promote all worthwhile strategies, not insist on a "one size fits all" approach.

Hat tip to Blair Rogers for the links.



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