

# Comments on Urban Activation Precincts

## The fantasy of affordable housing



Summary:

“Urban consolidation”, “Transport Oriented Development” and now “Urban Activation Precincts”. The names change all the time but it’s basically the same thing: whack in more people into Sydney which has long ago exceeded its limits to growth.



In year #8 of peak oil it is unwise to pro-actively increase the population of Sydney (half of the growth is driven by an ambitious immigration program). The larger the population, the longer the petrol lines at the filling stations when peak oil turns into a physical problem. Australian crude oil is depleted by a whopping 83%. Once motorists are forced to take public transport for long-distance commuting from outer suburbs the trains will already be full at many stations now

developed or proposed to be developed as so-called “transit oriented development”.

Diesel shortages mean food shortages and high rise residents without a garden will be particularly hard hit. These shortages are almost guaranteed as the only viable alternative transport fuel, natural gas, is set to be exported in energy quantities equivalent to the whole Australian petrol and diesel consumption. So when the time comes to convert vehicles to gas it’s all committed for exports. Clever country exports itself energy poor.

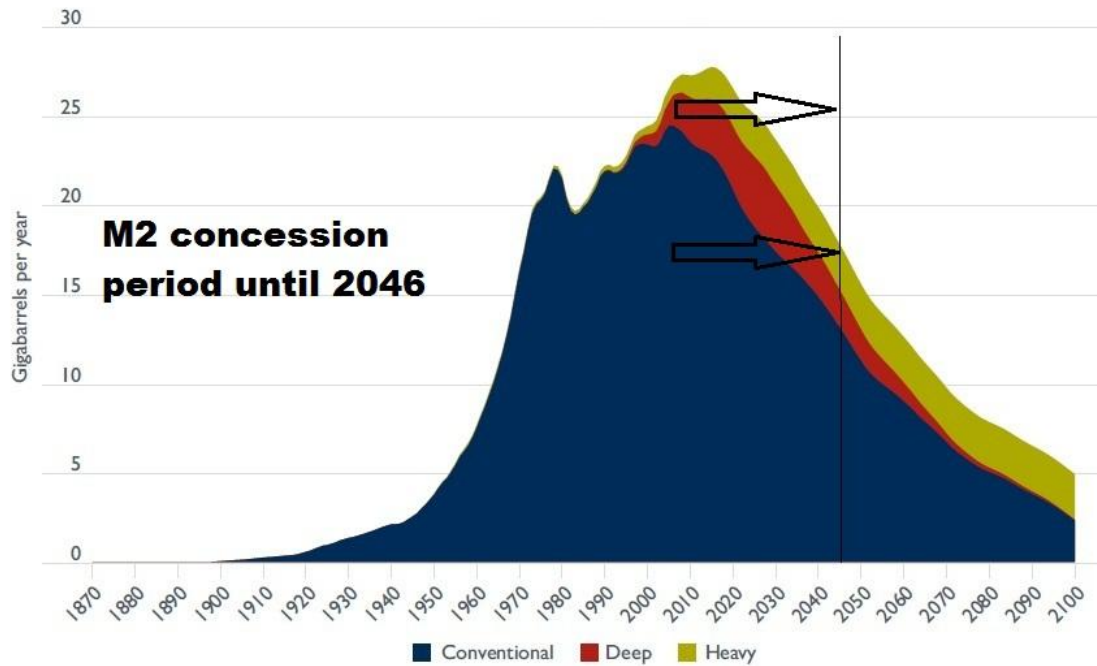
Due to the global debt problem which was triggered by peak oil, the size of the housing sector including associated infrastructure will be limited. And all this in the context of ever increasing fees and charges pocketed by consultants, architects, project promoters, financial advisers, contractors and real estate agents. Precincts are particularly expensive as a lot of lollies have to be included to make the project acceptable by local population. Trying to achieve affordable housing in this way is a pure fantasy, only existing in government papers.

There will also be power shortages as the NSW and other governments fail to replace outdated coal fired power plants with renewable energies (e.g. thermal solar plants) at a speed commensurate with the urgency to reduce CO2 emissions. In 2010, NASA climatologist James Hansen gave Australian coal just 10 years before global warming events become so severe (turn on your TV now and what you see will only get worse) that everyone will understand that not only will we have to reduce CO2 emissions but also extract CO2 from the atmosphere to bring concentrations down to 350 ppm.

There will also be huge storms impacting on highrises. The energy unleashed grows with the square of wind gust speeds. In other words, life in highrises will become very uncomfortable. These flats will become the slums of the future.

There is only one solution: decentralization, decentralization, decentralization to areas outside the commuting distance of Sydney. This can only be done with a job creation program in regional towns, preferably in renewable energies, biofuels etc. that means energy producing, not energy consuming economic activities. Sustainable, that is energy frugal cities will not have a higher population than 150 – 200 k and only when properly designed from scratch. No matter what planning strategies the NSW government now adopts or implements, Sydney will disintegrate into whatever subcentres can survive.

Figure 13.12 Components of total world crude oil production



This is an optimistic assessment from BITRE completed in March 2009. Peak oil is a process which started in 2005. It would have taken 10-20 years to prepare for peak oil. That period has now passed. Governments hate peak oil so the public is not informed properly. That guarantees no preparations will ever be made before the system collapses one day when a set of underlying problems converges. Free-wheeling long distance commuting by car will come to an end in this decade. That will be the beginning of Sydney's disintegration. Provided nothing happens in the Middle East. Just in from today's news 3/7/2012



6/1/2012 Iran playing war games but not in video arcades  
<http://crudeoilpeak.info/iran-playing-war-games-but-not-in-video-arcades>

When that happens, planning luxurious precincts will be the least of Sydney's worries

Detailed comments on:

Activation precincts guideline

<http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=VaCeKwk-oDk%3d&tabid=205&mid=1081&language=en-US>

Quote: “NSW State Government policy is to substantially increase the supply of housing and employment, improve housing choice and housing affordability.”

Comment: Employment in which sectors of the economy? And where will this employment be located? In order to minimize transport requirements employment and housing have to be close together, preferably in walking or cycling distance. Therefore, the employment strategy must come first.

Quote: “.....it is important that land supply is located not just in urban areas but in key regional locations.”

Comment: This is just a lip service. The NSW State planning bureaucracy is Sydney centric and worse, CBD centric. Both planning capacity and flow of money is concentrated in and for Sydney. The latest example is the \$ 6bn Barangaroo project. How much infrastructure could you build in regional centres for this sort of money?

Quote: “..... local government will play a key role in the development, implementation and delivery of these important precincts.”

Comment: This sentence is already outdated.

### **Residents to lose objection rights in new planning laws**

26/6/2012

<http://www.smh.com.au/business/property/residents-to-lose-objection-rights-in-new-planning-laws-20120626-210mx.html>

### **Councils to lose approval rights over developments**

28/6/2012

<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/councils-to-lose-approval-rights-over-developments-20120627-212w8.html>

Quote: “The updated Sydney Metropolitan plan, regional, subregional strategies and the transport master plan will provide strategic guidance and a framework for the identification of precincts.”

Comment: I have written a submission on the Metropolitan Strategy which is available on my website

[http://crudeoilpeak.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Big\\_Sydney\\_big\\_problem.pdf](http://crudeoilpeak.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Big_Sydney_big_problem.pdf)

The plan is NOT updated. It has no energy, let alone emission calculations over the projection period and is therefore not much different from previous versions.



## Comments on Metropolitan Strategy Sydney over the next 20 years (Discussion paper, May 2012 version)

### Big Sydney – Big problem



Every economic activity is a transformation of primary energy into usable energy with the end product of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere

I first mentioned the lack of energy calculations when the Metropolitan Strategy was presented at a 2005 seminar in the University of New South Wales, which used this document

[http://sydney.edu.au/architecture/documents/prc/prc\\_may18\\_jenniferwestacott.pdf](http://sydney.edu.au/architecture/documents/prc/prc_may18_jenniferwestacott.pdf)

The work was done under DIPNR.

5 years later, at a Sunset seminar in the University of Sydney

Planning for Sustainable Growth - Issues and Directions

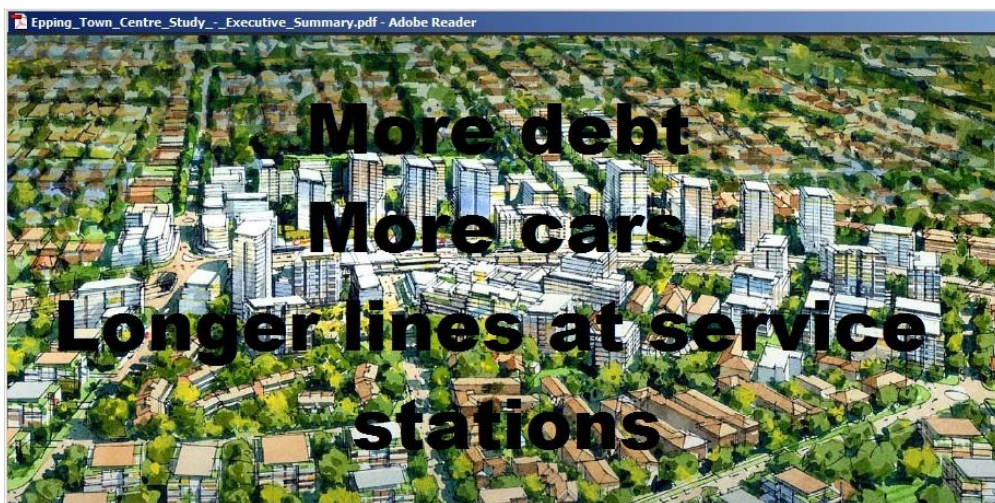
<http://sydney.edu.au/news/architecture/295.html?eventid=5893>

I asked the Director General of Planning: “How many millions barrels of oil, how many millions m3 of gas and how many millions tons of coal to you need to implement the Metropolitan Strategy for the next, say, 10 years? And what is the absorption capacity of the atmosphere when burning these fossil fuels?” Answer: “That question is too hard”

This energy ignorance, if not illiteracy will have severe consequences for Sydney.

Quote: “Nominations for potential precincts may come from a number of sources, such as Department of Planning and Infrastructure research and empirical data, and nominations from Councils, State agencies and the private sector.”

Comment: No voluntary nominations from Councils which are forced by the State government to approve housing strategies. The example for Epping is this:



<http://www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au/planning-and-building/epping-town-centre-study>

This promotion material from developers was put on a website funded by ratepayers. Unbelievable. This is how you destroy a suburb. No one wants these Mini Hongkongs. When the land is sold or auctioned off, land values go up and Council rates increase. For genuine residents this is bad news.

On page 7 we find an image depicting the CBD with the Barangaroo development

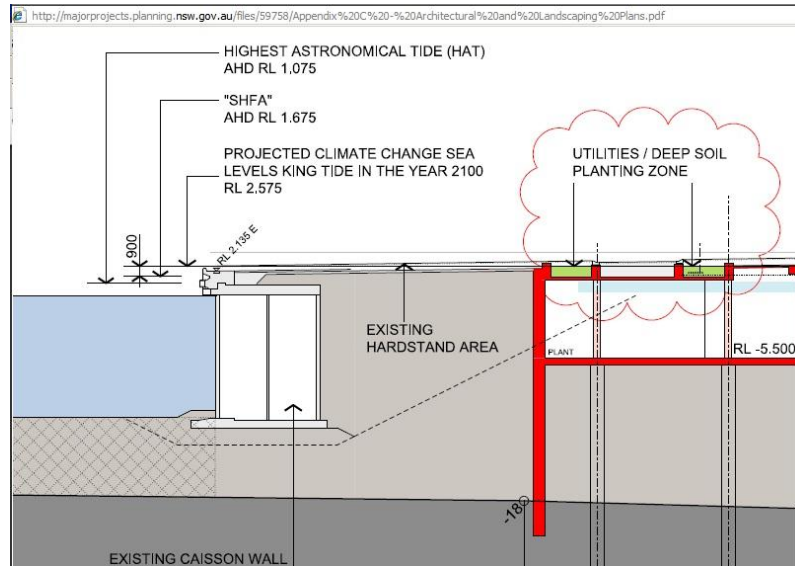


I want to remind planners that this place will be flooded by sea level rises, estimated at up to 2 m by 2100 (Prof. Tad Pfeffer, INSTAAR), including the melting of the Greenland ice sheet

<http://crudeoilpeak.info/sea-level-rises>

More details are in my previous articles:

18/11/2010 Sydney builds huge "sustainable" basement car park in Darling Harbour prone to flooding by sea level rise



<http://crudeoilpeak.info/sydney-builds-huge-sustainable-basement-car-park-in-darling-harbour-prone-to-flooding-by-sea-level-rise>



Work on this basement car park has started

13/9/2010 Barangaroo will not make existing Sydney sustainable

<http://www.crudeoilpeak.com/?p=1859>

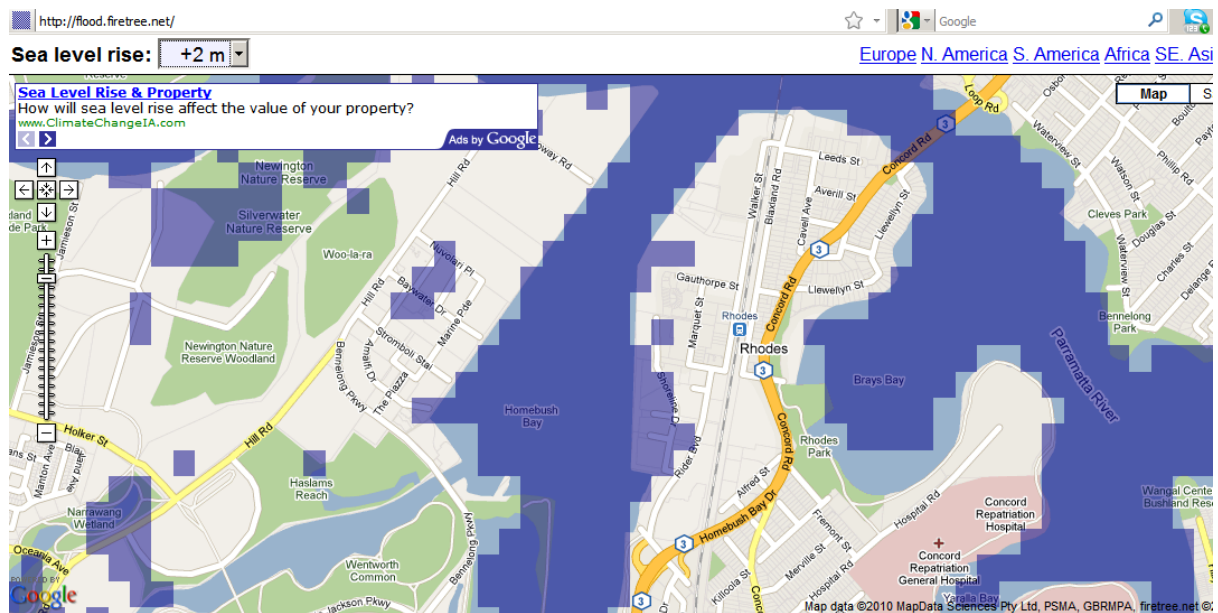
Future generations will ask: "who allowed this to happen? All the calculations were available to the decision makers at the time." They will enter history books on the wrong side of the ledger.



The same applies to other developments, e.g. at Rhodes.



3-dimensional computer generated model of proposed changes under the Draft Rhodes West Master Plan 2009



<http://flood.firetree.net/?ll=-27.8390,138.1640&z=13&m=2>

As an update to how much the Greenland ice sheet is in danger, this is the latest research:

### Greenland Ice Sheet Melt Nearing Critical 'Tipping Point'

June 2012

<http://www.climatecentral.org/news/greenland-ice-sheet-reflectivity-near-record-low-research-shows/>

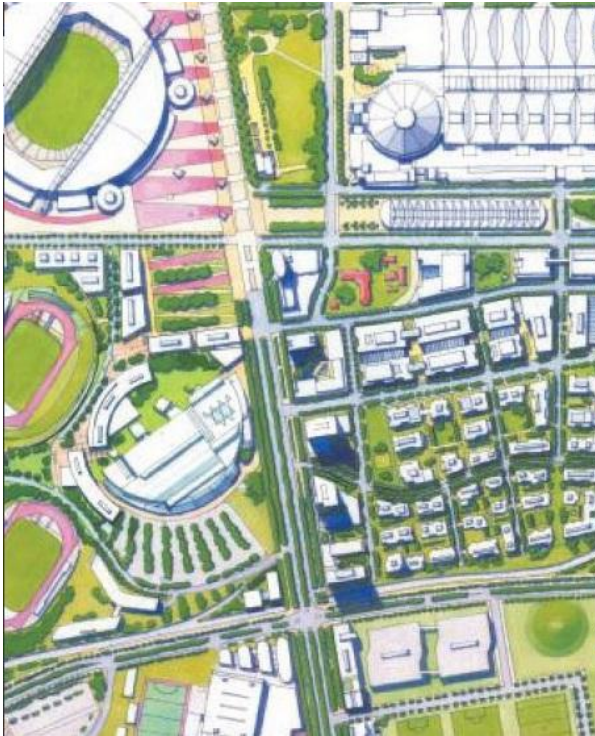
Needless to say that Planning Minister Sartor's approval of the 3<sup>rd</sup> coal loader in Newcastle pro-actively contributes to these sea level rises. If cumulative emissions since 2007, the 4<sup>th</sup> IPCC report, are taken as a basis including half of the emissions from coal exports Australia is in there with 4%.

So much on the coordination between departments and the selection of sustainable precincts.



Quote: “Detailed planning studies and investigations will generally be required for Urban Activation Precincts.”

Comment: The examples on page 8 demonstrate the employment deficiencies in the plans:



<< What is the employment creation in this area? We have large sports facilities and a sort of exhibition centre. Not many permanent jobs in there.



<<< What is the idea behind this plan? Are these office blocks with residential towers in between? Or just flats and residents work somewhere else?

Are we going to have an ever growing service industry while energy supplies are declining?

Where are the CO2 calculations for all the concrete needed in these massive developments? Can no one connect the dots?

We just heard about the increasing coal use at a Boral cement plant: Coal war rages in NSW  
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-06-22/coal-war-rages-in-nsw/4087540>



Quote: "If the proposed planning changes are likely to affect critical habitat or threatened species, populations or ecological communities, the Director-General must formally consult the Director-General of the Office of Environment and Heritage and/or the Director General of the Department of Primary Industries under the provisions of Section 34A of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act."

Comment: The threatened species is homo sapiens

NASA climatologist James Hansen in a testimony to the Iowa Utility Board, in 2007

"For most of 20 miles there were trains parked, engine to caboose, half of the cars being filled with coal. If we cannot stop the building of more coal-fired power plants, those coal trains will be death trains – no less gruesome than if they were boxcars headed to crematoria, loaded with uncountable irreplaceable species."

[http://www.columbia.edu/~jeh1/2007/IowaCoal\\_20071105.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/~jeh1/2007/IowaCoal_20071105.pdf)

Look at the coal trains in the Hunter:



Picture taken from a Country Link train. The description is here:

28/5/2012

NSW regional railway clock stopped at midnight but Hunter coal trains are rolling

<http://crudeoilpeak.info/nsw-regional-railway-clock-stopped-at-midnight-but-hunter-coal-trains-are-rolling>

8/3/2010

NASA climatologist James Hansen at Sydney Uni: "Australia doesn't agree now that they got to stop their coal, but they are going to agree. I can guarantee you that within a decade or so because the climate change will become so strongly apparent that's going to become imperative"

20 seconds clip:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qMD2sd0lPeg>

Full lecture:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5E5EdbiB4HU>

>From here:

[http://www.usyd.edu.au/sydney\\_ideas/lectures/2010/professor\\_james\\_hansen.shtml](http://www.usyd.edu.au/sydney_ideas/lectures/2010/professor_james_hansen.shtml)

His book:

<http://www.stormsofmygrandchildren.com/>

Hansen's granddaughter is 8 years I think, so the storms are there already:



### Heat to grip US East coast as severe storms possible

2/7/2012

Temperatures past 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32 Celsius) and severe thunderstorms are possible on the East Coast this week as almost 500,000 customers remain without power following weekend storms in the Washington area

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-07-02/heat-to-grip-u-s-east-coast-as-severe-storms-possible.html>

Quote: Outline of Process

## 5. Outline of Process

### 5.1 Assessment of Urban Activation Precincts

**Do oil, energy and CO2 emission calculations here first**

#### Precinct working group

Establish a project working group with Council, and state agencies (particularly Transport for NSW) to deliver individual precincts. Establish community reference groups where required

Quote: "The Minister will also decide the appropriate environmental planning instrument for the new planning framework"

Comment: The Minister should be made accountable for all projects which increase emissions. No government will escape future compensation claims

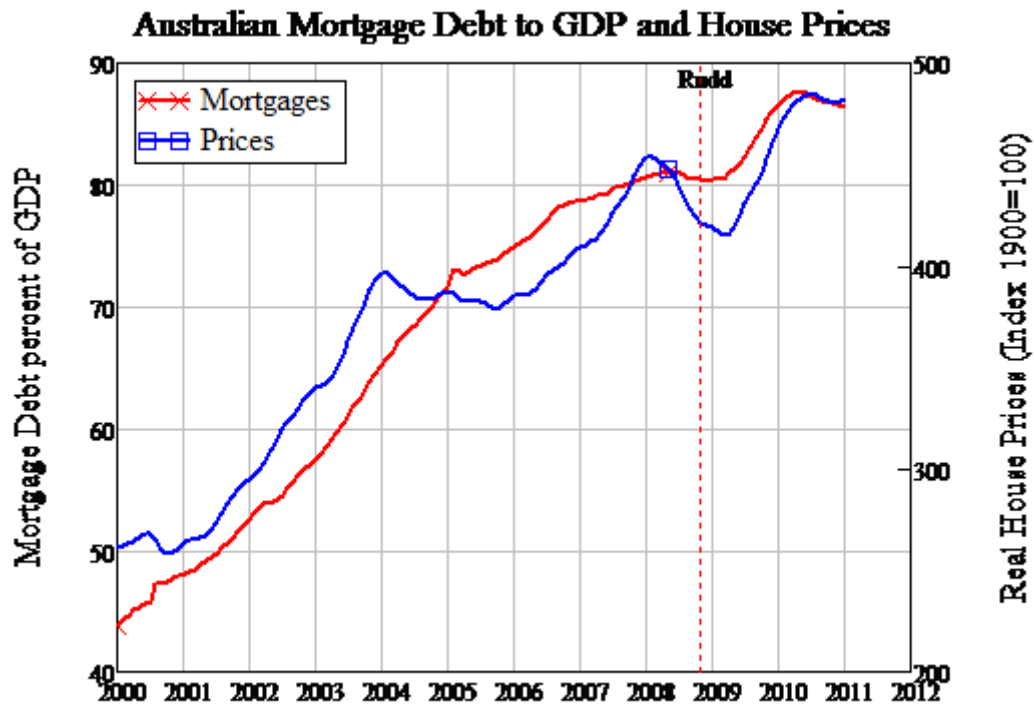


<http://crudeoilpeak.info/compensation-claims-from-global-warming-damage>

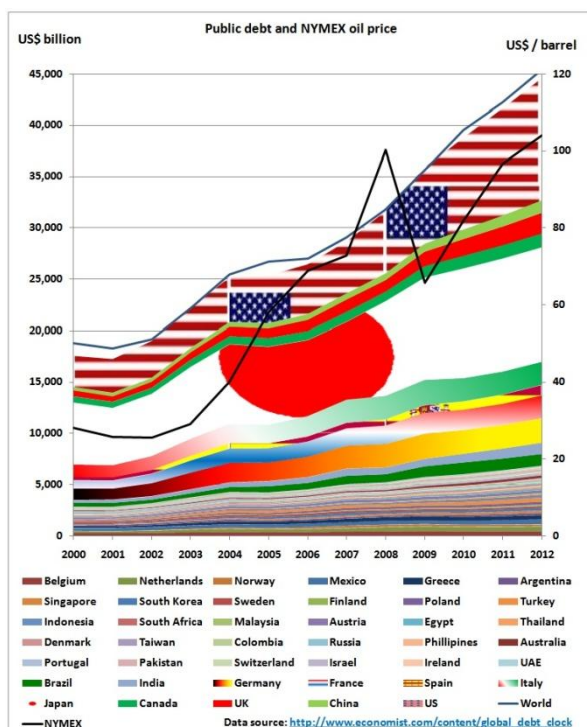


Quote: “.....Precincts, zones and development controls that are based on financial viability and affordability, and reflect market demand and investor feasibility”.

Comment: The debt crisis will limit future housing development



No architectural sketch, no housing strategy paper, no developer's brochure will change the fundamentals of this graph from Prof. Steve Keen. <http://www.debtdeflation.com/blogs/> Mortgage debt is approaching a whopping 90% of GDP. Once the debt bubble bursts, there will be a lot of tears. In future, people will 1<sup>st</sup> have to save before getting at a loan.



<< Link between mounting debt and oil prices.

4/6/2012 Global debt and oil prices  
<http://crudeoilpeak.info/global-debt-and-oil-prices>

Australia has low public debt (that is why the infrastructure is so poor) but high private debt.

*Whereas historical oil price shocks were primarily caused by physical disruptions of supply, the price run-up of 2007-08 was caused by strong demand confronting stagnating world production. Although the causes were different, the consequences for the economy appear to have been very similar to those observed in earlier episodes, with significant effects on overall consumption spending and purchases of domestic automobiles in particular. In the absence of those declines, it is unlikely that we would have characterized the period 2007:Q4 to 2008:Q3 as one of economic recession for the U.S. The experience of 2007-08 should thus be added to the list of recessions to which oil prices appear to have made a material contribution.*

[http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/Programs/ES/BPEA/2009\\_spring\\_bpea\\_papers/2009\\_spring\\_bpea\\_hamilton.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/Programs/ES/BPEA/2009_spring_bpea_papers/2009_spring_bpea_hamilton.pdf)

### Accommodating natural population growth

Natural population growth can be accommodated in 2<sup>nd</sup> floor extensions



<http://www.everettbuilding.com.au/SecondFloorAdditionBrick.html>



However, what we see is that old houses are completely pulled down (waste of materials and original energy) and replaced by energy hungry McMansions, bringing the local grid to its knees. Occupied/rented by overseas investors (note the auction sign). Many planning sins here: black roof tiles, no solar water heater, grey concrete drive way (instead of grass pavers), symbolic “low maintenance” landscaping, no cross ventilation. BASIX is useless.



## Decentralization to sustainable cities

It is very doubtful whether Sydney can ever be made a genuinely sustainable (energy frugal) city. The size, topography, historical settlement patterns, limited rail infrastructure, the continuing love affair with the car and the prevailing harbour view mind set in all government departments make this task very difficult. If a sustained attempt were made to decentralize, new **cities** (not subdivisions) could be planned from scratch.



<<< Not your average subdivision but a community of 30-40 K population with its own commercial centre and light industrial park where 50% of the population can find work, within walking or cycling distance.



<<< 4 communities are grouped around a city centre with higher level facilities. 1 circular and 2 radial bus or tram lines would be sufficient as public transport. No building higher than 3 floors. Surrounding land used as community gardens to supplement food supply.

The plans are from Dodoma, Tanzania, where I worked as a town planner in the 1970s

The housing debt problem remains the same, but per capita infrastructure cost could be much lower, also because of lower land prices.