



Civic Exchange Energy Forum IX

Oil Depletion and the Future of Transport in Hong Kong and China

On 5th September 2008 (Friday), Civic Exchange hosted an Energy Forum entitled “Oil Depletion and the Future of Transport in Hong Kong and China” supported by MTR Corporation Limited.

A keynote presentation was given by Dr. Richard Gilbert an expert on Peak Oil and post peak solutions. He has outlined the facts and implications of peaking oil supply, and has compared a number of solutions for transport that reduce the dependence on fossil fuels. Two other panelists - former Commissioner for Transport Robert Footman, and Alex Tancock of Peak Oil Hong Kong Limited have offered additional comments on local implementation of low carbon transport solutions and have led a stimulating discussion, which was moderated by Mike Kilburn, Environmental Programme Manager of Civic Exchange.

- At the forum, Dr. Richard Gilbert illustrated the use of electric cars and noted that public awareness of the level of off-the-shelf availability was poor in HK. He believed that HK Government had the means to subsidise such a move, as rising fuel costs drive buses towards a tipping point, where it becomes economically viable (in terms of full life-cycle costs).
- Richard commented that in HK's hilly terrain, electrified systems were much more efficient than hydrocarbon engines and that it would be more efficient to burn hydrocarbons to create electricity than to stay with pure hydrocarbon engines in such an environment.
- He then spoke briefly about the spike in energy costs for the extra 20% of speed for ships and trains, and noted that Japan's bullet trains ran slower than China's would do for this reason.
- Other issues discussed included the failed Citybus trial of electrified buses a few years ago, and the barriers to adaptation of this technology in the future (US\$1 million per kilometre of overhead cabling installed), the lack of a manufacturer of skysails for commercial ships, and noted that HK/PRD would be the ideal centre for an Asian base of operations owing to the huge port traffic and manufacturing capabilities of the Delta.
- WWF (HK) noted that they had recently produced a book – “Plugged in: the end of the Oil Age”, which closely follows the thinking of Richard Gilbert's new book “Transport Revolutions”.