

RACWA Response to Government of Western Australia's Consultation Paper Focus on the Future: Opportunities for Sustainability in Western Australia

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Priority Sustainability issues for Western Australia

Transport's current dependence on cheap oil supplies is not a sustainable activity. Estimates of the life of cheap oil supplies range from 3 to 50 years however the sooner we start the transition to a sustainable system the easier it will be.

Car manufacturers have invested over \$16 billion to date in developing fuel cell technology. Fuel cells will lead the way to the development of a sustainable hydrogen based transport.

Current estimates are that fuel cell vehicles will not become common for at least 10 years^{1,2}. Daimler Chrysler have stated that they will have a fuel cell vehicle available by 2004 and fuel cell buses will be trialed in Perth as early as late 2002.

The RAC is closely following the development of fuel cells and we will be ready to advise our members on their use as soon as they are ready. We will also consider their use in our own vehicle fleet as soon as it is practical.

The RAC also supports moves towards a more balanced transport system in Perth. We support the Travelsmart scheme (Note: the first launch of a Travelsmart project took place at the RAC head office).

Is Sustainability a worthwhile Pursuit?

The RAC agrees that sustainability is a worthwhile pursuit. As an organisation which has been in existence for almost 100 years we have some experience of taking a long term view. The RAC appreciates that change is continuous and it is necessary to plan for the future.

As an example we recognise that fuel resources are limited and they must be managed to obtain the most beneficial use.

Opportunities to pursue sustainability

A major concern of our members is the continued availability of fuel at a reasonable price. The RAC believes that it is prudent to conserve fuel supplies so that the changeover can be made gradually and disruption minimised.

The RAC has embarked on a project to raise public awareness of the fuel market and oil resources. This also means gaining recognition by the public that a large reduction in fuel prices would be counterproductive. It would lead to increased consumption of crude oil, bring forward the need to change to alternative fuels and make it more disruptive to the community.

However we also caution that gaining acceptance of this means that fuel price changes must be gradual. We believe that the public would strongly oppose a sudden large increase in fuel prices. The reaction to the price increases in 1998 is evidence of this.

The RAC also believes it has roles in

- encouraging its members to use alternatives to the car whenever possible.
- raising awareness of technology developments and their impact.

The RAC's views on the role of Government, business and the community in facilitating change to be more sustainable are:

Government Role

The Government's role is to assess what is possible and ensure costs are shared equitably.

Business Role

Apply sustainable solutions to its problems and endeavour to operate in a sustainable way.

Community Role

Community needs to be kept informed and given the chance to decide between the alternatives.

Research and Development needed

The major item is to determine;

1. Standard of living that people want including levels of mobility
2. What is the population that can be sustained at this standard of living, given current levels of technology and likely innovations.
3. Sustainable vehicle technologies suitable for WA conditions and their infrastructure requirements.

References

1. Richard Parry Jones Ford Group Vice President Global Product Development in Automotive Engineering International June 2001 P26.
2. Northeast Advanced Vehicle Consortium Future Wheels. Interviews with 44 Global Experts on the Future of Fuel Cells for Transportation and fuel cell infrastructure and a fuel cell primer. Nov 2000 P23