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Driving us backwards?

"CARS cause more trauma to the community than any other crime combined," says officer Ross Randall ("Cops, kids and a fatal car culture", The Saturday Age, 25/2). Are the costs still worth the gains?

Worsening traffic congestion is put nationally at more than \$10 billion a year and rising. The Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics estimates the pollution generated from such traffic causes an equivalent number of premature deaths to those caused directly from car crashes. The rate of serious injury in Australia is cited as being up to 25 times the fatality rate.

Globally, the World Health Organisation estimates the number of direct fatalities at 1.4 million each year and increasing (about 50 per cent more than the death rate from malaria). And only a small minority of the planet's inhabitants drive cars.

The outgoing Minister for Manufacturing implored us to further raise subsidies to the local car industry. Can we hope that his successor will see that its wealth-generating capabilities belong to a bygone era?

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