

# FACT SHEET

## CARS - THE POLLUTION SOLUTION?



*A horse-drawn traffic jam in Ruthven Street, Toowoomba in 1908.*

There is a lot of talk these days of sustainable energy and possible carbon taxes. We look back with nostalgia to an age when transport was not reliant on fossil fuels. The streets were quieter, cleaner and safer. It might surprise us in the 21st century to learn that 100 years ago the first motor vehicles in busy cities were welcomed in the belief that they would reduce traffic jams, make the streets cleaner and safer, and improve air quality.

It is estimated that in England alone there was 3 million tonnes of horse manure produced annually. Every street had copious amounts, and the methane and uric acid vapour from horse urine was so strong it stripped varnish off carriages housed in city stables. Much of this 'horse pollution' washed down drains and into waterways. (In Australian towns the 'fertilizer' ended up on vege gardens in every backyard.)

Motor taxis did reduce some traffic congestion when first introduced. The little taxis took up only half as much roadway as a horse-drawn hansom cab. Every city was crowded with horses and delivery carts. Motor vehicles travelled further faster, and crowded city markets and warehouse districts could be moved out of town.

Once everyone could afford a car suburbs stretched further and further. Urban sprawl filled up the old horse paddocks. It looked like 'progress' for a while, but reliance on motor vehicles comes at a cost in fossil fuels, environmental concerns and frustrating traffic jams. Another change is occurring, just over a century after the motor cars began to replace the horse. Improved public transport is moving more people with greater efficiency. Motor vehicles are also more fuel efficient and less polluting as we adopt 'hybrid' technology and new types of fuel.