



Press Release
The Sustainable Energy Forum Inc
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Sustainable Energy Forum: Government Turns Its Back on Transport Alternatives

The Sustainable Energy Forum has criticised the Government's plans to increase state highway funding and make highway construction the centrepiece of transport policy. Tim Jones, Convenor of the Sustainable Energy Forum, said "The Government is living in a fool's paradise if it thinks that highway construction is the way to improve our transport system. Although the Government's announcement of its continued commitment to the Auckland and Wellington commuter rail systems is welcome, it's the only good news in these announcements. Everything else the Government has announced shows that it regards the private car as the be-all and end-all of our transport system."

"The Minister of Transport obviously hasn't been paying attention to International Energy Agency reports that warn of a supply crunch in world oil supplies approaching 2012. This supply crunch is likely to be worsened by the current low world oil prices, as these discourage investment in oil exploration and production.

"Given all this, you'd think the Government would be interested in other sources of transport energy. That makes it all the more surprising that the Government has just disbanded the Vehicle Energy and Renewables Group (VERG), which was set up in 2008 to explore ways in which New Zealand could promote the uptake of low-carbon fuels and vehicle technologies, focusing especially on electric vehicles.

"I was a member of the VERG, and I'm disappointed that the Government has chosen to end its work so prematurely. New Zealand's transport system is 99% dependent on oil, nearly all of it imported. A move away from this dependence is desperately needed both to reduce our soaring greenhouse gas emissions from transport and to increase our ability to withstand future oil price shocks and supply shortages. All the Government can point to as achievements in this area are decisions to 'equalise the tax treatment of biofuels and make electric vehicles temporarily exempt from paying road user charges'. That's nowhere near enough," Tim Jones said.

"There is much more work to be done in this area, but it appears the Government would rather place its reliance on oil. Perhaps the Minister of Energy's enthusiasm for coal-to-liquid fuels conversion plants, despite their appalling greenhouse gas emissions, has something to do with this as well. Whatever the reason, the Government's changes to transport policies will lead to increased greenhouse gas

emissions, more dependence on fossil fuels, and a transport system that is more hostile than ever to alternative forms of transport," Tim Jones said. "I hope the Government will rethink the direction it is taking the transport system, and will put prudent and environmentally responsible policies in place."

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Contact for this press statement:
Tim Jones, Convenor, Sustainable Energy Forum
Contact: convenor@sef.org.nz or 027 359 0293

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