



Transport conundrum

WHAT'S THE PLAN?



Geoff Gwilym VACC CEO

Infrastructure Victoria – regarded as an independent, non-political think tank – has delivered its 2021-2051 strategy paper.

Key themes are road user charging – the more you drive, the more you pay – congestion and parking charges in metropolitan areas, and the end to new petrol and diesel car sales by 2035.

The recommendations extend to the creation of additional rail lines, including a reconfiguration of the City Rail Loop, improving rail services in Melbourne's western and northern growth areas, and the outer metropolitan rail corridor.

Significant road and tram network additions also feature, as does the recommendation to guide people toward alternative forms of personal transport, such as bicycles and electric mobility.

The Victorian Government will now consider the document – and all 94 recommendations – and put the insights to good use when drafting a new state infrastructure plan, due for release in the next 12 months.

I wonder what it will take to get people out of their vehicles – still the most Covid-safe option when getting from A to B, not to mention something we have spent 120 years getting comfortable with...

Will the lure of a cheaper bus ticket or an electric scooter be enough to change the way we move?

Only if it's convenient. That's the crux of the matter – along with accessibility and safety.

The reality is, as long as the next train is still 40 minutes away, the bus stop is a half-hour walk or catching the tram means waiting on a dark road, people will continue to say, "No, thanks". And can I blame them?

Prepared by Victorian Automotive Chamber of Commerce

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[ROADSIDE ASSIST]



PERFORMANCE HERO

IAIN CURRY GETS ANSWERS

WRITE TO MOTING AT CARS@NEWS.COM.AU OR PO BOX 2808, GPO SYDNEY, 2001

What's your opinion of the Volkswagen MK5 Golf R32? Are they a good car? Any issues with them?

Kristian Edgcombe, email
 Now you're talking my language. These 2006-2009 all-wheel-drive hot hatches are excellent performance buys. I drove a friend's example recently and its grip, noise and acceleration had me itching for one. A 3.2-litre VR6 engine, 184kW/320Nm and 0-100km/h in 6.2 seconds, all from about \$15,000. Manuals are rare, but VW's DSG auto problems were mainly sorted by this time. Even so, prioritise one with an impeccable service history. R32s were built to be driven, so most will have had a hard life. The Mk5 Golf GTI is worth a try too. \$10,000 buys a good one with three pedals: those prices will soon climb as it's now being correctly recognised as a GTI high point.

CRACKING UP

My 2019 Subaru Forester driver's leather seat has two splits on the side. It's only done 40,000km. The dealer was of the opinion it wouldn't be covered under warranty as it's wear and tear. I'm perplexed as the splits are on spots I don't sit. Should I pursue this with Subaru or am I flogging a dead horse?
 Silvio Iadarola, email

Absolutely you should pursue this with Subaru Australia. Other Forester owners have reported cracking seats, and if they can't show any accidental damage on your part has caused them, it must be a warranty repair. I don't think anyone would think split seats is fair wear and tear on a car that's less than three years old. Call Subaru customer care on 1800 226643, get a case number from them and say you're seeking a warranty repair.

LIFE SAVER?

Re your comment on roll bars (sports bars) fitted to dual cab utes. Are they "only cosmetic"? My son was driving his Toyota HiLux fitted with one, he was run off the road and rolled down a gully. It was deemed the roll bar was effective and he only sustained minor injuries.

Malcolm Mackenzie
 If accident investigators deemed a sports bar protected the cabin in any way, it's hard to be anything but very happy about that. But people mustn't confuse these steel sports bar accessories with proper rollover protection bars. The likes of Safety Devices make multi-point bolt-in roll cages for dual cabs to protect all passengers, typically for oil, gas and mining fleets. I haven't seen any manufacturers claim that sports bars improve rollover safety.

FUEL MISER

Re Jeep fuel economy, I have a 2015 Cherokee Limited 2.0-litre diesel. On a 9000km trip

towing a 2000kg camper trailer I recorded 10.2L/100km. On a 450km highway leg I saw 8.1L/100km. I was the happiest camper and it tows beautifully.
 Ian Murley, email

You're a miracle worker if your figures are accurate. Ian. Previous letter writers were towing with heavier Grand Cherokees, so your smaller Cherokee does have an advantage. Its official economy is 5.8L/100km with no trailer, but my test saw closer to 8L/100km. For the sake of the planet, and your wallet, I hope your numbers are accurate!

SAFE OR UNSAFE?

Re autonomous emergency braking (AEB) happening at the wrong time, I've experienced this many times. I wonder how many so-called "brake-check" incidents are initiated by AEB? Unwanted braking has led to the usual pumped-up ute blokes tailgating me thinking I've brake-tested them, but it's been the AEB at work. No wonder they overtake me enraged.
 Ross F, email

Not only AEB, but also radar cruise control. If a car suddenly pulls in front on the highway, the radar cruise jabs the brakes and can look like you're brake-testing the car (or angry ute driver) behind. If people just left a safe distance to the car in front, so much road rage – and so many accidents – could be avoided.

REV HEAD

At my 2019 MG3's first service the dealership asked if there were any issues. I said yes, it does 2000rpm on start-up first thing in the morning. I was told this is normal. Things must have changed since I was an apprentice and taught never to rev a cold engine.
 Denys Elder, email

I wouldn't worry, 2000rpm won't be stretching a cold engine. If it stays at 2000rpm at idle there is a problem and the dealer must diagnose and remedy this. MG offers a seven-year warranty, so make good use of it. But really, the 82kW 1.5-litre four-cylinder in your MG3 isn't an engineering marvel. If a few revs get it started on a cold morning I'd forgive it that.

UNBREAKABLE

Re Jim Reynolds's Toyota HiLux only needing a couple of replacement clutches after 535,000km, my 2013 Toyota HiAce is still on its original clutch after 340,000km and I drive it like I stole it.
 Steve Gorton, email
 Of all the vehicles I wouldn't drive "like I stole it" the HiAce would be up there. I'd be into a hedge with a burnt-out clutch in no time.



WILD CLAIMS

I question Bruce O'Neale's criticisms of a Toyota Land Cruiser 200's fuel usage. I've towed a 2800kg caravan with mine over nine years and use 16L-21L/100km, not his suggested 25L/100km. I've no doubt his Chevrolet truck is impressive, but the LC 200 is a magnificent, trouble-free tow vehicle. I've

ordered the new LC 300.
 Mike Kerdel, email
 I hope you were one of the first to order the new Land Cruiser 300, Mike. Latest news is the wait list is up to 12 months. Not a problem for you if you still love your LC 200. The way things are going with used car prices, it could be worth a packet by next year.

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[FIRST DRIVE]

THE POWER TO CHANGE



Kia's plug-in hybrid, seven-seater SUV provides a greener alternative for families

BILL MCKINNON

Plug-In Hybrids (PHEVs) tend to get a bad rap in road tests. They're expensive compared with petrol and diesel alternatives, their electric range is often too short for daily driving and most of the time they are running as a conventional hybrid, on petrol and electricity – technology that's been around for more than 20 years now and which also costs a lot less.

Kia's new Sorento PHEV GT Line is a typical example. It's not a bad thing as far as seven-seater SUVs go, but I can't make a credible case for actually buying it.

Let's start with the price. Kia is asking (cue sharp intake of breath ...) \$81,990 drive away. I know it ain't cheap being green, but this is a whopping \$14,700 more than the 2.2-litre diesel Sorento GT Line, and \$17,700 more than the 3.5-litre V6 petrol variant.

The sales pitch is that Sorento's claimed electric-only (EV) range of 68km is sufficient for many people's day to day driving, which is certainly true.

However, the range numbers claimed by car makers for their EVs and hybrids are just as rubbery as the ones they publish for their petrol and diesel-powered vehicles. In the real world, they are inevitably optimistic and rarely achievable.

Kia's 68km claim for the Sorento is based on the NEDC standard, still used in Australia but now superseded by the more realistic WLTP test protocol in Europe. Sorento's WLTP range is 56km.

Sorento has switchable EV and Hybrid (HEV) modes, or you can just let its software make the decision. A six-speed automatic and all-wheel drive are standard.

Driving around town, our test car covered 25km in EV mode.

Then, with the infotainment screen display showing 61 per cent charge in the 13.8kWh battery, and a remaining range of 27 km, the 1.6-litre turbo petrol engine began to fire up intermittently.

In slow moving traffic, you should get 50-60km on the battery alone, but Sorento's software will override EV mode and start the

engine under some circumstances – if you use more than 70 per cent of accelerator travel, for example, once you reach open road speeds. It will also fire up to keep the 12-volt battery (which runs the aircon, lights and other ancillaries) fully charged.

When an internal combustion engine is running, even though it isn't spinning the wheels, you're not really driving a clean, green EV at all. You are burning fossil fuel and making Greta Thunberg angry.

Still, with the petrol engine making only an occasional contribution, instead of having to haul two tonnes of luxury SUV around, fuel consumption in town was just 2.7L/100km.

The 3.5-litre V6 petrol Sorento averages 13.8L/100km.

Kia's WLTP fuel consumption average for Sorento PHEV is 1.6L/100km.

Running in hybrid (HEV mode) on the highway, with the petrol engine and electric motor operating together in parallel, Sorento PHEV averaged 7.2L/100km. When I tested the Sorento diesel last year, on the same road, it averaged 7.0L/100km.

Sorento's battery needs to be recharged from a power source.

This takes four to six hours from a household power point, using the supplied cable, or three and a half hours from an optional (\$2829.59) 3.3kW wall-mounted charger.

Sorento's cost/benefit ratio may be questionable, but as a drive it's an exceptionally refined, luxurious SUV.

You get immediate, responsive EV torque, respectable performance (0-100km/h in 8.4 seconds) and seamless, smooth hybrid operation, albeit with occasional hesitancy from the auto.

Sorento is one of the tidier handling big SUVs, and while there's plenty of body roll when cornering, the PHEV feels confident and planted at speed, with a supple, quiet and well controlled ride.

GT-Line spec is uber luxe, with quilted Nappa leather-faced upholstery, heated/ventilated front seats, heated row-two seats, Bose sound, three-zone air, USBs for all seats,

AT A GLANCE

KIA SORENTO PHEV

\$81,990 drive away	7-year/ unlimited km, \$4903 for 7 years	1.6-litre 4-cyl turbo plug-in hybrid, 195kW and 350Nm
7 airbags, auto emergency braking, adaptive cruise, blind-spot and lane-keep assist, rear cross-traffic alert	1.6L/100km	604 litres (5-seater mode)

automatic parking, a sunroof and comprehensive driver assist safety tech.

You get most of this fruit in Sorento GT-Line petrol and diesel, of course, for a lot less cash.



VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

PHEV technology looks good on paper, but you pay a massive premium for it and, in the real world, the pay-off doesn't quite match the promises.



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