

Panel Discussion Notes

Responses to Question 1:

Where will the solutions to a future energy transformation come from? Which challenges are best suited for international initiatives, national government initiatives, local government initiatives, market responses (including grey and black markets), or informal organization (e.g., car sharing cooperatives)?

Buhay

- Chose to return to academia from oil industry in order to educate people about the issues.
- How to make a better world? Educational institutions have a valuable role to play through courses; provide and dissemination of information

Gilbert

- City of Hamilton is convening special meeting next week to discuss his report.
- Why is it so important to them? Because he framed “peak oil” issue as an economic development strategy – emphasis on the “electric city”, which was actually what Hamilton was known as a century ago.
- i.e. must phrase it in a way that’s meaningful to politicians.

Mawdsley

- Behaviour change won’t happen until it hits people financially.
- Technology for fuel efficient vehicles has been around for years.
- Governments can’t do it, but individual action will happen if it hits people’s pocket books.

Ramsey

- All government and industry will be involved.
- What’s important is *who* takes initiative.
- Need to step up and produce ideas.

Gilbert

- Existing institutions can deal with this change; all will be involved but which sector will lead will depend on the people involved.

Perl

- Pre-1945 Canada and the US both had very strong policies from top down that mobilized people to conserve energy to win the war. Couldn’t we do it again if the need is dire?

Kunstler

- Whole society during WWII much more regimented – people used to working in large organizations, factories etc. We are different people now, much more individualistic.
- We need to determine which level of government is more appropriate for what will be required.
- Without a sound national railroad system, large nations won't be able to hold together.
- Bottom-up self-emergent solutions will be important but individuals can't rebuild build a railway system.

Schreyer

- Business will not continue as usual.
- What did we learn in the past when we were in a crunch?
- Is it better to ration or live in a casino crapshoot?

Question 2

What preparations are needed to keep essential urban public services functioning during a time of insufficient energy supply?

Ramsey

- Unstated assumption that oil crunch will make us decrease oil consumptions in all areas equally and across the board. Not the case. Some areas will need to be reduced but others will need to be maintained. We are going to have to prioritize.
- Whether policy or market does it, certain services will be deemed essential and kept going (ex. EMS, police, garbage disposal)
- Things non-essential like single occupancy vehicles will not be viable

Mawdsley

- Food transportation – have to choose where it will come from
- Travel to work – we will still need to get to work, but some commuting could be replaced by more tele-commuting.
- What are our priorities?
- Will need to do without luxuries, reduce travel

Buhay

- How do you get people to change?
- Most people won't
- Can force them but don't like being told what to do.
- Need to reward them somehow to make change.

Gilbert

- Advantage of age is that you can remember when things were different. In WWII England there was coal and food rationing, among other things.
- His graduating class all just turned 65. That cohort/generation is living the healthiest, longest, and best of people before the rationing and after it in U.K.
- Must remember that there can be advantages to living differently

Kunstler

- Just need to realize that life will change, but we won't have a smooth transition.
- We will be faced with disorder and turbulence; social unrest, maybe violence.
- Ideological violence, delusional thinking will increase; could become more delusional – battle to preserve access to the unsustainable way of life we live now.
- Such a struggle would be a waste of resources and futile.

Schreyer

- 2 extreme scenarios
 - 1. Intractable problems – massive die-off
 - 2. When the time comes we will swiftly make the right transition.
- He believes will be more like the 1st. High turbulence.
- Back to question 1 – some things Can & US can do.
 - technology should not be sold short but will not solve everything.
 - 1. National electricity grid
 - 2. with existing technology should be able to encourage government and industry to use more geothermal ground source heating.
 - costs more up front. 8 -10 year payback.
 - should be money loaned at prime to encourage it. Made available at cost.
 - 3. Hybrid cars. Should be able to plug in as well.

Question 3.

How will cities accommodate the sudden changes in transportation activity, from the decline of air travel and tourism to changing freight logistics, to a reduction in single occupant vehicles and corresponding increase in demand for personal transportation alternatives?

Gilbert

- Anticipate and act appropriately.
- In Canada main role of federal ministries is to protect the interests of their related industries/economic sectors, and not the commons. We need to de-link our institutions from industry, not using ministries to subsidize industries.

Buhay

- We need to be optimistic and take personal responsibility for change.
- ex. health care system in Can. in crisis, therefore need to take more responsibility for own health.

- Same with energy. Take responsibility for our own energy consumption. For instance, we can get “smart meters” installed to buy credits for electricity rather than getting billed for it, so you can tell how much energy you’re using. This makes you really aware of need to turn off lights an appliances.

Mawdsley

- We can’t all change where we live or sell our cars, but there are some things easy to do.
 - turn down heat, put on sweater
 - bike to work
 - etc.

Ramsey

- Tourism didn’t always mean international travel; when he was young meant 200 km from home, not 2000 km. There will still be travel, but it will be closer to home.
- Personal mobility needs will create demands for alternatives -- bike routes can be created with a can of paint. It’s a matter of choice.
- Public transit – some rapid increase in capacity possible.
- Will need to double occupancy of vehicles; car pooling programs need to be expanded aggressively.
 - Can happen quickly
 - Can buy enough time for longer term solutions

Kunstler

- NAFTA provisions will be source of conflict between Can. & US
- Canada should renegotiate, especially over natural gas.
- Tar sands development is using up all natural gas resources
- Deals with China could become problematic for US.
- Annexation of Alberta or US trying to break up Canada so that they can have different relations with different regions.

Schreyer

- Canada at fault for many of our relations and deals with US.
- NAFTA does not force us to keep increasing production of natural gas every year. It does force us to maintain @ least what we sold to them the year before.
- Electric trolleys in Winnipeg were sold to Vancouver and Edmonton in 1950s because ice built up at the junction of the wires – minor problems that could have been easily solved.
- Often major decisions are made for mundane reasons that keep us from making positive changes.

Q&A

Mark Burch

- Need another conference on peak oil with arts and social research community on theme of “how to change cultural values?”
- Other parts of world and in other times we weren’t so focused on consumerism.

Kunstler

- Gambling has become normative,
- Gambling is the de-facto for of reparations to aboriginal peoples in US; but has very negative consequences for their societies.
- Tribes are contracting out operations to organized crime.
- There is a tremendous amount of dishonesty involved in a lot of our social attitudes and values.

Mawdsley

- There will be blaming of governments and of oil companies – this is already happening.
- will be very interesting socially.

Ramsey

- When crisis hits we won’t have the luxury of blaming people.
- What we will need to have is a consensus of what strategies will work and which won’t.
- At the present time, however, each faction is trapped in own silos and don’t know other perspectives. A lot of the peak oil discussion is taking place on basis of interest and expertise.
- But this issue spans all sectors because oil will affect all of us. So, yes, we do need to open the conversation to many more sectors.

Schreyer

- We can detect a generational shift now – Baby Boomers blame government generically.
- However, corporations largely to blame. They have internal governance problems.
- Oil corporations are not putting \$ into exploration, but into profits. Buying own shares to kite profits. Executive salaries are out of control. But there is no way that internal governance functions can change this; governments have a role here.

Question about capitalist system, obsolescence and disposable goods

Kunstler

- Capitalism is not an ‘ism’ – it’s not a belief system or a religion but rather a problem of surplus wealth.
- we’re facing decreased capacity to produce wealth.
- big problem of finance now – we created so many phoney expectations of wealth for no work.
- “Finance” is the institutional basis for these expectations.
- Depression was crisis of capital. Had plenty of resources, just lack of confidence in system.

- Now we're heading for a "train wreck" -- problem now will be lack of resources *and* lack of confidence in capital.
- We will probably behave like an "exhausted" society.

Ramsey

- We are starting to invest more in a decent public realm.
- Vancouver has enormous demand for 'good' public spaces, walkable neighbourhoods, etc.
- market driven now but doesn't come about automatically – government has an important role in terms of setting policies in which development takes place.
- Need government push for some things ex. seawall in Vancouver – not profitable on property by property basis. Only if work all together and each owner builds their piece.

Mawdsley

- China is the marginal buyer right now.
- OPEC can't set prices anymore.

Gilbert

- Sweden has just adopted policy to go completely off oil. Currently 30-35% of energy use.
- Very strong government
- very strong industry and economy (many high-profile corporations [Saab; Ikea, etc.])
- Therefore, we need better government who will lead us. Capitalism is not the problem – we just need a better framework for capitalism to work.

Ramsey

- goal is to reduce the chaos as much possible
- Ease the transition

Question (paraphrased) : What do you say to those who would live hedonistically in face of crisis?

Buhay

- Once you have kids or grandkids can't think that way

Gilbert

- Before oil supplies run out we will need to cut back on our consumption in the west to let other countries develop their economies.