



## Ahead of Time

celebrates the achievements of Mayer Hillman on his seventieth birthday. Mayer has a unique combination of qualities including great intellectual productivity and originality, tenacity in argument and in pursuing his chosen themes, and a willingness to speak truth to power.

The distinguished authors of these letters underline Mayer's achievements as researcher, writer and thorn in the side of the political establishment. They also seek to advance Mayer's ideas expressed in his remarkable range of publications about transport, health, energy, the environment and city and town planning.

The letters are both collegiate in tone and universal in relevance. They sound alarm bells about climate change and environmental degradation, and they bear witness to the fact that it has never been more important that Mayer Hillman's ideas should be taken seriously.



Policy Studies Institute

## BIRTHDAY LETTERS FROM

John Adams  
Nicholas Albery  
Anne Ashe  
Ian Christie  
Adrian Davis  
Paul Ekins  
John Grimshaw  
Aubrey Meyer  
John Pinder  
Stephen Plowden  
Lynn Sloman  
Juliet Solomon  
John Whitelegg  
David Wiggins  
Michael Young

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Edited by  
Robert Hutchison



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For further information contact

Policy Studies Institute, 100 Park Village East, London NW1 3SR  
 Tel: 020 7468 0468 Fax: 020 7468 2211 Email: pubs@psi.org.uk

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## Introduction

Mayer's main interests – in architecture, city and town planning, transport, health, energy and the environment – developed through the second half of the twentieth century. Few people have been more aware of the policy twists and turns taken by successive British governments over that period. Remarkable scientific and technological advances have not been accompanied by any significant increase in the individual or collective wisdom that would enable the optimum application of those advances. The rise of democracy has reinforced and underscored the growth of short-termism. Private affluence has brought with it an unconscionable increase in more and less visible forms of environmental degradation.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s – and while working at the Policy Studies Institute – I was a highly privileged part-time lodger in the Hillman household. I have two abiding memories of Mayer from that period. One – and I witnessed it many times – is of him arriving at home or at work, unhelmeted but fully exercised, having just dismounted from his bicycle. The other is of Mayer bounding down the stairs of the The Coach House at 22.29 just in time for *Newsnight* – a programme which would frequently provoke utterances of dismay or disbelief at human folly, plus the occasional comment on the single raised eyebrow of Jeremy Paxman.



Mayer has many attractive qualities: among them generosity, tenacity and a wholly admirable willingness to speak truth to power. At the same time he is an expert researcher, Old Testament prophet (forever pointing to the 'inevitable' punishment of autogeddon), and alarm-clock to the bland and blinkered 'suits' of central and local government. Mayer's talks, conference papers and interventions at public meetings have often been dismissed as 'OTT' or 'quite unrealistic'; but I suspect that they have been remembered more than most, and it is remarkable how frequently his research findings and ideas have been plagiarised by journalists and others without proper acknowledgement. All progress does indeed depend on the unreasonable person.

There was a highly enthusiastic response to the invitations to contribute to this book. Following discussion between members of Mayer's family, Juliet Solomon, and myself, contributors were asked to write an open letter – dated 30 October 2021 (Mayer's 90th birthday) – 'about the world as it is in 2021 and the world as you and Mayer have for many years hoped and/or feared it might become'.

Quickest off the mark in responding to this invitation was Nicholas Albery, who founded the Institute for Social Inventions in 1984. His contribution to this book is a characteristic expression of an irreverent free spirit who put his socially innovative ideas into action. Nicholas Albery – who never owned a car – was killed in a car crash on 3 June 2001. The death of such a life-enhancing person in such a way at such a time is saddening and poignant beyond words. His death was a tragic reminder of a point that Mayer has repeatedly made: decision-makers all over the world routinely ignore or downplay the consequences of the several hundred deaths on the road that happen every day.

The letters that follow contain much expert assessment and opinion and a wide range of prediction from the darkly fatalistic to the cheerily optimistic. Mayer has many admirers – including that other great inventor of new organisations and institutions, Michael Young, who adds an afterword. The affection and respect in which Mayer is held shine through the contributions that follow. Above all, it is clear that it has never been more important that Mayer's ideas should be taken seriously.

Robert Hutchison

## Family preface

Mayer was born in London on 30 October 1931, the third of three sons of David and Annie Hillman.

David was born in Lithuania and as a child, fled the pogroms with his family to settle in Glasgow, where he later became a portrait painter and stained-glass artist. Annie grew up in a large family in Edinburgh and subsequently qualified as a doctor. As a general practitioner she was devoted to her patients and the community, which resulted in her very rarely resting from being on call, and running off to see patients at all times of day and night.

Despite her punishing work schedule, Annie was a loving and caring mother. David was much more authoritarian, and the boys reacted against this. Perhaps the most important outcome of the way that Mayer, Harold and Ellis were parented was their constant questioning and challenging of authority and conventional wisdom, including their religious upbringing. David was an orthodox Jew, himself the son of a rabbi. Annie, like David, came from a long and distinguished line of Jewish thinkers and practitioners and – although sceptical herself – felt it would be disloyal to question religious belief. But to a greater or lesser extent, all three brothers felt that Judaism was rather oppressive, and Harold and Mayer became affirmed atheists.

From an early age Mayer was known as Mickey, and at different stages in his life has returned to his official name, creating much confusion and embarrassment along the way! The brothers – Ellis, Harold and Mayer – were a tight-knit trio both emotionally and intellectually, discussing issues such as politics and religion from an early age, when they were evacuated from London for two years at the beginning of the War. They were always to remain close, and Harold and Mayer lived and travelled

together in their twenties. Whilst they all took fairly different roads in terms of careers and lifestyles, they retained a common core in terms of political and ideological convictions including socialism and vegetarianism, in-built work ethics, cultural interests, and their particular sense of humour.

Mayer studied as an architect and became a partner for 13 years in a small practice, designing a wide range of buildings. During this period in his life he worked conventional hours, keeping the rest of his time free for a very active social period in his life, including meeting Heidi and marrying her in 1964.

He felt increasingly constrained by architecture, his mind extending into the broader sociological and environmental context for the profession, including taking a diploma in town planning. The turning point, which was to change the course of his life, came with the publication in 1963 of the influential Buchanan report, *Traffic in Towns*. Sir Colin Buchanan's hypothesis that towns should be planned according to people's unfettered driving habits was total anathema to Mayer. Together with a colleague, he had already, in 1956, designed a pedestrian-oriented and largely traffic-free linear town with cars on the periphery, for a competition. Buchanan's ideas gained increasing currency and resulted in a spate of ring roads around towns in Britain. Nevertheless, in one particular case – the proposals for the London Ring Road – Mayer was involved in successful opposition.

Mayer increasingly felt the need to leave architecture and challenge Buchanan's ideas and the current consensus in planning. He was becoming actively obsessed with the impact of cars on communities and quality of life. His focus was later to broaden into ecological concerns such as air pollution and climate change. The first step was to check that a major career move was not just a whim. Thus in 1966, two years after getting married, and with Heidi's full-hearted support but the reluctant agreement of his architectural partners, he took two days a week leave for a few months to work in the Planning Research Unit at Edinburgh University. As a result, he had no doubt that he wished to change careers and undertake a doctorate. His thesis would examine the social and environmental aspects of personal mobility and their relationship with land-use planning and transport policy. He was encouraged by the University, who were confident that he would be successful in attracting a grant.

Mayer resigned from the architectural practice in London, Heidi renegotiated her editorial job to work part-time from Edinburgh, and with great excitement they made plans to move to Scotland. But, despite frequent reassurances, there was still no confirmation of funding. Then, three days before their move, to their astonishment and disbelief, Mayer was told that the anticipated grant had fallen through. Nevertheless, the University's Department of Planning was enthusiastic for him to go ahead with the thesis, and optimistic that he would be successful if he applied for funding on arrival in Edinburgh. When they recovered from the shock, they decided that they had little choice but to go ahead, and therefore took off in September 1967 to a potentially precarious new life.

Numerous applications for a grant continued, but Mayer's ideas were considered too controversial and radical. On one famous occasion, when a funding interviewer was out of the room, Mayer took the opportunity to lean over the desk and peep at the referee's form, where he read, 'This applicant has a bee in his bonnet!' Needless to say, he did not get this grant, nor indeed any other, and they had to live frugally for the three years on the rent from their London flat and Heidi's part-time earnings.

For Mayer it was a true test of perseverance. Not only did he lack financial backing, he was also offered little interest or moral support by his supervisors at the University. He also needed to learn new writing skills. This was in the days well before word-processing, and so 'cut and paste' was a literal activity, with the walls of the flat plastered with sentences and paragraphs linked by pieces of Sellotape. Their years in Edinburgh were both the happiest and the most difficult time of their lives. They made many good friends, and this creative time included both the birth of Josh and the conception of Saul. However, the pattern and intensity of work, and the commitment and desire to change the world, were firmly set in stone for the future, with the emergence of his persistently practised mantras of 'I'm too busy', 'I don't have time', 'I have to finish', 'I don't know what to do first' and so on.

In May 1970 the thesis was complete, with its basic conclusions to reduce the need for motorised movement, and to give equal consideration to satisfying the travel needs of all age groups. They returned to London, and this new stage in their lives

## From John Adams

Put in time capsule on 30 October 2001

To be opened 30 October 2021

Dear Mayer

*Tell me it isn't so!*

First, congratulations on your venerability. I credit all the cycling you used to do – before you were driven off the roads by the fearsome traffic and took to your rowing machine.

Second, I must express my regret that your 90th birthday party will not be an occasion where one can 'press the flesh'. Raising a glass to your 3-D laser hologram just won't be the same. But with all your now-ancient friends dispersed to the four corners, it is certainly better than nothing.

Third, at the time of writing, only qualified optimists, such as me, would have believed that so many of your friends would still be alive to attend your virtual birthday party – let alone in robust good health owing to spectacular advances in the biosciences.

Fourth, and now we get to the main point of this letter, I describe myself as a 'qualified optimist' because the 'progress' in science and technology that I can imagine at the time of writing will, by the time you read this, have created a world that I won't much like. I promise to be delighted if my pessimism proves ill-founded. But my method of forecasting is the common one; one picks trends that are running strong and projects them into the future, unless and until one sees something that might impede them.

So much was promised. Telephones, fax machines, video conferencing, e-mail and the internet were to be our salvation.



They would dematerialise the global economy. They would transform it into an information economy that would tread more lightly on the Earth. Electronic mobility would substitute for physical mobility. Red-eye flights to business meetings would be replaced by a saunter into the virtual meeting-room. Most of us would compute to work rather than commute to work. Urban rush-hour traffic jams would melt away. We would be better informed, and democratically empowered by the internet's ability to register our views by online voting. We would be liberated to spend more 'quality time' with our families and neighbours. Year by year we would become richer, more convivial and kinder to the planet. Moore's Law stipulated that these trends would be exponential: the power of computers – the key drivers of all this progress – would continue to double every 18 months for as far as the eye could see.

This is the vision that was promoted by government and industry with generous quantities of both money and exhortation. Even at the time it was obvious to some (including you and me) that the exhorters were either deluded or (more often) cynically deluding.

The historic evidence was clear. While electronic mobility could on occasion substitute for physical mobility, it was overwhelmingly a stimulus to it. Just as with the telegraph and the telephone before them, e-mail and the internet provided people who were physically remote from each other with new reasons to meet, and facilitated their doing so. The eyes of the increasing numbers of business travellers<sup>1</sup> will have become even redder as they are expected to travel with their computers – downloading messages and updating their spreadsheets as they go – and to attend endless time-zone-spanning virtual meetings – all computers now coming with tiny inbuilt cameras as standard.

The urban rush-hour traffic jams will indeed have disappeared, to be replaced by pervasive all-day congestion.<sup>2</sup> With the exception of a few small islands of urban café society – focused on Starbucks – the search for somewhere to park, and liberation from the morning commute to work, will have encouraged the dispersal of further millions to exurbia, and their settlement in densities unserviceable by public transport – let alone feet or bicycles.

Better informed our world will not be. As we roam wider, we spread ourselves thinner. The greater the geographical extent of our 'known world', the lower the level of resolution at which we can know it. As the volume of information overwhelms the human capacity to make sense of it, people are compelled to adopt ever-cruder filters. On contentious issues – genetic engineering and global warming are current examples – information overload combines with crude but highly selective filters to polarise global public opinion; people abstract from the internet only what they want to know.

And convivial it will not be. Hypermobile societies<sup>3</sup> are anonymous societies, and anonymity breeds crime, fear and paranoia. The biggest losers will be children. You will recall our study of children's independence over 30 years ago,<sup>4</sup> in which we discovered that hardly any children were being allowed out of the house anymore unless chaperoned by an adult – and the answers we got when we asked parents why they were denying their children the freedoms that they (the parents) had enjoyed as children: fear of traffic and fear of strangers.

By 2021 there will be many more strangers. The *Stranger Danger* campaigns run in schools were a late 20th century symptom of the social stress caused by hypermobility. Neighbourhood Watch was another; 'neighbours' who did not know each other put stickers in their windows and pretended to look out for each other. By the time you read this, such schemes will have been abandoned as the ineffectual shams that they were, and replaced by CCTV cameras capable of recognising faces, backed up by databases storing personal information about everything from DNA to body odour,<sup>5</sup> and for those who can afford them, private security services and gated-communities. The ultimate gated-community at the time of writing offers a foretaste: it is the ResidenSea, an ocean-going cruise liner under construction in Norway, with 110 residential apartments (at \$2 million to \$5 million each), combining high security, the ultimate in video conferencing and satellite communications, and the financial advantages of living offshore.

The Government's Crime Prevention Panel acknowledges the existence of trends that are fostering crime: easier access, reduced geographical barriers, increased size of the rewards and increased

anonymity.<sup>6</sup> It characterises the crime problem as a technological arms race and proposes fighting high-tech with higher-tech. And in the threat they spot an opportunity: the 'potential for the UK to excel in world-leading technology and solutions'.<sup>7</sup> Annex 1 lists some of the exciting possibilities. They include: genetics, biometrics, biomimetics, sensors technology, magnetic materials, smart materials, encryption... propinquity tagging... nanotechnology... wearable technologies... intelligent alarms.

The report does acknowledge, in passing, the existence of the problem of 'social exclusion' – those outside the gates of the gated-community – and proffers a technological solution: 'new technology can reduce crime and fear of crime ... by being universally available across society, strengthening communities and reducing social exclusion'. But this 'solution' is oblivious to the nature of arms races; *universal* accessibility to the technological weapons about which the Panel enthuses would make them available to the enemy as well.

Their method for anticipating the future, like mine, projects ongoing trends indefinitely in the absence of perceptible impediments. I would be intrigued to know how many of the Crime Prevention Panel have read Orwell's *1984*, or Huxley's *Brave New World*. The panel's future is Orwellian with a brave new high-tech gloss. Can I see any impediments to its realisation in a hypermobile world? None!

What drives the forecasters' models of increasing mobility? Economic growth. Are there any governments anywhere resisting economic growth? No. Is their Orwellian future democratically resistible? No. Participation rates in democracy are decreasing. Increasing mobility increases the scale of problems that need governing – moving the locus of political power from town hall, to Whitehall, to Brussels and ultimately to completely unaccountable organisations like the World Bank and the IMF. As effective accountability decreases, so does the incentive to vote. The electronic referenda proffered by the proponents of 'cyberdemocracy' will routinely leave people frustrated by the simplistic propositions on which they are invited to vote, and disenfranchise large resentful minorities. Nowhere in the genre of science fiction, in which distance has been conquered by science and technology, can one find a plausible example of effective democracy. The scale of the problems that need governing precludes it.

While writing this letter I took a break to listen to a BBC programme on 'virtual tourism': without touching fragile environments it will simulate not only the view, but also the noises, smells and even the weather of remote parts of the world, which will be spared an invasion by 'real' tourists. I fear, Mayer, that, like your virtual birthday party, I find the idea less than completely satisfying.

Perhaps I will log on to your birthday party 20 years from now to discover that your arguments have prevailed – that everywhere governments are esteeming the local above the national and global, that walking and cycling have been granted priority over every other form of transport. But, as I write, the tide appears to be running strongly in the opposite direction. I hope you will be able to convince me it isn't so.

I hope to come and see you soon – in the flesh. Be prepared. I will need a drink.

Very best wishes.

Your young friend, still imbued with your irrational belief in the efficacy of rational argument

John Adams

## Notes

- 1 DETR forecasts at the time of writing anticipate that by the time you read this there will be about three times as many tourists and four times as many business travellers passing through Britain's airports. The forecasters clearly do not share the 'dematerialist' expectations of the enthusiasts for electronic mobility.
- 2 DETR forecasts at the time of writing predict that by the time you read this there will be 40 per cent more traffic on Britain's roads. Alarmed by the closure of large parts of the British motor industry, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry proclaims that people need to be persuaded to buy more cars.
- 3 *The social implications of hypermobility*, J. Adams, report for the OECD Project on Environmentally Sustainable Transport, ENV/EPOC/PPC/T(99)3/FINAL, January 2000. Available (with added irony) on the web at [www.oecd.prj/env/docs/epoc/pct993.pdf](http://www.oecd.prj/env/docs/epoc/pct993.pdf) and at [www.prospect-magazine.co.uk/highlights/hypermobility/index.html](http://www.prospect-magazine.co.uk/highlights/hypermobility/index.html)
- 4 *One False Move ... a study of children's independent mobility*, Hillman, M, Adams, J and Whitelegg, J, London: PSI (1990).
- 5 *Just Around the Corner*. Crime Prevention Panel, Foresight Programme, Department of Trade and Industry (March 2000) [www.foresight.gov.uk](http://www.foresight.gov.uk).
- 6 *Turning the Corner*, Crime Prevention Panel, Foresight Programme, Department of Trade and Industry (December 2000) [www.foresight.gov.uk](http://www.foresight.gov.uk).
- 7 *ibid.*

## From Nicholas Albery

30 October 2021

Dear Mayer

On this your 90th birthday I am writing to thank you for your annual column in our *Social Inventions* compendium. It must be for about 30 years now that you've been faithfully contributing to this. I'd like to check, but our library was destroyed in Cricklewood's second fundi terrorist nuclear explosion, and latest word of mouth suggests it will be years before the wretched Web comes back online. (The longer the better in my view: it's just a sewer of pornography and terrorism, and security's finding it harder and harder to crack their codes in time.)

If it hadn't been for you I might be safely ensconced by now in a retreat in the Canaries or New Zealand or somewhere, but all your diatribes over the years against jet fuel's destruction of the environment made me feel guilty every time I flew.

But I've left it too late, and here I am stuck in the dangerous – what's this week's new name for it – FIRBI, the Federated Independent Republics of the British Isles?

Anyway, with all us western urbanites trying to flee the dangerous cities, one has to be richer than you or I will ever be to buy one's way into those safe southern havens. And why bother? We're too old and we've had a good life. But it's a pity that our grandchildren face such bleak futures.

How is it in Cornwall? I suppose you're happy now that no one travels any more.

The local neighbourhood canton in Laurieston gave us such a thorough vetting before they allowed us to settle here after our escape from London. They tracked my smart-card through all my nefarious past but seem to have come to the conclusion I'm no



threat – there's nothing radical nowadays about being a conservative anarchist.

They're cock-a-hoop at the moment and still celebrating their declaration of independence as part of the Free and Independent Republic of Dumfriesia.

Already Dumfriesia has its own stamps, currency, prime minister, parliament, even the makings of its first armed brigade. At this rate they won't be happy until they have their own national theatre and opera house, and to hell with whether there's enough food to feed us, despite all their talk about self-sufficiency. The trappings of a new nation seem more important to them.

Still, I can't help rejoicing that the world is fragmenting politically into thousands of new pieces. The European Union seems like a distant nightmare. Even as a young man, I approved of the Fourth World slogan 'small nations, small communities and a human scale' – John Papworth's vision of a multicellular, power-dispersed world.

I'm not sure you ever went along with this. But why not? If ecological harmony is all about diversity, why not diversity in the political field too?

They take security very seriously here in Dumfriesia. A policeman comes to your door once a fortnight to ask if you've seen any strange or unusual goings-on in your street. What do they expect to catch – terrorists with suitcases full of biological weapons? Already I've been reported twice. A few more times and a few more cups of tea and the policeman will be my first local chum.

My son's been summoned for neighbourhood service. The Laurieston canton imposes a labour tax on its residents: two hours community service a week on anything from street cleaning to caring for the elderly.

He's really too busy with next year's *Social Inventions* compendium, so it seems he'll have to pay the job allocator to employ someone to do his labour tax for him.

You'll be pleased to know that population continues to go down here in the Laurieston canton, despite all the immigration from the cities. The new taxation system your committee suggested seems to work well locally, rewarding women with the fewest children (the money comes through their women's groups, so that the men can't lay their hands on it – it's still a male thing to get drunk and drugged most nights).

I can't help feeling that the general situation's improving though. I know thousands have died in these terrorist attacks and that so many are injured and bereaved, but I do get a sense that people are gradually happier again. Perhaps it's just the recent drugs initiative that's helping. In Laurieston you can still get medicinal drugs on prescription from the doctor, but the powerful entheogen drugs are legally available only through the priests of the various religions.

The minister in the church at the end of our street insists you sit through his service first, then you get MDMX as part of the communion wine. Set and setting are important with these drugs, so I suppose it's as safe a way as any for these young people to have their raves. And it's one way to fill the churches; at least it ensures that all these beautiful buildings have a future. But it's very weird to hear the loud drumming and to watch these upstanding ministers gradually turning into bearded shamans.

In my Utopia, drugs would be legalised only for the over-90s. The time to get high is when all your worldly responsibilities are over and you're mature enough to enjoy it. What was it Yeats said? 'An aged man is but a paltry thing / A tattered coat upon a stick, unless / Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing / For every tatter in its mortal dress.'

So, here's wishing you a VERY HIGH & HAPPY 91st YEAR!

But don't get so high you forget to send your column to my son on time.

Nicholas Albery

## From Anne Ashe

30 October 2021

Dear Mayer

It seems unbelievable that I could have known you and Heidi for over 50 years. Your challenge to conventional wisdoms influenced not only my ideas but those of many people whose paths (and sometimes swords) crossed or coincided with yours. You influenced policy, too, and I want to illustrate this with reference to two strategic themes we worked on in the 1970s.

The first theme, which underpinned almost all of our 1970s work, was that an equitable transport policy needed to take account of *variations in personal mobility*. This factor is now absorbed into one of public policy's fundamental concepts – *social inclusion*.

The second theme, which our work urged should be a guiding principle for both land-use and transport policy, was *reducing the need and incentive for motorised travel*. And this is now absorbed into a further key policy concept – *sustainability*.

I'll also look at one particular application of these themes – *policy on walking* – though there are dozens of other examples I could have chosen. And I'll reflect on whether your influence has been compounded by other influences.

### *Variations in personal mobility: the need for equity*

So *has* policy shifted here? I think the answer is 'yes', and that your approach to personal mobility is now threaded through transport and land-use policy, even if not as radically as you would wish! For me, certainly, the change was noticeable by the beginning of

(public) transport nodes. Planning authorities have used planning powers to improve the competitiveness and attractiveness of long-established town and city centres, including using compulsory purchase powers to assemble sites for facilities within centres. The death knell sounded for out-of-town centres in the early years of the century, and their redevelopment as urban villages, suitably tied into the public transport infrastructure, is now commonplace.

Shorter journeys have also resulted from policy guidance on mixed land uses, which contrasts with last century's rigid zoning. Industrial change means that mixing housing with industrial or commercial uses is now acceptable, and travel reduction is seen as one advantage of this. And Departmental objectives on sustainable development now specifically aim to reduce the need to travel and break the link between rising prosperity and increased travel.

I know you have distrusted the purity of policies based on reducing congestion costs, and have argued against large scale 'prestige' public transport provision, but you must admit that both of these considerations have influenced attitudes and aided the introduction of fiscal measures affecting fuel duty, road tax, engine size and company cars. All this has combined to shift emphasis away from private motorised travel – and in a manner rendering it acceptable to those who otherwise would have distanced themselves from your more radical aims! All right, the car was praised for widening horizons and making travel more flexible, but even by the turn of the century it was acknowledged that this had been exacted at too high a price and that a policy of 'predict and provide' in terms of road space was unacceptable. Instead, attention increasingly focused on developing alternatives to using cars, improving public transport, reducing pollution and protecting the environment.

#### *Provision for and recognition of walking as a method of travel*

This area of policy is just one of many you have influenced. It was given prominence as far back as 1979 when we wrote *Walking is Transport*, which illustrated that walking, in spite of meeting many

travel needs, was neglected by policy. This research was perhaps the easiest that we worked on, in that the evidence was simply overwhelming, in terms of both the significance of walking and the blinkered nature of policy which ignored this fact. At the time, official documents generally discussed travel in terms of a simple bimodal split between private and public motorised (including rail) transport. We urged that official statistics should include data about walking; that policy assessments should consider the contribution and benefits of walking; and that policy evaluation should include the impact of transport and planning proposals on walking; that walking should, in short, be dealt with as a means of travel.

These recommendations were all acted upon, although slowly. Fifteen years passed before the 1994 PPG13 recognised that 'a large proportion of the journeys people make is on foot and a high proportion of all journeys made by all means of travel is very short', and advised transport authorities to reorder priorities to provide, for instance, 'wider pavements and narrower carriage-ways'. Subsequently the DETR set up the National Walking Strategy Forum, producing *Encouraging Walking: Advice to Local Authorities* in 2000. This heralded a real shift, recognising the transport benefits of walking and its significance as a means of travel. In words which could have been taken straight from *Walking is Transport*, it stressed that walking should be 'considered and promoted ... as a matter of course'. Its recommendations must have sounded very familiar to you: reduced dominance for motor traffic, widening of crossings, pedestrian phases in traffic lights, traffic management measures to reduce speed, and – particularly emphasised – land-use measures to reduce the need for travel. You didn't sit on the working groups which produced this report, but you surely sat on the shoulders of many of the members. Now, of course, it is common practice for walking to be included in policy discussion and transport statistics, and for transport and planning authorities to have staff who deal with walking.

The accessibility value of local facilities is now accepted and advocated by policy. The history of Community Network Offices (CNOs), which used to be called 'sub-post offices', provides an example. The decline in post office activity brought about the closure of many of these, and government plans to use automated



bank transfer for pensions and benefits threatened them with more loss of trade at the turn of the century. So the government set up the Universal Bank, to operate from these local post offices. At the same time it encouraged them to diversify their activities. This they did, to become the CNOs they are today, providing information and support, and acting as local access points for many government, internet and other services. The policy stemmed from a concern about financial access, but it acknowledged the need for physical accessibility.

*Synergy: have there been other levers for change?*

During the 1970s and 1980s we despaired sometimes of getting a fair hearing for our work. But you continued your onslaught and gradually found that you were heading in the same direction as other forces for change in this country, Europe, and internationally: synergy was taking place. One of the most significant levers for change – and another subject of your work – was concern about climate change. This and other strategic concerns about biodiversity, agrochemical pollution and fossil fuel depletion culminated in the United Nations' Rio Earth Summit in 1992, ushering in a new era dedicated to sustainable development. This was made more urgent in the face of the Third World's legitimate demands for development, and the potential disasters that would ensue were they to follow the unsustainable example of the West.

The emphasis on sustainability was furthered by concern about declining urban infrastructure and the need for post-industrial urban regeneration. There were worries about agricultural land-take (especially in the more agriculturally favoured South East); about dereliction and wasteland in urban areas; and about the need to revitalise city centres. Changes in social attitudes towards inner city living coincided with these policy changes. The trend started with the development of London's Docklands, and soon extended to loft-living elsewhere, and then to more traditional low-rise, high density developments, which were associated with local shopping, leisure and service facilities.

The development of the e-highway (e-footpath?) has also been influential, though at times a mixed blessing. The obvious

example is e-commerce, allowing people to order delivery of their weekly shopping from home, but also encouraging them to increase food-miles by ordering clotted cream from Cornwall, or haggis from the Highlands. Work-life balance initiatives caused an explosion of working from home combined with the development of local, walkable Systems Centres.

Change also crept into other aspects of public life and policy. In education, the 'green' syllabus was developed, featuring pollution and global warming, and the health benefits of walking and cycling. Positive health policy reinforced this last message among the adult population, and independent living initiatives for older people have supported local activity centres. Recognising the need to sustain rural communities has furthered the development of community transport and peripatetic services in rural areas. The development of light rail, though expensive, helped to change the image of public transport. The resurgence of the railways diverted both passengers and freight from roads, although I know you disagreed with the levels of investment involved, which give the message that long distance travel is something to be catered for. Perhaps you have more sympathy for the growth of interest in canals? The development of a national drinking-water grid to quench the thirst of the South East provides money for repairs and maintenance, and is combined with the continuing development of tourism and a growth in canal-borne freight. These developments are aided by the redevelopment of brownfield sites in canal basins for industry and for fashionable hotel and housing complexes, and by the grants provided for canal freight since 2010.

*Are we there yet?*

So, are we on the path to achieving equitable and sustainable transport policy and travel behaviour? I don't think we can be complacent about this, and I'm certain that you're not. There are countervailing influences such as a continuing public 'demand' for more, faster and unrestrained travel; such as the belief that the unacceptable environmental and fossil fuel consequences of travel can be dealt with by a technological fix focused on cleaner fuels or lighter cars; such as the rationale for 'green' policy citing

congestion rather than equity and sustainability. Also, taxation on aviation fuels is still woefully inadequate and the government remains too sensitive to the demands of vociferous road and car lobbies. The environmental impacts of electoral short-termism are well rehearsed in 'green' commentaries, but are only slowly receiving public recognition. We need to wait a while yet to see whether better environmental education will affect the travel choices of today's young people, and whether they will view the freedom to use a car as a concession rather than as an unquestionable right.

Even so, I do believe there has been some slow change along the lines you so long and energetically advocated. Do you remember all those in the 1970s who gave you pitying looks, and sniggered to each other at what they thought was at best audacity or lack of realism on your part, and at worst professional kamikaze? The heavy sighs and shaking heads when you suggested raising pavements at intersections to indicate shared road space? The apoplexy when you suggested including walking in transport models? The tut-tuts when you suggested drastically reducing speed limits in residential areas? The compressed lips when you suggested abandoning the trend towards bigger, fewer public facilities? The exasperated faces when you suggested returning to a concept of neighbourhoods and neighbourhood facilities? The sneers when you suggested that freedom for the car driver was depriving others of their freedom and their lives, was damaging the environment irrevocably, was irresponsibly contributing to greenhouse gases, was irreplaceably using up fossil fuels, was – in short – unsustainable? Do those people recognise themselves, out there in their fashionable city penthouses, putting in their stint on a school walk-train with their grandchildren, browsing through their online catalogues, chatting to their delivery person, monitoring their heart rates as they spin along the cycle lane to their local fitness centre? But they also cover up in strong sunlight, lament the climate change that floods their seaside retreat, bemoan the loss of skiing and wine-growing areas, worry over the fate of infirm and ageing friends and family trapped in 1960s suburbs with no doctor, chemist, bank or food shop in easy reach, and mourn the loss of wildlife stifled by pollutants and the destruction of views lost to concrete. I'll bet they're eating their 1970s transport models now.

Much has changed since the car-centred 1970s but, Mayer, you were never a person to let yourself off lightly and there's a long way yet to go. So on your bike and show us the path to a more sustainable future. There's work to be done out there, and minds to be changed!

Anne

## Notes

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## From Ian Christie

30 October 2021

Dear Mayer

It is hard to believe that you are now 90 – especially as it was only a couple of months ago that you left me, a mere 64-year-old, gasping in your wake in the annual Third Age Bikeathon from London to Brighton.

Your 90th birthday has set me thinking about your life and achievements and all that remains to be done to create the sustainable world you have fought for over the years. I turned to your new *Collected Writings* and reflected on all the projects and campaigns you've put your mind, heart and soul into for so many decades. I thought the best way to say what I want to convey to you would be to review it. So here goes.

All the best

Ian

As if Children Mattered: *Collected Writings, 1970–2020*, Mayer Hillman, New Policy Studies Institute, 2021.

For the last half-century and more, Dr Mayer Hillman has been a leading social researcher and campaigner on many issues concerned with quality of life in the broadest sense. Like Lord Michael Young and the philosopher Mary Midgley, he is one of those rare and cherishable souls who gains in campaigning passion, inventiveness, insight and energy the older they become. Like them, Hillman has continued to produce powerful work in



old age, and it would come as no surprise, given his staggering level of fitness for a 90-year-old, to see him go on to publish well past his 100th birthday.

Hillman's enthusiasms and *bêtes noire* are all on display in this collection of his essays, extracts from books and reports, and pamphlets from the last 50 years. So we find the passionate arguments for action to avert climate disruption; the detailed research showing how children's mobility was drastically curtailed in the late 20th Century by our dependence on the car; the campaign for reforms to the daylight-saving regime in England; the relentless arguments in favour of transport policy makers taking walking and cycling seriously as transport modes; the pioneering analysis of risks from road safety measures, which paradoxically increase danger to pedestrians by making road users feel less vulnerable and more able to increase their speed; the insight that many of our environmental problems over the last half-century cannot be solved by technical fixes on the supply side, but require profound changes in the pattern of demand.

Mayer Hillman's title, *As if Children Mattered*, comes from a book published in the late 1990s by the American business analyst and social forecaster Jeff Gates, (now leader of the US New Radical party). Gates' book, *The Ownership Solution*, calls for a reform of capitalism to create a system that operates 'as if children mattered' – as opposed to the ways in which the economy has worked to undermine environmental security, family life, social cohesion and the prospects for long-term sustainability for all. Hillman's concerns have always been centred on the quality of life of children in the present and of future generations, drawing outraged attention to the ways in which modern life, and especially dependence on the car, has constrained children's independence and warped our attitudes towards safety and the public realm. And his campaigning work on climate change in the 1990s and 2000s, calling for radical measures far beyond those contemplated at the time by politicians, has been fuelled by a deep concern for the quality of life that tomorrow's children will inherit from a short-termist, self-centred culture of consumption.

Few prophetic voices with uncomfortable things to say are given a welcome by the public and the policy makers. So it proved

for Hillman in the 1990s, confronted by governments unsympathetic to his arguments. At the time, he was especially preoccupied by the dangers of climate change from global warming, arguing strongly for far more radical measures to curb greenhouse gas emissions than policy makers were prepared to contemplate.

Hillman made two particularly unwelcome proposals. First, that we should begin to establish carbon allowances on a per capita basis, to promote more sustainable consumption of fossil fuels in an equitable fashion nationally and worldwide. Second, that airlines should be taxed for the first time to reflect the environmental damage done by airliners' emissions, and especially to take account of their contribution to greenhouse gases and global warming. Typical reactions to these proposals were that Hillman and others like him were 'jeremiahs', systematically exaggerating the risks and obsessed with a hairshirt approach to life, yearning for the chance to issue everyone with ration books for their carbon allowances. He was also written off by many as someone peddling naïve ideas that could never be politically feasible.

In this, of course, Hillman's critics were mistaken, as we know now. It is one of the great satisfactions of reading his book that one notes the many reforms that have been adopted over the last 20 years which have their roots in ideas which Mayer developed and promoted. Of course, many others have taken them up and refined them, and perhaps few policy makers know how much they owe to thinkers and researchers such as Hillman, but it is nonetheless a pleasure to consider how influential he has ultimately proved to be. And one suspects that on his 70th birthday 20 years ago, Hillman himself would have had few expectations that the world would have changed so much in the directions he had advocated for so long.

The most obvious change has been the worldwide response to the evidence of climate disruption caused by greenhouse gas emissions. Young readers, used to the system of carbon allowances and global emissions trading, find it hard to imagine a world in which these did not exist and were the subject of furious debate. But of course it took an emergency to bring these systems into being, and to bring people such as Mayer Hillman and Aubrey Meyer, the founder of the Contraction and

Convergence Plan now in use around the world, to the attention of policy makers.

The warning signs of climate change were apparent in the 1990s, but were largely ignored, especially in the USA. The great storms and floods of 2000–2001 in Britain played a significant role in raising public awareness of the risks of climate disruption, but even then Hillman and Meyer's pamphlet of 2003 on carbon allowances, emissions trading and airline taxes was disregarded by politicians fearful of the electoral consequences of radical policies to manage demand for fossil fuel use, especially in transport. Memories of the fuel crises of autumn 2000 and the 'motorists' revolt' in 2002 were too strong.

It was not until the Great Storm of 2005 in north-west Europe, and the near-simultaneous catastrophic floods along the eastern seaboard of the USA, that public opinion and political attitudes began to change rapidly. The Emergency Earth Summit of 2006 put in place the Contraction and Convergence Plan, which was ratified across the planet by 2010.

Of course, the action came too late to prevent major climate disruption, and we are living with the consequences now – the spread of tropical diseases in the North, the prospect of huge migrations from flooded coastal cities in the South, and the likelihood of extinction for so many species unable to adapt to warming and loss of habitats. But the signs are that we did act in time to avert truly calamitous climate change by mid-century.

The world that has emerged, painfully and with much economic dislocation, is in many ways a better one. Air travel is much reduced, but sea travel has grown enormously since 2010, along with the booming virtual reality travel industry. British Airways famously makes more money from its Virtual Travel business than from its flights. Petrol-based cars are becoming collectors' items, with most people using hybrid petrol/fuel cell vehicles if they cannot travel by foot, bicycle, bus or train; and of course the need for travel for work has been much reduced by the explosion in teleworking over the last 20 years, and by planning regulations which favour proximity of workplaces to homes.

All this means that Hillman's vision of a society that takes its own future and that of its environment seriously is on the way to being realised. This is a source of huge satisfaction. But I suspect

that he derives even more pleasure from a smaller consequence of the great changes seen over the past generation. In 1971, and again in 1990, Hillman and his colleagues, John Adams and John Whitelegg (all of them, of course, now members of the British Federal Senate), carried out surveys of children's journeys to school, to identify the ways in which the volume of road traffic was affecting their independence of mobility. In 1971 80 per cent of 7–8-year-olds were allowed to go to school without adult supervision. By 1990, the figure fell to a mere 9 per cent. By 2001, it was just 6 per cent.

Hillman used this research to great effect, adding to the debate on the impacts on children's health of car-dependent families and the loss of freedom to play and roam. In 2020, the research was repeated under Hillman's supervision. The figure for children allowed to travel to school unescorted, following a decade of reforms in public transport, cycling provision, pedestrian policy, and car restraint, and in planning of school locations and pedestrian pathways, was 65 per cent. Mayer Hillman can look forward to the 1971 figure being exceeded by the time of his 100th birthday, and no doubt he cannot imagine a better centenary present.

## From Adrian Davis

30 October 2021

*Some men see things as they are and say why? I dream of things that never were and say why not?*

(George Bernard Shaw)

Dear Mayer

I hope that this letter finds you in good health. As we have both long been advocates of the multifarious health benefits of cycling, I should, perhaps, particularly wish you many more years in the saddle! I still have on my shelves a first edition of your BMA book on cycling and health. I remember your struggle to get the BMA to accept the inclusion of the word 'far' in the sentence stating that the benefits of cycling outweighed the disadvantages. Alas, to no avail. The medical lobby was so very sceptical and defensive, wary of health promotion beyond the confines of the health sector, and the audacious idea that it is somehow better to invest in promoting the maintenance of health and well-being than simply attempting to 'mend' people once they have fallen ill. But then, the system trained and rewarded them for their skills in performing the latter, not the former.

Part of their entrenchment in the 'medical' model of health stemmed from the pervasive myth that good health was the outcome of medical services (born, it seems, with the establishment of the NHS). This myth stands alongside that of roads becoming safer as fewer crashes and casualties are recorded. In various ways these myths have been two particular challenges that you and I somehow became involved in debunking. Both were derived from a positivistic school of thinking which believed that the ability to give numerical value to an experience provided



the whole picture. You have played no small part in providing the vision that was so urgently needed by constructing the case for health-promoting, inherently safe, and resource efficient modes of travel to be recognised as a significant element of what might be termed 'healthy public policy'.

We have both written of the need for quality of life to be the overriding objective of public policy. Quality of life involves trade offs between material and non-material values, between physical attributes and the psychological (such as designing for slower speeds which then provide feelings of safety). Your relatively early work on social goals for transport policy in 1975 helped to define what the aims of transport policy should be: as contributing to goals which reconciled personal freedom with sustainability (responsibility to posterity, as you termed it), with equity, waste minimisation, and improvement of the social and physical environment. This was particularly important in a sector which increasingly confused ends with means and often thought more equalled better. Now, however, these social policy goals are commonplace within regional, national and local transport policies.

Among my collection of those unfadingly bright orange PSI publications is *Danger on the Road: the needless scourge* (1984). That was one of my early introductions to your work. In the 1980s I drew on it for inspiration in pressing an ardently *laissez-faire* central government to face up to the need to learn some important lessons from continental Europe on traffic calming (how quaintly we then distinguished ourselves from our European neighbours!). It has, for many decades now, seemed ironic that the one positive idea to emerge from the Buchanan Report (1963), *Traffic in Towns* – of environmental areas in which motor traffic could be restricted – should have been taken up by our continental neighbours in the 1970s, while Britain, to all intents and purposes, ignored it for 30 years!

How times have changed. The second oil 'crisis' and the flooding of the North American 'grain belt', in the short space of a decade, put paid to any assumptions that the automobile would continue to dominate street space and travel choices in the 21st Century. In the early years of this century global warming became a stark reality, at huge cost, to the most powerful and most polluting nation on Earth.

I have not forgotten what you once said in a discussion long ago, that the day would come when people in the street would feel sorry for someone passing by in a motor car. It would be a sign, you suggested, of some emergency which required their annual carbon quota to be all but used up in one fell swoop. Of course, we have not quite reached that scenario, but travel behaviour has changed so much from just 20 to 30 years ago when habitual car use was the norm for so many across the 'developed' world. There are now fewer cars owned in Britain than there were in 2005, and the street fleets and car pools that are now commonplace make ownership increasingly the preserve of the recycling conglomerates. Then, there were some 20 million bicycles in Britain. Now, a bicycle is owned by nearly every able-bodied citizen – some 50 million, so that there are slightly more bicycles in Britain than in the Netherlands – unthinkable just 15 years ago! Of course, we still have traffic congestion – it's just so much quieter now, and the air is cleaner than I ever can recall it being back in the 20th century.

In my street I can see the fruits of the withering of car dependence, which, although 'driven' by energy and climate change demands, has nonetheless brought about practical demonstrations of real road safety and environmentally-led transport planning. Our Community Zone now comprises nearly 90 per cent of the total district street network. Children are playing amongst the sandpits, hopscotch areas, and swings. Besides ten cars, a handful of Runabouts are dotted along the street. Once in a while a neighbour weaves his or her way between the trees, bikes, benches and seats, heading towards the local stores. I can hear the Runabout motor accelerate as it reaches the transponder at the zone boundary.

Children's health and well-being has been a particular cause that we have shared over the decades. Of course, data from *One False Move* (1990) became, at least for a decade, a mantra chanted by many champions of children's rights – to the extent, I think, that strangers sometimes quoted your own data to you, ignorant of its origins! So many research projects addressing children and the environment during the 1990s and early in the new millennium had their origins, took as their inspiration, the powerful message that you, with your co-conspirators, set before us all: that children's independent mobility was being lost as danger on the

road perceivably increased. My own research in this area, which began at the Open University, was driven by this 'Hillman' hypothesis. Research addressing children's quality of life can be a powerful incentive to policy change. Although children need safe routes everywhere, the profusion of safe-routes-to-school programmes from the 1990s marked just the beginning of a diverse range of programmes (safe routes to leisure facilities, stations, health centres, etc) which were to improve the quality of life for millions of children, many of whom are now mature adults.

The levels of physical inactivity in children that we had both recorded in our 20th Century studies were part of a curious story. Certainly there existed already a sizeable volume of data on declining levels of physical activity across many 'developed' nations. The curious part was the self-restricted nature of much physical activity research, as most appeared to be focused on sports and exercise. Years of training in exercise physiology, psychology and physical education inculcated many physical activity researchers with a perspective which did not recognise the role or importance of physical activity as part of the routine of daily living. And it has taken many years for this to change. There were those, of course, who could and did see the wider picture, not least our mutual friend Jerry Morris, the 'grandfather' of exercise and health research, an arch advocate of walking for health.

During the 1980s, I was becoming more interested in transport and health when I came across your paper to the 1988 Healthy Cities conference in Liverpool. Drawing together many of the impacts of transport upon health, it inspired me to delve more into this multi-disciplinary and nascent field of study. I recall, years later, sitting in a majestic medical library wondering how I had come, as a transport researcher, to be reading papers in journals such as *Calcified Tissue*, *Bone* and the *Scandinavian Journal of Gastroenterology Supplement*! As you well know, drawing together the evidence and building the case for health-promoting transport policies invariably involves some detours into the many fields of human activity which touch on daily life in a multitude of ways. Yet for the purposes of public administration these were sectioned off so that never the twain should meet!

Indeed, in all the areas of work in which we have shared a common interest, an overarching impediment to promoting

health, and reducing danger on the road, has been these narrowly visioned worlds. They have been constructed, in no small part, for the defence of professions and sectoral interests. Of course, there are other significant barriers to change, not least the continuing influence of the industrial lobbyists. Yet their ability to hold such influence over policy has been reduced by the substantive changes set in motion by the European Sustainable Development Act of 2009, which, in no small part, thanks to your efforts, required that sustainable development be integral to work across all areas of public policy.

So, Mayer, in this brief letter of reflection, I hope to have conveyed to you how your work on health, transport and the environment has provided so much inspiration to me. It has been a guiding light, an *archipelago* of the imagination, which has gnawed at the consciences of so many of us who ask, 'Does it have to be like this?' Your response has always been so clear and so emphatic.

With kind regards and felicitations

Adrian Davis

## From Paul Ekins

30 October 2021

Dear Mayer

### *Three paths to sustainable development*

I had hoped that, by 2021, the essential features of the transition to what in the 1990s we began to call sustainable development would have become clear. But, in fact, we have advanced very little in the last 20 years in terms of seeing how the great environment and development questions of our time will be resolved. Let me elaborate.

It has been clear to me, since the end of the 1990s, that the transition to sustainable development would have to come about through one of three routes, or a combination of them, if it was to happen at all. These three routes might, in shorthand, be called: technological breakthrough, self-denial and transcendence.

Technological breakthrough says it all in the name. It is the achievement of win-win in both economic and environmental outcomes. It involves the ability to satisfy both human needs and unconstrained human wants with a small fraction of the environmental impact of current production and consumption patterns. The phrases of two decades ago which sought to express this phenomenon were eco-efficiency, resource productivity, natural capitalism and, most of all perhaps, Factor 10 – implying a factor ten reduction in the environmental intensity of economic activities across the board.

Self-denial is hardly a less expressive term. If it looks as if, for whatever reason, technological breakthrough is not going to deliver win-win environmental improvement to the required



extent, then an environmentally aware population may decide to constrain its wants, to ration through price or some other means the consumption and therefore the production of environmentally damaging goods and services. In the context of the 2020s this means getting really serious about the reduction of carbon emissions, about the safeguarding of biodiversity, and about controlling water use, even if this means not buying or doing things which people would very much like to buy or do.

In terms of behaviour, transcendence does not differ very much from self-denial. It still results in the reduction of key environmental impacts by people choosing not to buy or do certain things. The difference is that this behaviour change is not experienced as self-denial, because environmentally damaging activities have ceased to be attractive to the great majority of people. To illustrate, most people probably do not experience as a cost the current social prohibition on the abuse of children. Abusing children is not something they want to do. The few people who derive pleasure from abusing children are regarded as perverts and become social outcasts. Transcendence, as referred to here, is about the evolution of values such that people begin to feel the same way about the environment as they do about child abuse and abusers. There is a difference, of course. Very few people get pleasure from abuse of the environment in itself. Their environmental damage is an unintended (though perhaps inevitable) result of some activity being enjoyed for other reasons. Even so, throughout the 1990s environmental awareness among the general public increased to the extent that it was possible to imagine that by 2020 a change in values would have taken place such that even unintended environmental abuse would have become socially unacceptable.

#### *Experience since 2000*

As I said at the beginning, I had hoped back in 2000 that in 20 years, those of us who had been working for sustainable development for so long (but for reasons of mortality would be unlikely to be doing so for much longer!) would know which, if any, of these pathways to sustainable development were being trodden

and would be likely to achieve their destination. Alas, the picture is still confused, but it is interesting and therefore still worth describing.

With regard to technical change, there has of course been an enormous advance in the last 20 years. The problem is that it has not been sufficiently guided in the direction of sustainability. I say 'sufficiently' because there have been many positive developments. For example, cars are much more fuel efficient now, while the emission from exhausts of toxic local pollutants practically disappeared in old industrial countries by 2010 and is nothing like the problem it was even in lower-income countries. But cars still run mainly on fossil fuels, and worldwide there are now over 800 million of them (nearly twice as many as there were in 1990), so their contribution to global warming is actually greater than it was in 1990 despite their greater efficiency. Moreover, many of them are still driven, and are still legally driven, too fast, dividing communities and making roads the most dangerous daily experience, bar none, for children and old people.

The problem in this area, as in many others, is that policy makers committed to sustainable development never adequately appreciated, or convinced electorates of, the crucial role of *prices* in directing technical change. The simple fact in a market economy is that technological development is driven by a perception of potential profits. For example, as a society, we never fully grasped the elementary economic fact that, if we wanted renewable energy sources to play a really substantial role in energy supply by 2020, market conditions in the past two decades needed to have convinced entrepreneurs and venture capitalists to make the investments to get the economies of scale to reduce their costs, so that they could, by now, compete profitably and unsubsidised with fossil fuels. The pro-renewables rhetoric of policy makers from about the mid-1990s was never matched by price signals, and rhetoric by itself is a very poor mobiliser of investment.

This brings us to the second inevitable conclusion of the last 20 years: the Western consumer has shown little willingness to make sacrifices for the environment, despite the fact that, in surveys, environmental concern is now said to be running at very high levels, and is regularly reinforced by unequivocal scientific evidence of serious environmental malfunction, due to climate

change, water stress, land degradation and serious predictions of ecosystem collapse due to the loss of biodiversity.

One of the most unappealing characteristics of the present situation is that people increasingly blame others – especially corporations and governments – for the environmental calamities that are actually the direct results of their own lifestyles. They blame businesses for not producing totally green products, but are generally not prepared to pay premium prices, or accept a slight reduction in performance, when such products are put on the market. They expect new wonder technologies to come to the environmental rescue, but punish governments which try to put in place the price signals to stimulate the innovation which the development of new technologies requires. The protests against perceivedly high levels of fuel taxes which swept through Europe in late summer 2000 were an absolutely classic example of popular determination to retain valued elements of lifestyles, regardless of the environmental consequences. As you know, these protests put a dampener for many years not just on road fuel taxation, but on increases in environmental taxes more generally. An exception has been the taxation of aviation fuel, which now pays a rate of tax worldwide that is equivalent to the highest national road fuel duties. This has almost certainly cut the growth rate of air travel substantially – but it has still been 3 per cent per year over the last 20 years. Heathrow's Terminal 5 has been open since 2008 (and I know that you were not particularly mollified by the fact that it won numerous environmental awards), but it has been running at dangerously full capacity since 2015. Now there is a public inquiry in progress as to whether Heathrow must have a new runway, and a sixth terminal to go with it, or whether the South East 'needs' an entirely new airport. Again, not much sign here of self-denial among the travelling public.

And so to transcendence. I suspect that this was the route to sustainable development which you and I both hoped, against the evidence, would materialise. As we worked together, with Robert Hutchison, on our book *Wealth Beyond Measure* in the early 1990s, we discussed how important we perceived the non-consumer elements of quality of life to be, and recommended that they should receive a greater share of the attention that was then being excessively directed at narrow measures of economic

performance. As things turned out, we were not wrong. Before the end of the decade, the government had published its own set of sustainable development indicators, *Quality of Life Counts*, which included, and affirmed the importance of, many of the aspects of quality of life which we had emphasised in our book. But, it has to be said, the non-economic elements of this indicator set, and of human life generally, have not collectively displaced the importance in political life, and in public consciousness, of economic objectives. Arguments for economic growth and more jobs still generally win the political day, even when the environmental outcomes are problematic. For the public, shopping (increasingly in huge out-of-town complexes that could be located practically anywhere in the world, so little difference is there between their manifestations in different countries) continues to be the most popular away-from-home activity. Television, a greater and greater proportion of which seems to consist of advising people what to buy in these emporia, predictably remains the most popular at-home activity, although internet games, and yes, e-shopping, is starting to run in a close second. I don't think that any of this can be classed as transcendence.

However, this is beginning to sound too negative. As I have already said, there have been environmental changes for the better in the last 20 years, especially those due to the new environmental technologies which have been developed and diffused. The really good news of this period, though, is that the Earth's natural systems have generally proved far more resilient than many of us feared back in the early 2000s. A great quantity of biodiversity has disappeared, but there seemed to be no way to prevent that 20 years ago, and the biosphere still seems to be functioning more or less normally. Climate change is certainly occurring, but the rise in sea level and number of freak weather events are less pronounced than seemed likely in view of the huge increase in storm damage in the 1990s. We can only keep our fingers crossed and hope that the pro-renewables revolution really takes off in the next five years, as it has been promising fitfully to do for the past ten.

On the human side, things could be much worse. The global population has only just passed seven billion, and looks as if it will level out below eight billion by the middle of the century,

which is well below what most demographers predicted 20 years ago. Moreover, there are only half the number of malnourished people in the world than there were in 2000 (which is still 400 million too many), and the UN's Human Development Index has increased modestly in most countries in most years since then, so that it is certainly possible to say that the human experience in 2020 is, on average, less distressing than it was at the turn of the century. Whether it is also more fulfilling depends on how highly you rate shopping!

Perhaps the most hopeful sign of all for the future is the way in which global capitalism has developed in terms of corporate social and environmental responsibility. There are still corporate gangsters, of course, who trample on human lives and the environment, but increasingly they are treated as pariahs by their business peers (rather as dictators began to be treated and prosecuted by the international community in the early 2000s). Almost all the global companies which now account for a full 80 per cent of market transactions operate according to strict, externally verified, social and environmental standards. This has made a huge difference to the corporate impact on society and the environment in general.

So there is still everything to play for in terms of the transition to sustainable development. I feel sure that if we were around in another 20 years' time we would know whether humanity had made it. I have to say that I don't think that even your phenomenal youthfulness will take you through to 110, but then, come to think of it, I did read the other day that some geneticist claimed to have found a way of switching off the gene responsible for ageing....

Here's to the next two decades.

Best regards

Paul

## From John Grimshaw

30 October 2021

Dear Mayer

I am glad to hear that you are still cycling around. Still, you are hardly alone. There was a time when a 90-year-old on wheels would have been a rarity, but now that insurance companies have adopted your 'ten years younger on a bike' findings, there is scarcely anyone I know who isn't pedalling their premium down! I confess to finding it all rather overpowering at times and I fondly remember those early days of route development, when we had a scarcity value – why, I reckoned to know the names of every cyclist I passed in a city like Glasgow – there were so few!

Those were the days when we rampaged around the country taking in disused and abandoned railways to make the paths, and the power base, with which to win back a kingdom for the bike. In that rough old construction world you may care to know how important your books were: *Personal Mobility and Transport Policy*, *Walking is Transport*, *Danger on the Road: the needless scourge*.

I have them still, and they were the resource we relied on to make our points. The books had a certain austerity about them and – like this one – no pictures. You were probably to blame for the fact that I cannot now write without the odd sketch or photograph to aid the flow of words – something you always managed without!

Nowadays your books are collectors' pieces, but then they were almost all we had. Of course, in the end, the changes have been faster than we anticipated, in those long years when it seemed almost perverse to stand in the way of a seemingly universal world of cars. Then it all changed, quite suddenly: the fuel crises, global warming (which became part of everyday



vocabulary), sea level rises, and almost constant flooding, all put the folly of the 20th Century in stark perspective, and have ended the so-called love affair with the car forever.

You will remember the changing events so clearly. With mandatory motor vehicle speeds controlled by satellite – it's inconceivable to think that governments actually allowed motorists to drive at whatever speed they liked – precedence was given to pedestrians and cyclists (so much better than the automatic gates we had in mind), and with the end of the *private* car, all vehicles had to travel full, rather like the old jitneys. And all this resulted in almost daily improvements for cyclists until they have become masters of the almost empty roads, and really the only private and independent transport vehicle we have.

However, it didn't happen easily. I well remember your fury when the government of 2000 pinned *all* their faith in public transport, which forecast ever *longer* journeys. In fact, public transport had by then been left so far behind by the mileage driven privately that it could never provide a substitute that maintained the same way of life.

Today it is all taken for granted, but then the notion of a three-pronged approach – doubling vehicle efficiency, doubling vehicle occupancy and halving travel, to achieve an eight-fold reduction in energy – was considered absurd. We had a worry that clever technology would swamp the world with small Runabouts, but really the transport system had collapsed so far that the public demanded more radical approaches. The hardest was doubling vehicle occupancy, which effectively turned most private cars into 'public' vehicles, although most people lived locally and knew each other. The dreadful 'Stranger Danger' campaigns by earlier governments, which had isolated the individual, had to be reversed, and ironically it was mobile phone technology which solved that problem with its ability to pinpoint your whereabouts and so effectively 'guard' the individual when travelling with a stranger. The same phones eventually removed a good deal of travel demand, a process which really started in earnest when all new developments had to demonstrate that their scheme would reduce positively the amount of travel in the community. The only way the big commercial developments could do this was by

simultaneously building local branches throughout their catchment and arranging that for the appropriate proportion of time their staff 'hot desked' down at the end of the street in the local office or workshop. The same requirement killed off those huge generators of traffic – the out-of-town shopping centres – which also had no choice but to reinvent the corner shop.

But what a waste it all was. One hundred years of frenetic energy to build roads, transport systems, and spread out settlements, that reduced the whole so-called civilised world to a drab mass of concrete and writhing steel. It makes me so angry that we lost so much, so many resources, so much land, so many lives. It's like a bad dream now, one which we are only just waking up from, the consequences of which will govern our lives forever.

But at last we are rebuilding the world around less and less travel. Of course, it's very exciting, although I admit I really don't understand some of the travel techniques involved: the virtual travel arrangements are extraordinary and in one sense, of course, people travel more than they ever used to, although, obviously, it's all in the imagination of the computer.

We were only partially involved in the Home Zone aspect, but it was extraordinary how quickly this caught on, once we had worked out how to use European legislation on the Freedom of the Individual to cover families and children. That was an exciting transfer of power away from central bureaucrats to the really local community, who could focus on life in their own street – a process which has rejuvenated neighbourly support and helped many an individual through the environmental, transport and administration disruptions of the last 20 years.

One matter I was particularly pleased with was the *Car-Free Convention*, of which both you and I took advantage to create traffic-free streets, in much the same way as earlier generations had achieved cigarette-free restaurants and cinemas. Up until that time, those of us who managed without cars gained no real physical advantage, no reduction in Council Tax, no widened pavement planted with trees, no attractive route to walk or cycle. I think the Convention was a turning point, because it really established that society gave precedence to people, not hunks of metal.

I am glad to say that there is still a need for some physical effort, or we would wither away in a gluttonous mass, as was the

trend 20 years ago. It's strange, isn't it, that your research on the benefits of regular exercise has become the guiding philosophy of this age, and that as a result, the bicycle, that beautifully efficient piece of transport technology, has again regained its place as the key means of transport more or less 100 years after its last blossoming.

There cannot be many examples of technology reinventing itself in this way. I wonder what Alex Moulton would have said – do you remember the time when his bikes were so beautiful and rare that they were collected and hung on walls instead of pictures?

Anyway, I was very pleased to hear that you joined in the Longest Ride last 21 June. It has really become something of a tradition to ride the whole national cycle network on 21 June each year. And this year was the 21st anniversary of that first opening in the millennium year. I don't think there has been a single year that you have missed the trip as our patron – and Sustrans couldn't survive without your support.

Birthday letters are so difficult to write. As well as our well wishes, there is so much to congratulate you upon, particularly the final success of 'Flying Too Far' and the decisions by the WAA to reduce the volume of air travel by 10 per cent, year on year. But there is also that nagging doubt that it might all have happened anyway, despite our efforts. Oil was bound to run out, traffic was bound to grind to a standstill; did we really make a change? At one level we did all we could, but at another, we were hopelessly inadequate for the task. If only, if only – if only scores no points – but if only we had been able, as a world, to foresee the whole terrible consequences of travelling too much and then *taken action to avoid it*. But we were not.

Sometimes I am asked what I thought about on that 21 June opening in the millennium. It was assumed that I would have been ecstatic! But no, try as I can, I can only recall a quiet sadness that it was so little, so late, and there was so much left to do and that I was desperately tired!

But I cannot finish on such a sombre note – not on a day like this. There's a present on its way by separate delivery. We have finally sorted out that bitumen additive for dog food, so that their mess can have positive use. I thought you could give it to that

frightful neighbour over the road, who still persists in keeping a dog in town.

So on that note, I wish you the very best for the next year, and look forward to seeing you on the ride next June. Do remember, as if you would forget, that now the Thurrock sea walls have been abandoned, we have rebuilt the national cycle route to Southend, inland through Basildon, of all places!

Best wishes

John Grimshaw

## From Aubrey Meyer

30 October 2021

Dear Mayer

We met all those years ago in the early 1990s. You were already a veteran of thinking and campaigning about what was then known as 'sustainable development'. I was just a middle-aged musician in the first throes of the deep anxiety that a new awareness of these issues had unleashed in me.

With three friends from the UK Green Party I had just formed the Global Commons Institute, or GCI. With a focus of human-induced global warming and climate change, our global mission was summed up simply as 'equity and survival'. International agreement to reduce the emissions of the greenhouse gases causing climate change was obviously needed. GCI took the simple position that the international sharing of this task would have to be based on recognising the principles of precaution and equity, or fair sharing under limits. This is what we subsequently came to develop as a call to the UN for international emissions 'Contraction and Convergence', effectively a deliberate convergence on equality per head of the emissions shares of the rich and the poor.

Demonstrating your own effort to avoiding emissions from motorised transport, you had cycled across north London to my small flat so we could talk about these concerns. The journey from your home in Hampstead to Willesden was mostly downhill. You obviously knew this and therefore that the journey home was going to be uphill. You didn't appear to mind this in the least.

Perhaps it was allegorical. After a moment's downhill, it was refreshingly easy for us to find common cause in our concerns. And afterwards – in fact ever since – it has been difficult really for



all of us to go home. This is because we knew that it would be an uphill struggle to persuade people that this sharing under limits, or global equity, had to be locally, but also widely, accepted as normal and necessary for global survival.

In those days 'efficiency' was the dominant culture at court. Mammon – in a large car – was effecting a hostile takeover in a universe of infinite economic expansion. The gods of Casino-Capitalism had become Cosmos, and Communism was disgraced in the ashes of 'evil empires' and other such dragons that had been slain at 'the end of history'. The beasts of growth and greed had slaughtered the God of fair play. Equity was dead and efficiency triumphant. Do you remember all that?

What was and has remained vivid for me all the years since then was that the ethic of equity and survival was obviously already quite 'normal' for you. And while I was only to discover later that you had been frequently punished for thinking this way and would be more, at that moment in my life it was comforting to me that someone had arrived from the blue yonder of Hampstead on a bicycle with a commitment to this simple, decent, yet logical attitude.

It is now 30 years since that link and our friendship through it was made. What was true then has remained true to this day. I suspect it has been true through the ages. The way to salvation is hard to find and like a razor's edge. It takes self-understanding to find it and persistent courage to focus this effort on a constructive gentleness with other beings, as distractions and provocations to do otherwise are frequent and pervasive.

However, you had spotted that global climate change was uniquely forcing a dilemma on humanity that made the thesis of 'equity and survival' the logical imperative within which context the purely moral impulse resides. Unabated, climate change says that any ideological resistance to the moral impulse is subsumed by the negative expression of the thesis, in other words 'no equity, no survival'. Opponents of the thesis face the problem of being not so much 'not good' as 'not smart', as not to survive is to lose.

Those who demurred were often nothing more than sceptics who had presumed that any power for change is in the institutions of *realpolitik*, and that they – indeed we all – are condemned to behave as just spectators or fatalists, sometimes acting as well-

paid experts and as consultants, groomed in a none-too-subtle form of obedience.

You were never one of these. 'Equity and survival' says that now, if there is any power for change, it is first and foremost in the institution of the argument itself and its proper understanding and advocacy. I have felt for all the time that I have known you that this point was what we fundamentally shared, and that with you it was more strongly shared than with any of my other nearest long-time campaigning colleagues. The power of this insight is fundamental yet also dangerous. Power is always awesome because of the challenge it issues and the responsibility that it invites.

The simple logic of equity and survival has remained at the heart of what I long ago came to see as a basis for realising a politics beyond ideology. And armed with this argument, and the confidence derived from this recognition of its power, I believe that you and I, and all of us who argued this way, helped to shape the struggle for the necessary institutional changes more decisively than those with purely moral and/or merely technological preoccupations. This insight has helped to keep the iteration and development of the argument persistent, effective and responsive.

It has been the new neutrality. And now, after these 30 years, we can all see that the argument has decisively taken root in institutions of governance and social policy, that back in the 1990s were still captive to the ideological obedience of 'efficiency' and the loaded neutrality of *laissez-faire*. Sustainable development is now pursued in a way that is quite uncontroversially guided by a constitutional foundation of equity for survival. About this we can feel some sense of achievement.

Yet what Tony Blair, then prime minister, said back in the year 2000, sadly remains true to this day. All these changes recognised, humanity continues to create its problems faster than it solves them. In real terms our progress remains too slow and it is difficult to escape from a persistent feeling of failure. Our future is now really being determined by the ever more emergent and frightening reality of global climate changes, and effectively a global security crisis now exists because of this. The rise in atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations and global temperature is still out of control because of uncontrolled pollution.

It is true that we have also known from the outset that no matter how rapidly we all made progress in the effort to institute the culture of equity and survival, and then the consequences of implementing 'Contraction and Convergence', changes for the better would never outpace the rate at which climate change-related damages unfolded during the final decades of our lives. What we didn't know then was just how badly the odds were stacked against us in the battle to make the rates of change for the better overtake the rates of change for the worse. This was the precautionary point we had been urging all along. In the face of uncertainties about how fast humanity is approaching the zone where sudden and traumatic outcomes become possible, prevalent and even completely unavoidable, playing safe and not unnecessarily running risks should always have been the priority. And equity and survival said this. It showed from the outset that structuring for change among ourselves in concert – in a constitutional and comprehensive way – had to be preferable to having it forced upon us by indecision, adversity and adversarial chaos.

As you know, formal 'Contraction and Convergence' procedures on global emissions were finally instituted by the UN eight years ago. Subsequently, a context has evolved that has protected and reinforced the value of the numerous local initiatives emerging around the world on transport and other planning issues (the sorts of things you have also so persistently articulated and championed all your life). In the light of this I know it is a source of great satisfaction to you that not only has the global effort for resource conservation and sharing matured so visibly, but it has done so in such a way that the economic value of this conservation and sharing is recognised and rewarded as much as over-consumption is now discouraged and indeed penalised. For example, the agreement across Europe at the beginning of the last parliament to replace the tax and benefit system with citizen's income is probably the most radical transformation of social policy in the history of the European adventure. This is all quite amazing. One only has to remember how much of a status symbol large cars still were only ten years ago and to see how much of a stigma they are now, to recognise this. It seems that the work ethic is being superseded by the walk ethic and that perhaps we have not completely grown old in vain.

Yet in the last 20 years, because of the only partially retarded pollution of the atmosphere, humanity as a whole has added another 0.5°C temperature rise to the global average, 'Contraction and Convergence' notwithstanding. This is as much as humanity triggered in the previous 100 years. Conservation, sharing, global institutions of governance, enlightened social policy, high technology and the growing emergence of renewable and non-polluting sources of energy – welcome as all of these are – have not been able to prevent this rise in temperature. Extreme weather events and the damage resulting from these are still increasingly frequent and traumatic around the world.

This is a terrible legacy to leave to the children and grandchildren of today. Climate change will continue to worsen throughout their lives unless they are consistently more successful than we have been at slowing the rates of destruction and entropy in favour of overall ecological recovery and renewal. This dilemma remains at the heart of the human destiny. Our descendants will need the honesty to recognise this and persistent skill, courage and invention to deal with it effectively. But most of all they will need an understanding that without real and sustained compassion, all our efforts and theirs will be dissipated as they become locked into irreversible decline. I'm not sure at all that, if they find this too, they will be able to claim that they learned it from us or from history.

But then perhaps that really is the power of equity and survival. It is quite new. All these years I have loved and admired you for having the skill, the courage and the compassion to speak and act in its name.

Aubrey

## From John Pinder

30 October 2021

Dear Mayer

### *Cars and climate change*

Some may be surprised that you are not only alive but also busy on entering your tenth decade. I am not among them. Being seven years ahead of you, I must admit I have slowed down a bit. But I have kept going because I am infected by the same bug as you. We both find the difference between the world as it is and as it should be unacceptable; we are committed to doing what we can to change it; and we have to live and be active as long as we can, in order to try and put it right.

'Old Men Forget', as the title of Duff Cooper's autobiography put it. But we remember better what happened 30 years ago than where we put our specs five minutes ago; and I don't forget the first time we met, when you came to discuss the idea of working for PSI (in its earlier incarnation as Political and Economic Planning). As the Director, I had to judge whether you would be able to do the sort of things the institute required.

I remember the occasion vividly. I think I must have recognised the commitment to identifying problems and devising solutions that has given your policy studies their cutting edge, because I have that commitment too, even if yours is driven by fire and mine is more like the drip-drip of water on the rock of received opinion.

I think I also understood that your transition from being a practising architect, when you had catered for individual needs, to getting a PhD in sociology which provided you with tools to



analyse society, gave you an insight into the relationship between the two and hence a robust basis for policy studies: in your case for transport and land-use planning policies, taking account of both the needs of individual citizens and the impact of their actions on others.

As it was my job and my delight to read and discuss with you all that you wrote, you introduced me to new dimensions of the interdependence between citizens and the society in which they live. My personal commitment, generated by the experience of World War Two and its aftermath, was to deal with problems arising from the interdependence among nation-states, taking account of their need for as much autonomy as possible while ensuring that they do not cause each other unnecessary harm. This attracted me to the study of federal solutions to international problems. For a decade and more after I left PSI, this difference in focus led our interests to diverge. They converged again when it became clear that both interdependence among citizens within their states and interdependence among the states themselves were central to the causes and cures of what was to become the great world ecological crisis of the first 20 years of this millennium. But first, I must recall some of the things I learnt from you during the decade and a half that we worked together.

#### *Freedom and order: personal mobility and transport policy*

You began as you were to go on, with a book-length report called *Personal Mobility and Transport Policy*: a title that went to the heart of the nexus of problems which the steady stream of your reports was to tackle in the following years.

You have a gift for a title that tells the story in the fewest possible words. *Walking is Transport* followed soon after, showing the damage done by policies that privileged the car over the natural use of our two feet. Rural railways and rail closures were another facet of the same distortion. Cycling was yet another.

Concern about the quality of life, particularly for the weaker and less privileged, was implicit in those studies; and it was the explicit theme of your work on access to recreation and on the impact of transport policies on children. The effect of traffic, not

only on health but also on life, was the burden of *Danger on the Road: the needless scourge* – yet another of your striking titles.

You were appalled by the reckless exploitation of the Earth's resources without thought for the needs of posterity, hence your concern about the profligate use of petrol for road transport. The commitment to conservation took you beyond the use of petroleum for personal travel, back to your architect's engagement with building (*Less Fuel, More Jobs: the promotion of energy conservation in buildings*), as well as to *Making the Most of Daylight Hours*. You were quick to perceive that the impact of global warming caused by carbon dioxide emissions was not going to wait for succeeding generations.

Here were the grounds for the convergence of our two core commitments. For the indiscriminate consumption of petrol and other fossil fuels damaged not only citizens of one's own state but also, through the effect on global warming, the citizens of other states throughout the world. Interdependence among states as well as among citizens was involved. The implications of your commitment to just relations among neighbours and citizens, and mine to just relations among nation-states, coincided in our concern to stop the headlong rush to undermine the quality of life, and perhaps life itself, through the grossly unnatural warming of the planet.

#### *Cars and the great environmental crisis*

By the turn of the millennium, your ideas had penetrated the consciousness of people who read the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, and had growing influence on the British government's policy. That was a real achievement for a practitioner of policy studies. But citizens remained addicted to their cars. Walking and cycling were still unloved, save by a small minority. You had shown what the founder of policy studies, Machiavelli, called *virtù*: not just virtue – not his preferred subject of study – but outstanding merit in performance of one's task. He also insisted, however, that *virtù* alone is not enough. *Fortuna* is the other condition of success: not 'fortune' as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary, but circumstances that favour your project. There was, to be sure, growing

awareness of the problems created by the car. But only a great crisis would cure the citizens' addiction and engender the radical reform of public policy that you envisaged.

This was the paradox. Great troubles were required to jolt people out of a lifestyle that was leading to ruin and thus persuade them that the necessary changes had to be made. Misfortune had to provide the *fortuna* that would enable *virtu* to prevail. Thus it was the great wars of the first half of the 20th Century that led to the establishment of the Community, now the Union, which was a framework for post-war European peace; and the great depression of the 1930s engendered new economic thinking that made post-war prosperity possible. It is likewise the great ecological crisis of the early 21st Century that has been leading to the changes which were central to the message you began to propagate at PEP in the 1970s.

Like the tremors that precede an earthquake, the intensity of precursors to the great ecological crisis escalated around the turn of the millennium. The devastating floods in Mozambique and Orissa were reflected in milder form in the Po Valley and in England in the autumn of 2000. By 2005, the number of people displaced by single disasters in the world's South had risen to between five and ten million; and five years later, when Calcutta and much of Bangladesh were submerged for more than a year, there were over 50 million refugees. The cost of the damage of the worst incidents had risen from hundreds of millions to hundreds of billions of pounds. Small islands began to disappear under the sea. It was no longer possible to deny that global warming, induced by emissions of carbon dioxide, was the cause.

The most horrific disasters were in the world's South, so there was less urgent pressure for reform in the North, where the bulk of the carbon dioxide was emitted. But even in Europe and North America, floods and tempests proliferated. People living in great cities exposed to the sea, such as Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Lisbon and London, felt increasingly insecure. The British were losing the protection of the Gulf Stream. There was powerful pressure for radical reform.

The most environmentally conscious countries, such as Germany, Scandinavia and Holland, were the first to act. Thanks to prophets such as you, the British were not far behind. But while

their reforms were radical, they were not drastic enough. One reason was that they were unable to prevent global warming while the bulk of the emissions from countries such as the United States, Russia, Japan, and emerging industrial powers such as China and India, remained relatively unrestrained.

### *Pinder's dream*

This was where my commitment to federal reform of the relationship between states came into play. For without an international system that could require at least the major industrial powers, and preferably all states, to keep their emissions down to sustainable levels, global warming would continue with increasingly catastrophic effects. The inadequacy of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change had been demonstrated by the Kyoto Protocol of 1997: governments, most notably that of the United States, had accepted only pitifully inadequate targets which, exposed to the centrifugal forces of domestic politics, they then failed to honour or denied, in policy u-turns. I concluded that the principles which helped put a definitive end to the great crisis of the European wars should be applied.

The fundamental principle was that security in the relations between interdependent modern states could not be guaranteed without a rule of law applying not only to the states themselves but also to their citizens. Often obfuscated by a smokescreen of discontents, that was the lesson to be learnt from the establishment of the European Community and Union; and the rule of law required a democratic legislature. It required, indeed, a federal system of government, with democratic institutions at the federal level as well as within the member-states. The EU took over half a century to reach that stage, but its successes meanwhile, and in particular the permanent peace among its nations, were due to its development over the years in that direction.

Cloning of a European system would not suit the world. But four specific principles underlying the EU's development could be applied. First, there has to be a central purpose. For post-war Europe it was peace. The equivalent for a global community is ecological security.

Second, the rule of law has to be applied in fields crucial for that purpose. Europeans started with coal and steel, the industrial basis for military power at the time the Community was created. For the global community, equivalent fields are the use of fossil fuels as the main source of carbon dioxide emissions; forests that absorb them; and aid for the cost of eco-friendly technologies, without which developing countries would not participate.

Third, key institutions are necessary: a community court; a legislature comprising a house of the states and a house of the citizens; and an executive responsible for it. In short, the foundations of a democratic system of government.

Fourth, not all states are at first ready and willing for membership, and at least two key potential members have to take the initiative to begin. For the European Community, they were France and Germany; for the global community, the EU and India. The US, as the world's only superpower, was at first unwilling to share sovereignty, just as the UK had been in post-war Europe. China, as a budding superpower, was also not yet willing, nor ready to accept a democratic rule of law. It was the Irish, concerned to shift the EU's common foreign and security policy away from its focus on military security, who stirred the Union to take the first initiative and who, with sympathy born of shared experience of imperial domination by the British, helped most to interest India in the idea.

The resulting Global Community for Sustainable Development, attracting the membership of the majority of the world's democratic states, demonstrated its ability to reduce sharply some half of the global emissions of carbon dioxide and to influence the non-members to reduce theirs too. The US is now moving towards membership; a democratising China looks likely to follow, and in a few years only a small minority of states will remain outside. The world seems set to pursue the painful process of bringing global warming to a halt and then reducing it; and a by-product is the Global Community's growing capacity to provide a framework for world peace and prosperity.

### *The colder light of day*

I woke from that dream this morning, on your 90th birthday, in a Britain that has indeed been much influenced by your *virtú*. But the world has not been sufficiently influenced by mine: not only, perhaps, owing to unfavourable *fortúna*, in other words a tougher nut to crack, but also to my less incandescent *virtú*.

You expressed warm sympathy for the idea when I first consulted you about it and you put me in touch with the remarkable Aubrey Meyer and his Global Commons Institute, who introduced me to the concept of Contraction and Convergence: the steady reduction of emissions, over a period of perhaps a third of a century, at the end of which a sustainable level of global emissions would be shared among the world's states on the basis of an equal quantity per head of population. When I showed you a draft of my paper on a global community for sustainable development before its publication in 1999, however, your reaction was that the tone was not urgent enough, the cuts not deep enough, the pace proposed not fast enough: fire against the drip of water on the rock. But there has been progress. The global community is a major achievement of the EU's common external policy. The partnership with India is beneficent and strong. The US, China and other sceptical nations seem to be coming round. And your ideas have become part of the global intellectual concerns. PSI, replete with brilliant young researchers, now dwarfs the Brookings Institution in size and has a powerful influence on policy throughout the European Union and around the world.

There is light at the end of the tunnel; and you may see the world emerge from it before you celebrate your 100th birthday.

Yours, it really does begin to feel like ever

John Pinder



## From Stephen Plowden

30 October 2021

Dear Mayer

Sigmund Freud once complained that it seemed to be his fate to remind humanity of what it would rather forget. I often think of this remark in connection with your work, since you too have had to overcome every kind of defence mechanism to get people to listen to you. And you had to face another aggravation which Freud did not. Whether people agreed or disagreed with Freud, at least they did not claim authorship of his ideas. But your ideas, to the extent that they at last became accepted, were often expropriated by those who took them on board. This was partly due to academic and professional skullduggery, a feature of life that shows no signs of changing. But perhaps a more important reason was that many of your ideas were so obviously right that people did not like to admit that they had not thought of them for themselves but had, indeed, continued to follow quite other principles long after you had drawn attention to their deficiencies.

Your work has been so rich and covered so many fields, that it is difficult at first to discern the underlying themes, but they are there. You have always been interested in social justice and the fate of people left behind by 'progress'. You have been passionate about the environment and about our duty to leave to posterity a world fit to live in. You were always attracted to modest and frugal lifestyles and believed in self-reliance and individual responsibility. You were never taken in by fashionable ideas, intimidated by jargon or distracted by high-flown theory, but always retained the ability to cut through to the essentials of a complex situation and to keep hold of them. Many disappointments have not made you cynical nor dampened your invention

and persistence. Your enthusiasm and generosity still sparkle undimmed.

In spite of the strength of your arguments and your persistence in pursuing them, it is doubtful whether they would ever have had much influence in practice if outside events had not played a part. The gradual recognition of the importance of walking and cycling as modes of transport, to the point that everyone now regards them as primary, illustrates this.

What could be more obvious than that transport policy should give most attention to walking and cycling? These modes of transport are available to almost every citizen and cause very little danger to the travellers concerned or to anyone else – indeed they actually promote health and well-being. They make few demands on society's resources and give rise to no environmental intrusion or long-term ecological damage. One might think that the moment these attributes had been pointed out, politicians and other policy makers would have insisted on giving walking and cycling pride of place, but that achievement in fact took decades of work.

You had been interested in walking even before, in 1967, when at the age of 35 you decided to change your career from architecture to town planning. The ideas in your article 'Towards the Linear New Town', published in 1965, were amplified in your doctoral thesis at Edinburgh University and were then lifted, wholesale and with no acknowledgement, by the firm responsible for planning Hook New Town. For better or worse, the idea of building a new town at Hook was abandoned, so the first that most transport planners knew of your work was in 1973, when Political and Economic Planning published *Personal Mobility and Transport Policy*, which you wrote with Irwin Henderson and Anne Whalley. In that work you showed how transport planning was then based on surveys which failed to consider, and very often failed even to record, travel made on foot and other travel needs of people without access to cars, especially children. Your report was a major influence in leading people to question the methods of transport planning, especially for towns, then being promoted by the Department of Transport. Because of these and other criticisms, the Department ceased to support those studies a year or two later, and unfortunately no positive alternative was

put in their place. In the resulting policy vacuum, walking and cycling continued to be neglected in practice.

You continued to put the arguments in a number of studies with Anne Whalley and other colleagues and experienced both successes and disappointments. A major success was the improved treatment of walking in the National Travel Survey. Another was the promise made by Norman Fowler, then Secretary of State for Transport, in June 1980, at a conference inspired by your work, that central government would 'take a real interest in policy for pedestrians'. But Mr Fowler's plan to issue a discussion paper on walking was abandoned by his successors in 1983 on the grounds that there was nothing to say and the public would not be interested.

Despite this setback, interest in walking and cycling continued to grow in the 1980s and 1990s, largely as a result of the influence of your ideas. But these modes only really came into their own after 2003, the year in which central government finally relinquished its role as a roadbuilding authority. It is significant that that change was not brought about by reasoned argument alone. It had long been advocated and the arguments for it were overwhelming, but it was achieved only by political action of a drastic kind.

When Tony Blair came to power in 1997, he set up a new Department of Transport, Environment and the Regions with John Prescott as its head. Mr Prescott promised that roadbuilding would be treated as a last resort, but the government reneged on that promise in its ten-year transport plan published in June 2000. This led to the relaunch of Alarm UK, a loose federation of anti-road groups which had enjoyed considerable success in the 1990s. Alarm UK threatened extensive traffic disruptions if the proposed roadbuilding plans went ahead. Negotiations between Alarm UK and the government followed, as a result of which the government undertook to set up a commission, with members to be approved both by the government and by Alarm UK, to look into the case for roadbuilding. The commission reported that if the existing roads were properly managed – which required, among other reforms, the introduction of lower and properly enforced speed limits – there would be no case for a general increase in road capacity. There would still be a need for local roadbuilding

to serve new development, and there might also be a case for bypasses to bring relief to particular towns and villages, but those should be local decisions.

Local authorities now found themselves under intense pressure from their own citizens, supported by an alliance of national groups concerned with road safety, environmental protection, health, and the welfare of children and old people, as well as the pressure groups for walking and cycling themselves, to give priority to walking, cycling and road safety. All aspects of this campaign drew heavily on your work. The DETR, relieved of its roadbuilding function, which had so long distorted its approach to its other responsibilities, and which had also done so much to alienate the public and to lower the prestige of the Civil Service, also joined in. It pointed out that traffic calming and making provision for pedestrians and cyclists gave much better value for money than any other transport investment, and it refused to provide funds for local transport plans which did not reflect that fact.

In 2004 another major change in the structure of government also helped to advance causes which you had championed. It had become obvious by then that setting up the DETR had been a mistake. Not only was this Department much too large, but to have Environment merely a part of another Department was incompatible with the government's claim to put the environment at the heart of its activities. Transport has a major impact on the environment, but so too do industry, agriculture, energy and housing. So a separate Department of the Environment was formed, following the Dutch and Swedish models, with a very high standing in the hierarchy of Departments and powers to scrutinise and set standards for the work of all the others. One of the first achievements of this Department was the introduction of the daylight-saving reforms that you had advocated as far back as 1987. Shortly afterwards, under pressure from the new Department, all the major building societies insisted on an energy audit for all buildings which were bought with a mortgage, and the terms of the mortgage were related to the building's energy rating. Thus a reform which you had advocated 20 years before was finally implemented.

Throughout the 1990s you became more and more concerned about global warming and about the reluctance of governments,

and society generally, to face up to the scale of the changes needed to meet this challenge. The solution you proposed was based on an ingenious form of rationing. Everyone would be allotted a fuel allowance, and every time someone purchased a product or service with a significant energy component – for example when paying a domestic gas bill or buying an airline ticket – the due amount would be subtracted from the allowance. The allowances could be bought and sold, so that people who were prepared to live frugally with respect to fuel could enrich themselves by selling a fuel entitlement to those who were not.

Even those of your friends and colleagues who liked this idea in principle were doubtful about its feasibility, and such problems were not altogether resolved in the major study you published in 2001. Some gaps and weaknesses enabled people who were hostile to your scheme for reasons of commercial self-interest, and those who did not like thinking about fundamental problems, to ignore or belittle your report. You modified your proposals to deal with the criticisms and published a revised version of the study in 2003. This aroused more interest, and various institutions in western Europe, the United States, Japan and India launched research programmes of their own on the same theme. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether the ideas would have spread outside the research community and some of the environmental organisations but for various world crises.

During the first decade of the 21st Century, weather previously thought freakish became commonplace throughout the world. Floods occurred almost every year in Britain and other countries in western Europe. Some settlements had to be abandoned altogether, and in other towns the historic centres, built along river banks, were demolished and turned into parks. These developments caused widespread uneasiness, and helped to create sympathy for ideas that up until then had been dismissed as far-fetched, but they did not lead to any radical change. That happened only as a result of a political upheaval. I refer, of course, to the revolution in Saudi Arabia in the year 2009.

There is no need to recount in detail events that are etched so clearly into all our minds. Suffice it to say that it was six months before the world's energy supplies returned to normal and during this time all countries experienced disruptions and some experi-



enced severe suffering. Because the crisis occurred between the months of March and September, and the summer happened to be a warm one, the northern hemisphere escaped relatively lightly. Australia and New Zealand imposed rationing and other restrictions even more severe than those in force in World War Two. Thanks to those measures, and to the spirit of national solidarity which the crisis and the fair way it was handled engendered, although there was hardship, there were no calamities. It was a different story in South America, where many poor people in the great conurbations died of famine and disease.

For many years before this crisis, environmentalists had been pressing governments to regulate the performance of motor vehicles, pointing out that limiting top speed and acceleration would enable fuel consumption and pollution to be reduced to a fraction of their previous amounts. Some developing countries had tried to adopt such policies, but since at that time they did not manufacture vehicles, they had found it difficult to do so on their own. For political reasons, governments in developed countries had always shied away from actions that they thought might alienate motorists, although their excuses for inaction had become increasingly threadbare. Now, at last, they acted, thus producing the new generation of 'green' vehicles seen on our roads today. But the only countries that were prepared to go beyond this obvious step and to implement fuel rationing of the kind that you had advocated tirelessly for so long, were Australia and New Zealand. They were determined not to place themselves in jeopardy again, and their experience in the great crisis of 2009 had convinced them that by pioneering these measures they would reduce rather than increase their internal social tensions, as well as earning international prestige.

Next to follow was the Russian Federation. There, too, it was seen that a fair energy-rationing scheme, as well as easing the country's economic problems, might help to restore the social cohesion which the Soviet Union, with all its faults, had aspired to. Equally important, the World Bank and the European Union, hoping that the Russian experience might serve as a pilot for the rich western countries, offered a huge programme of technical assistance to the hydroelectric and solar power industries in Russia in return for the adoption of fuel rationing.

In spite of these favourable experiences, and also increasing climatic disturbances, western countries were slow to follow suit. The cyclones that wreaked havoc in Madagascar and Mauritius in 2015, and the floods that covered half of Bangladesh in the following year, provoked outraged demonstrations in western capitals and against the World Bank, but resulted in no action beyond emergency relief. However, in 2018, unprecedented storms broke the dykes in the Netherlands and flooded large parts of East Anglia, causing many deaths. In 2019, Hurricane Lulu not only devastated large swathes of Florida and the Carolinas but took the roof off the Capitol building in Washington while Congress was sitting. Only then was legislation passed to enable fuel rationing to be introduced throughout western Europe and the Americas. The schemes themselves will be introduced next year.

Will their introduction be accompanied by a recognition of you as their original author and tireless advocate? Your friends are petitioning for some suitable honour to be conferred on you. We may or may not succeed, but perhaps you will not mind too much either way. You are secure in the possession of things more valuable than any medal or honour: the love of your family, and the gratitude and affection of your friends.

Yours ever

Stephen

## From Lynn Sloman

30 October 2021

Dear Mayer

Of all the ideas that you have argued for, there are three which seem to me to have had the most profound influence. First, you demonstrated how increasing car use was denying children their freedom and independent mobility. Second, your research on speed was the start of a campaign to make our roads safe for everyone to use. And third, you have argued for many years – and it is just beginning to have an effect – that transport investment should give priority to measures which enable short trips by foot or bike. In every case, your ideas started something big.

That research on children's independent mobility provided resonant soundbites for campaigners for more than a decade. With John Adams and John Whitelegg, you found that the proportion of children allowed to travel to school on their own had plummeted between 1970 and 1990. The figures were quoted so often by the media: in 1970, eight out of ten seven- to nine-year-olds were allowed to travel to school on their own; by 1990 only one in ten could do so. Parents said the main reason they didn't allow their children to walk alone was danger from traffic. By 1990, children's 'licences' to do all sorts of things (cross the road, walk to school) were on average given two years later: what a seven-year-old was allowed to do in 1970 would not be permitted until the age of nine in 1990.

The other theme running through that research was the way children were penalised for the unsafe conditions on our roads. Then, road safety campaigns were targeted at controlling children. The established perspective was that roads were dangerous places. Children must be kept away, taught respect for

on big infrastructure projects would be better allocated to small-scale schemes to make it safe and easy to walk and cycle. You never tired of pointing out how many miles of cycle lane could be bought for one hundred metres of Jubilee Line extension, to the frustration of many public transport campaigners. Why, they said, could you not compare the cost of a cycle lane to the cost of a new road? Didn't we need better cycling facilities *and* better public transport to get motorists out of their cars? Some of us agreed with you that investment in big public transport projects was misguided where it simply cut journey times and encouraged people to commute further. We felt that the top priority should be better *local* public transport: high quality, accessible, reliable, frequent buses and trains for short journeys. But sometimes it made sense to argue for big rail infrastructure schemes as the lesser of two evils – better an upgraded west coast main rail line than an M6 widened to twelve lanes, with all the extra traffic that would generate. The roadbuilding binge of the first years of the century was not as bad as the earlier era of Twyford Down and Newbury, but it came a close second.

The case for adequate spending for small-scale projects is now starting to be heard. The cost of taming traffic and reclaiming our streets for people is large: comparable in fact to the cost of major road schemes. In 1997, one estimate put the cost of traffic calming in all appropriate residential roads at £3 billion. A few years later we calculated that safe routes to school for every child would cost £2 billion, and home zones (the same number as in the Netherlands) would cost another £1.4 billion. That level of spending was, and is, achievable – but only if local councils stop wasting their money on building new and damaging road schemes. We were shocked to find many areas where measures to tame traffic were being implemented so slowly that there was a 50-year waiting list of communities demanding action to tame traffic outside their school or on their street.

In 2021 we are just getting to the point that the Dutch and Danes were at 20 years earlier. Our cities, at last, are becoming cities for people, not cities for cars. Our country lanes are now safe and pleasant to walk or cycle. Children can play in the streets again, and old people can sit and talk. And yet, away from these havens, the traffic by road and by air continues to grow, and the

battle to stop more countryside being turned into tarmac goes on. We face the consequences of rising greenhouse gas emissions, and yet we still struggle to reduce air traffic. Day-return flights to the Canaries – why not? Home delivery of luxury flowers picked to order that morning in Colombia – amazing what you can order over the net. Meanwhile local tourist resorts are on the decline and local businesses are closing down. Twenty years ago you were thinking and campaigning on these issues too. It's not yet time to stop.

Mayer, your free thinking and dogged determination has had a huge effect. The establishment may not always have listened to you. But your ideas have shaped the agendas of thousands of dedicated grassroots campaigners and campaign groups. You have challenged and refreshed our thinking and enabled us to move in new directions, and together we have made the world a better place than it might otherwise have been. So, from all environmental transport campaigners, for your creativity and energy and spirit, thank you.

Lynn Sloman

I am sorry I didn't stop you to say 'hello', but I assumed from your demeanour and your behaviour (how did that battered and much repaired bag in your hand get onto your bike that you had more important business than chat. And I couldn't help that, as I watched you, that you were simply doing what you had always done: confronting those cocky and making holes in them. I mean, trying to get them, and I think you know who they are, to look at it all another way.

It must have been about ten years ago, I suppose, that I was at our favourite political party, when you 'did' for the Minister of Agriculture. Do you remember that chap who had brought about the delight of some new, large and sleek hydrogen-powered vehicle he'd just bought for some fabulous sum? You looked at him and said, very softly,

'I'm so sorry your last car broke down.'



## From Juliet Solomon

30 October 2021

Dear Mayer

I saw you yesterday – I could hardly believe you were still at it – pedalling along the road, past that river-like humming parade of small but still aggressively powerful electric cars. One of them had managed not to see you. Nor, I think, had he seen the people around your vintage, with the misfortune to be less fit than you, buzzing along in their electric minicarchairs. Impatiently, he pulled out to try to overtake the queue. Mayer dear, you may look frail, but it was miraculous to see the scrubbed and smug faces of the unaware and elaborate couple as you leaned over and banged your fist on the windscreen. They didn't have the grace to open the window, but it was obvious from their expressions that you had, at the very least, breached the security of their cocoon.

I am sorry I didn't stop you to say 'hello', but I assumed from your demeanour and your briefcase (how old that battered and much repaired bag is now) strapped onto your bike that you had more important business than chat. And I couldn't help thinking, as I watched you, that you were simply doing what you had always done: confronting those cocoons and making holes in them, I mean. Trying to get *them*, and I think you know who they are, to look at 'it all' another way.

It must have been about ten years ago, I suppose, that reception at our favourite political party, when you 'did' for the Minister of Agriculture. Do you remember that chap who was bragging about the delights of some new, large and sleek hydrogen-powered vehicle he'd just bought for some fabulous sum? You looked at him and said, very sadly:

'I'm so sorry your last car broke down.'

'Broke down?' he said.

'Well,' you said, 'presumably you had some reason to buy another, when the last one was quite new.'

He looked bemused. You kept staring at him. Then he realised, and what a lot of stuttering justifications he produced. He was never again going to be quite so comfortable. A bit like the woman who was talking about driving her teenage daughter to school.

'Oh,' you said innocently, but knowing quite well the strapping teenager in question, 'I'm sorry, I'd forgotten about Sue's disability problems and how much you have to do for her.'

Another cocoon was ruptured at that party. How many more must there have been? Who was the evil and reactionary Member of Parliament you disturbed with a genuine explosion when you were just a free-ranging teenager? Did anybody ever know what impact that had?

Mayer, a lot of this paid off. Especially for us footsoldiers. The retreat from cars actually owning all the roads, shopping centres, and all that, started nearly 30 years ago, with Planning Policy Guidance Note 13. I don't think anybody needs reminding that the civil servant who framed it owned up to being conscious of thinking of what you would say when it was drafted. We haven't got there, of course – what a long way it is. But there are kids back on some of the streets again, even if not enough.

A lot of us got caught up in your slipstream. You wrote and wrote about the social aspects of transport and people like me were fascinated by the connections. Had you started work 25 years later, you would have had, as I did – partly because of your previous, underfunded and underused work – government funds available to look at the issue in more depth. At least some of those people have tried to address it, although they haven't got nearly as far as they would have done if they'd taken your recommendations on board more than 40 years ago when you made them, instead of just in the last few years when so much more physical and social damage has been done.

The butterflies have yet to emerge in big enough numbers from the punctured cocoons. Will they? Who knows? It was sad

that the post-Thatcher legacy left so many of those who might have been effective radicals completely captive to the consumerism you despised, leaving it to the present generation of younger people to start really hammering again.

Your influence on others has been profound. It was very hard for others to influence you, once you'd made up your mind, even if they thought you were wrong. Where did we fail? I think it was over two issues. Women were one of them; I know you were very sympathetic to them but I'm not sure you quite understood where they were going, and why, and what their use of cars had meant symbolically. Your second blind spot concerned bicycles. It was really rewarding working for you on the BMA book about bicycles, and I notice that even now this contribution of yours is still quoted.

The trouble was that you were, and still are, so happy on your bike, and so fearless of traffic, and it has served you so well, that you could never really understand why people might not enjoy riding them, or why they might be scared. To you, and to many of us, they are a rational, health-giving, cheap and often exhilarating solution; there can be no argument about that. Lots of people, however, just don't like riding them. One day somebody will convince you. Or not. But the diehards will go on trying, and you will continue to reason with them.

Meanwhile, I cannot thank you too much for debating and disagreeing with, inspiring, helping and personally supporting me and so many other people over the years. The world needs you, on your bike, knocking on windscreens and adding a new dimension to otherwise rather ordinary journeys.

With much love

Juliet

## From John Whitelegg

30 October 2021

Dear Mayer

During the 1980s and 1990s it was very common to see grandiose 'State of the World' reports. There was even an annual publication from the Worldwatch Institute in Washington DC with this exact title. These publications were assiduous in documenting the dreadful state of tropical rainforests, fish stock depletion, loss of natural habitat to roads, airports, leisure complexes (and everything else); water resource conflicts; and of course the growth in greenhouse gas emissions and lemming-like rush to embrace everything that was modern, high-tech and scientific (GMOs, DNA sequencing, cloning). It was almost like the last scene of some dreadful Shakespearean tragedy, which had to include a frightening litany of all the defects of the main characters and their crimes, both against each other and against justice, peace and love itself.

We now know that the final curtain came down on a sad, degraded, unfair and war-torn world. I remember well how your interventions at conferences (modest, timely and accurate though they were) were greeted by polite disinterest and a ripple of discontent indicating that you had gone too far. How could anyone reasonably suggest that we shouldn't fly! How could anyone even think that a world could be structured in a quiet harmony nurtured by the rhythms of walking and cycling? How could anyone suggest that billions of pounds of expenditure on grandiose public transport schemes was anything other than logical, sensible and much needed investment in a green future? Well, you did suggest all these things and you were right.

If we now survey the world around us and reflect on progress, I have to say that your efforts and mine have not rescued the



situation. The massive selfishness and destructiveness of the USA have infected the world. We used to worry about trivial things like computer viruses and 'worms' that would destroy our hard disks or delete programs and e-mail the mayhem everywhere else. What a pity we didn't realise that the main virus was the American consumption virus, and now it's everywhere, locked into all political cultures and replicating itself more violently and virulently than anything the 20th Century produced.

You probably think this is a bit harsh. Yes, we did get a lot more people cycling in the first 20 years of this century, and we did get more walking in some places, but it all turned out to be a bit like apartheid: we now have separate development. There are walking and cycling zones of various kinds and a range of segregated routes, but the vast bulk of the space in towns, cities and rural areas is allocated to cars. Even worse, these cars are now much more territorial and aggressive than they were 20 years ago. Pedestrians and cyclists are even deliberately maimed and injured if they step out of their reserves. Car drivers know their rights and they have paid a lot of tax. Cyclists and pedestrians are the parasites and have paid no tax.

This is all very sad for anyone over 70 years of age, and there are now a lot of us around. Cars do cause less pollution and produce less noise, but there are twice as many of them around as there were 20 years ago and they are everywhere. They go very fast and crossing roads is, of course, now illegal unless at a designated crossing-place. Cyclists and pedestrians are frequently cited as responsible for their own accidents and deaths because they weren't in their own reserves or cyclists weren't wearing helmets (made compulsory in 2005). The failure to sort out the car problem in Britain has created a nasty, brutish and oppressive society. What was going on in the rest of the world was worse.

I remember working in Calcutta in the late 1990s and first few years of this century. Contrary to popular opinion in the developed world, it was a fine city. It had a wonderful, dense, facility-rich and people-rich structure and life; it was life itself. It was very poor and it was very polluted but it was still a city built for the needs of people. Its shape, size, density, greenery, vitality of its citizens, food production and everything else screamed that it was a city for people. This is now over. Thanks to the

Americans, the Japanese and the British, it is now a city for cars and lorries. It happened this way because India's politicians were able to point to the UK and the USA and say, 'This is the route to prosperity' and, 'If it's good enough for them it's good enough for us'. The people of Calcutta objected to and were ignored by the very surreal phenomenon of a Marxist government (the state of West Bengal) in league with global corporations.

Calcutta got a dozen or more flyovers paid for by the Japanese and described as 'development aid'. A fine tram system was destroyed and replaced by a totally unaffordable monorail system that gave millions of dollars to corporations and handed over valuable central land to overseas companies and ever richer local politicians. Car parks replaced tram depots and road space allocated to trams was replaced by more traffic, more pollution and more pedestrian deaths. All this produced huge increases in the emission of greenhouse gases. India, with one billion people, followed the American model. Britain did its best to help, with lots of engineering consultancy, and no one took any interest at all in the poor of Calcutta, or the rate at which productive cropland was being lost to tarmac and concrete. Calcutta is now much poorer than at any time in its history and the poor are more diseased and vulnerable than at any time in the last 200 years. The march of the global corporation, the American virus and European indifference have destroyed a great world city of more than 20 million people.

This destruction has not been confined to Calcutta. The whole of Asia and Latin America has joined the car race, and Africa is just slightly behind in terms of car numbers and ownership. We now have a global population of 2.3 billion cars, many of which spend most of their time jammed in cities and spewing out filth in the direction of the poor, who cannot afford cars. This global population of vehicles has brought devastation in its wake:

- Greenhouse gas emissions from the vehicle fleet are now at 10 billion tonnes per annum (4.4 billion in the late 1990s);
- Road traffic accidents (which are not really accidents) now kill 2.5 million people every year and injure 60 million more. Comparative figures in the late 1990s were 0.5 million deaths per annum and 9 million injuries per annum;

- Of the 60 million injured people, 5.7 million are permanently disabled in some way, leaving a disastrous legacy for the poor people of Africa, Asia and Latin America. As in the 20th Century, it is mainly poor people who suffer the plague-like impact of traffic.
- Traffic has become a crop. Faced with choices about what to do with the scarcity of land, countries like India have abandoned food production and given the land over to tarmac and concrete. Globally we now allocate 200 thousand square kilometres of land to tarmac, and this is enough land to feed 80 million people. They are not being properly fed, and poverty and disease are on the increase.

I remember in the late 1990s you used to say that our children and grandchildren would ask us what we did to prevent global catastrophe. As we now know, very few ask this question at all. They want to know what science and technology will do to solve all these problems, but the American virus precludes any intelligent thinking about changes in behaviour and alternative lifestyles.

When Henry Ford wrote his fascinating book *My Philosophy of Industry* in 1929 (almost 100 years ago), he gave the title 'Machinery, the new Messiah' to one of the chapters. He was convinced that machinery (including cars) was the future of humanity. He saw the central dynamic of life to be the growing size of human demands and the 'need for these to be met'. How right he was. We have gratified our needs to the point where it is impossible to suggest any other philosophical basis for life. Mayer, you alerted us all to the fatal flaws in endless gratification, and you did it with flair, patience and dignity. The message was not heeded and we are now reaping the whirlwind.

With thanks

John Whitelegg

## From David Wiggins

30 October 2021

Dear Mayer

'That governments don't think people care about it hardly means they should take no action at all about global warming.' These are the words I heard you say at a public meeting in the late summer of 2000. That was 21 years ago. By the subjective time-reckoning of a Nestor or Polonius as hardened as you and most of your friends are to having your advice first ignored, then forgotten and then reinvented (or cobbled back together), you could say it was only the day before the day before yesterday.

On that late summer evening, your words struck me forcibly, but not in the shape of a remark about the absurdity, prevalent at that time, of allowing debating points about prediction to obscure the brute physics of the greenhouse effect or the black prospect of limitless increase in emissions of greenhouse gases. For that was common ground and familiar. Nor yet did they especially strike me by pointing forward to the world's unreadiness for the practical, moral and political questions that are crowding in on us now, as a result of upwards of 350 million refugees being displaced by rising sea-levels. Rather, I was struck by your uttering in public the sort of doubt I had been feeling for a long time. How little space remained under democracy of the sort we had then, late modern democracy or 'common man' democracy, for ordinary practical wisdom! Now of course we have 'residual government'. Under that (under 'residual democracy', some prefer to say), HMG presides in a vestigial role over a giant system of 'public-private' agencies so designed that, in practice, given the workings of the EC and the international agencies and global trade organisations, most substantial questions (except specific

questions, loudly trumpeted, rates of taxation or state entitlement or whatever) are removed from the area of parliamentary debate, electoral contestation or public controversy.

People of your and my generation are apt to lament this outcome. We see in it a sad denial of spontaneous civic life, the subversion of meaning, the raising of an exorbitant rent by bureaucrats, corrupt or not corrupt, on all human activity, and the crass validation of the continued (albeit allegedly regulated) destruction of the plenitude and variety of the natural world. We say the system gives realisation to a strikingly poor model of practical reason (a model faithful only to the case of the monomaniac planning for a checklist of self-contained objectives). We say it institutionalises the neglect of a myriad of alternatives to a way of living that still confuses idle consumption with happiness and the capacity to summon a mass of information/misinformation with the noiseless pleasures of real understanding. Among the young and the merely middle-aged, however, another complaint is usually preferred: that the system never comes through with what is promised; that it obstructs the proper workings of commerce, yet never defends us where we really need protection; that it has impoverished us. In the variety of these complaints, though, one sees the stability of the new order of things – its quasi-permanence, pending some larger ecological disaster than any so far witnessed, pushing people back onto 'their own resources' (the outcome for which most people and localities are entirely disprepared).

At the time of your remark, before 'management' so largely displaced legitimate government, what should we have been thinking about? And which observers of the political scene, both engaged and dispassionate, should we have been studying? There must, in the past we are concerned with, have been some. But not discovering who they were, I went back to two witnesses nearer the beginning. The second witness is not so early as to be an outright opponent either of what he called 'collectivism' or of the popular will (witness his qualified endorsement of one particular form of the referendum).

'The leading statesmen in a free country have great momentary power. They settle the conversation of mankind.... The future of this country depends on the happy working of a delicate exper-

iment.' That is Walter Bagehot, quoted in AV Dicey, *Introduction to the Law of the Constitution* (Macmillan, 1885). The following is from Dicey himself, writing in the preface (1914) for the eighth edition of that book, in the shadow not only of the Great War but also of the Parliament Act of 1911: 'We now know for certain that while popular government may be, under wise leadership, a good machine for simply destroying existing evils, it may turn out to be a very poor instrument for the construction of new institutions or the realisation of new ideals.'

I wish we had talked more about such things when there was a chance. We first met in the early 1970s, I think, when we spent much time together on the Independent Commission on Transport that issued *Changing Directions* (Hodder Coronet, 1974). But even in the earlier 1960s, when you were preparing to dissect the assumptions underlying the Buchanan Report and I was one of the multitude campaigning against the London Motorway Plan, I wonder how much we should have disagreed about Dicey's gloomy prognosis. Postponing the last clause I have quoted, I think each of us would have questioned his optimism. Surely the 'existing evils' of the 20th Century were more subtle and even more tenaciously rooted than those of the 19th.

An example that would have come to mind is this. By the time of the mid-1960s, the governance and tax framework had in many places promoted a highly dispersed settlement pattern. Such patterns, by their nature, create extremely poor access between home, work/school, and everyday facilities other than access by car (resulting in traffic jams that do not even incorporate more than half of those who need the said access). They were in almost nobody's interest. Nevertheless, any political proposal to change the planning, tax and subsidy framework that created the pattern would have been denounced as a serious threat to the interests of every income class. Of course, it could have been shown from the work you were about to do and had already begun (*Architects' Journal*, April 1957; also your evidence to the House of Commons Subcommittee on Urban Transport Planning 1972: 107/11) that any such denunciation would have been a gross misrepresentation of the short-, middle- and long-term interests of the neediest and the most disadvantaged in our society, and many others besides. All the same, elections came and elections went without



that work's impinging on the election of a single MP – or even on the deliberative process itself. For 20th Century democracy, as it then was, offered research such as yours no influence commensurate with that which was incontestable in it.

The narrowly constrained information base for decision-making was one thing we should have agreed about, even in the 1960s. If in later decades we had talked further about these matters, I wonder whether even then we could have agreed on something else. Under late modern democracy, the collective will seemed constantly to confound itself. For me, three examples come immediately to mind.

First, the British people was obsessed with an image that it had of the landscape. It pictured cornfields, hedges, copses, grazing animals, etc. It insisted on its right to access to these things. But knowing almost nothing of the preconditions of any reality that could approximate to the image, it raised no effective protest when its representatives in government, under advice from the experts in the Ministry and the spokesmen of agribusiness, persisted in policies that forced off the land the only farmers or farming practices that could have saved the land from the featureless monoculture we now complain of (or from the pollution of the water table by pesticides so much discussed now). The case for the protection of environmentally benign local food production against competition from imported food that was produced in ways that abused animals or ecology, or both, was scarcely even aired.

Second, parliament decided in 1964 that something had to be done about the British Railways Board's deficit. In the article we wrote together for *Town and Country* (eds. Barnett and Scruton, Jonathan Cape, 1998), 'Railways, Settlement and Access', we showed that the chief result of HMG's acting so simple-mindedly on a report that *professedly* ignored both lost contributory revenue and the social consequences of railway closures was this: a near doubling of the deficit in real terms, and that for a railway system of scarcely two-thirds of the size, whose general level of accessibility and access-provision had been more or less halved.<sup>1</sup>

Third, the concern with education that burned so fiercely at the turn of the 20th Century was even then much more than 100 years old. By 1923–24, the impulse is discernible in reports of the Inspectors of Schools to begin to celebrate the success of the

Victorians' reformatory and public-spirited efforts (see Cmnd 2443 (1925)). In 1935, the Inspectors even declare that 'few features in the history of the last 30 years...are more striking or more inspiring than the improvement in the health, the manners, the level of intellectual attainment, the vitality and happiness of the rising generation' (Cmnd 5290 (1936) 'Education in 1935'). By 1938, 437 out of the 798 open scholarships won at Oxford or Cambridge were won by pupils from state or grant-aided secondary schools. Two-thirds of these pupils gained exemption from payment of fees because of low parental income. By the mid-1960s, a point was reached where, among school leavers admitted to study at Oxford or Cambridge, the proportion who were state-educated exceeded absolutely the number educated at fee-paying schools. But then, in the later decades of the 20th Century, that level of achievement was never repeated. Still less could it be surpassed. Why? No doubt the answer is disputable. But why ignore the simplest hypothesis? In the thinking that had led up to the 1944 Education Act (Hadow, Spens, Norwood, etc), the inherited variety of schools was respected and continuity was maintained with Victorian and Edwardian achievements ('It would be an unforgivable wrong to those who come after not to conserve what is good in the labours of the past' (Norwood: ix)). The main question became how to provide more free places at grammar schools and how to confer parity on other existing schools. These questions were soluble. By 1965, however, a new impatience and contempt for received wisdom resulted in the government's requiring all local education authorities to submit 'reorganisation plans'. The thing that was not revealed and was never afterwards discussed was that, in introducing so-called comprehensive education and initiating the process that brought all selection to an end (culminating in most of the direct-grant schools being lost to the public system in 1974), the United Kingdom was embarking on an experiment for which there was simply no precedent anywhere in Europe. The full scale of the failure of the experiment is only hidden by our public forgetfulness and unawareness. It was this failure, of course, together with problems of disorder and delinquency and the impossibility of recruiting teachers prepared to defend themselves front and back (from the violence of children, from the constant regulation, assessment and control visited upon them by official assessors,

experts and commentators, representing the collective will's dissatisfaction and distrust) that combined in 2010 with the staggering cost of the whole enterprise to create an unprecedented public crisis. That crisis (a rare thing in these new times, a 'political' crisis, though little really remained to discuss) gave us the system we now have, namely devolution of all concern for education to parents armed with education vouchers. Some now say that, by this and analogous developments in higher education, the collective will has at last regained its ascendancy. The trouble is though that, in the long long period of comprehensivisation, over-regulation and re-reorganisation, few (if any) institutions of education preserved their moral or intellectual independence, or safeguarded from corruption by false objectives and abject fear the other virtues that had once been second nature to them. There, of course, we beheld the second *trahison des clercs*.<sup>2</sup> Nowadays the *clercs* simply meet demand. But the main thrust of demand itself is largely uneducated. If or when the humane understanding of the arts and sciences is re-engaged, will this need to come from outside the schools and universities altogether?

Here were three examples of the way in which the collective will of late modern democracy constantly confounded itself, leaving the flat scene we look out upon in 2021. If you hadn't liked these examples (the third might then have seemed controversial), I could have proposed many more. But 50 years on, the thing I often ask myself is this. At the turn of the century, and before deliberative democracy was effectively abandoned, how could the almost incontestable sorts of thing that you and your collaborators were pointing out have been made to impinge more effectively on public deliberation? How could the collective will have ceased to confound itself? What could have persuaded it to countenance the measured tempo of wiser decision? What could have saved 'popular government' from the creeping self-hatred that eventually forced us all to acquiesce in 'residual government'?

Once we see that these are four different aspects of one larger question, we can appreciate, I think, what a 'delicate experiment' our deliberative democracy was and how constrained the conditions were under which it could have maintained itself. Those who read Jean-Jacques Rousseau's actual words will know that Bagehot and Dicey were not the first to think such pessimistic thoughts.

What were the conditions under which democracy could have fared better? It would be tiresome, scarcely the stuff of a letter for your birthday, to try to enumerate all of them – by deduction presumably from the great truth, so often ignored by the common man of your and my time, that since acquired characteristics are not inherited, human beings are remarkably poor in instinct, are born no wiser and no stupider than they ever were, and rely on culture, education and inherited wisdom which can be lost within two generations for almost everything that distinguishes them from other animals. But it is also unnecessary. It is enough to reduce our question to this: after 1924, say, when our prospects for deliberative democracy must have been unprecedentedly good, what needful thing or things were omitted or sacrificed or forgotten or abandoned? What was the crucial thing that should have been held onto?

The short answer I would give to the question is that at some point we quietly abandoned the sort of practical deliberation I mentioned in passing when I contrasted the thought processes of Hadow, Spens and Norwood with the start-from-zero approach of the 1960s. It was not simply bad luck that the failure of the policies their successors initiated came in the end to be seen as spectacular. Among Labour voters, Jeremiahs such as myself were prophesying this in the mid-1960s.

The short answer is too short. The first supplement would be to insist that deliberative democracy depended for its survival upon shared constitutional awareness. The people's elected representatives were one indispensable component of the structure that possessed sovereignty. That was a fact. Sadly, the fact came to be confused with the idea that the elected representatives were the only part of the structure that had any legitimacy. If it was too late for a constitutional lawyer to explain how it was impossible for the House of Commons to take on the whole role of 'Queen in Parliament' (a change in one part of the structure without compensating adjustment to others), was it always too soon for elected representatives to have the thought that, in the long run, the practical wisdom of the decisions in which they participated was a necessary condition for the survival of our democracy itself? Was it always too soon to have the further thought that, if there was to be any practical wisdom, then every measure needed

to be subjected to a far wider kind of scrutiny than could be mustered from within the ranks of those prepared to enter the life of electoral politics? Alas, it was always too soon – and then it was too late. For the business of engaging wisdom and experience and recruiting it for the Upper House, or retaining it and making full use of it there, was constantly bedevilled by a seemingly ineradicable misconception of legitimacy. Not only that. The same *hubris* coloured elected representatives' dealings with the civil service, on whose independence and openness – on whose capacity and readiness (in so far as it still existed) to study and see the practical significance of the kind of research you were doing – Members of Parliament always put far too low a value. It is depressing that they never saw this, but ministers ended up with precisely the civil servants they deserved, namely survivors, either too willing to overlook the difficulties of what elected ministers were proposing or else indoctrinated by the political opponents of those policies! Of course, it took a long time in the better ministries and departments to wear down the integrity of the administrative class. But, in time water wears away stone.

If it was to survive, deliberative democracy should have attempted less and prepared far more carefully and open-mindedly for that which it did attempt. Its impatience with constitutional questions was little short of suicidal, as was its failure to pay attention to other ways of testing and refining a proposed measure against consensus and gathering a consensus for the measure as refined. (Think how little attention was paid to the workings of the federal and other structures of Switzerland – or of Germany, imposed on her after World War Two by the allies, not least by Britain.) But what else? Well, was there not also some failure of nerve? – a failure one does not know how to date very exactly except by reference to the first decade of the century, or how to locate very precisely except by saying that it was a failure on the part of those who realised that we were squandering the extraordinary wealth we then enjoyed (and enjoyed without thinking how much of it depended on a rapaciously unsustainable rate of consumption or waste of natural resources). So few said in public and followed through in practice that which they really knew – as if the will of the demos could make its own truth and fashion its own reality, dispensing thus with all ordinary

platitudes and reminders. Of course, once uttered aloud, the idea of a will making its own truth is so absurd (or, some might once have said, so blasphemous) that it barely survives exposure to the air. But the idea was not named aloud; nor, in the event, was it suggested that the endless sequence of governmental failures was to be explained by the indifference of ministers and civil servants to the unwelcome truth that, unless considerable trouble is taken in some sphere of practical activity to have regard for what was done or attempted in the past, new actors will have almost no idea of what they are doing in the present or what risks they are storing up for the future. The same goes for other platitudes. It cannot really have been necessary to wait for the educational crash of 2010, the intermittent paralysis of the railways in the period 1999–2005, or the later paroxysms of the National Health Service to recover the truism that the best person to run a school is a teacher, to run a railway a railwayman, to run a hospital a matron or doctor. I still ask myself whether – if these truisms had been recovered earlier and the public interest had delegated its rights of inspection and control to the professionals themselves, directing them to proceed in a way of their own that was innocent of all managerial dogma – these enterprises could have stayed within the reach of public policy and the idea of public service (the only known counter to corruption).

Dear Mayer, I have wandered off into too many might-have-beens. I must not forget the thing I most wanted to say, which was about your work and that which appealed to me most in that part of your work which I know. At the very beginning, you must have noticed that social and economic researchers can collect indefinitely many objective facts about something important without collecting anything of any importance. Instead, you set out to direct your own inquiries from an explicit concern with the human hopes and concerns that are the least contestable of all, not the idle desires but the needs, not just any needs but the vital needs, of an ordinary person living a worthy, active life in a workaday setting. What mattered was not any ephemeral political programme or perniciously contestable conception (or misconception) of one or two human ideals, but the invariants of the human condition and the full range of vital needs. On this approach, which places a proper value on work and non-depend-



ence, one sees effortlessly that Margaret Thatcher's, Gordon Brown's and Gordon Brown's successors' tinkering with the pension provisions of Beveridge represented a gross and rhetorical abuse of the notion of need, pauperising hundreds of thousands of people now reduced needlessly to the status of vassals of the re-reorganised Benefits Agency. One sees instantly within your framework that the thing that matters is not how exact a set of statistics you can arrive at but *what exactly the statistics* however roughly or readily *measure*; that it is madness to collect accident statistics, for instance, in a way that measures the safety or dangerousness of a mode of transportation by its direct dangerousness to its users rather than by its direct and indirect dangerousness to everyone. One sees equally effortlessly that inherently controversial notions of equality (or weasel notions like 'social exclusion') are not required to describe ordinary injustice, ordinary wrongful deprivation or ordinary immiseration. One can see effortlessly (and here I revert to the matter that we first discussed those 50 years ago) that the vital human need is not mobility *as such* but access to things vitally needed (entailing only such mobility as is required by access within a settlement pattern not distorted by mindless public folly). I now realise what a constant consolation your work was to me in my own philosophical engagement with the notion of need,<sup>3</sup> a notion not much in favour among my colleagues. Not only did it show a way forward with a variety of specific questions. It illustrated something else that I cared about (for theoretical reasons this is not the place to enter into), namely the possibility of finding a starting point that is at once value-committal and incontestable (in the best sense objective). No wonder the powers that were found your work so marvellously intractable.

David Wiggins

P.S. (I have never written you a letter without a postscript and this cannot be the time to change the habits of a lifetime.) What did I mean at the beginning in lamenting the demise of public political deliberation concerning substantial questions of ends? Was this an expression of nostalgia for the days of the struggle of ideas with the simple names 'equality', 'exclusion', 'class', 'customer choice', 'commercial freedom', 'enterprise', ... ?

Answer. No. Even if my letter is shot through with nostalgia, this is not nostalgia for a further and better earful of all that. The thing I was lamenting was the shrinking of the space that remains for a manner of argument that engages with substantial ends, not by the setting of targets, but by the publicly considered emphasis it places, in this or that particular place, on certain particular ends at the expense of other ends – not without regard for all other ends. I still think this should be the work not of managers charged to promote particular programmes, but of statesmen free to conduct their business neither as a bare residue from the allocation of functions to executive agencies (see my paragraph 2) nor as a matter of fashion in slogan making, but in the manner of a mature politics. Mature politics has its being in the struggle *within the business of government itself* between competing conceptions of the answer to the question 'How are we (the non-factional we) to conceive, sustain and extend that which has been achieved so far?' or 'How collectively are we (the non-factional we) to mediate between the interests of this group and that group?' The mode of political deliberation that I miss (miss the disappearance of the possibility of) is that which plays itself out in the distinctive emphases brought to bear upon the whole range of values (human values, green values, other values) and plays itself out in the creative dissension of distinctive political sensibilities, informing distinct and distinctive manners of active response to vital need. Such sensibilities do not find expression in the rhetoric of manifesto, bullet points, 'performance criteria', 'delivery'. Nor can they be refined or tested in the absence of parliaments comprising men and women with professional knowledge of things other than politics itself, men and women capable of holding ministers responsible for all the acts done within the province of their departments. This was never an easy thing to achieve, but once upon a time it was an ideal. I still hope that, within your and my lifetime, this ideal may, despite the unpromising framework, become visible again – even if only as an ideal.

Even more striking was one of his other companions, a man by the most careful analysis while he was still a senior member of staff at PSI for the reform of the calendar. This has been a long-fought campaign, which numbers amongst some of its foremost figures Julius Caesar and Pope Gregory the Great, with Mayes the most notable of its champions in the century just past. He was

## Notes

- 1 Recently I discovered that E.R. Hondelink, once the Senior Consultant to the World Bank and the United Nations on transport, had expressly warned the Ministry of Transport that this would be the consequence. '[Such a] combination [as you propose] of modernization and retrenchment can only have one effect: a few spectacular services and elsewhere a perpetual burden on taxation.' (See p 69, *Switches and Crossings*, by E.R. Hondelink (ed. R. Calvert), Truro, 1981.) A future historian of these matters who combines Hondelink's analysis with that furnished by you and Anne Whalley in *The Social Consequences of Rail Closures* (Policy Studies Institute, 1980) will have the materials for a signally severe indictment of the policies of Labour and Conservative administrations alike.
- 2 For the first *trahison*, see Julien Benda, *La Trahison des Clercs* (1925). For the all-embracing *trahison* (not of *clerics* especially), subsuming that which I call the second, see *La Trahison de l'Opulence* by Jean-Pierre Dupuy and Jean Robert (Presses Universitaires, 1976), where you will find at pp 52-3 (for instance) a convergence with your own work.
- 3 Even venturing once, under your influence, into the transport field. See 'Public Rationality, Needs, and what Needs are Relative to', in Hall, P. and Bannister, D. (eds.) *Transport and Transport Policy*, Mansell, 1981. See also *Needs, Values, Truth*, Oxford, 1987, 1991, 1998 third edition, where pp 11-16 and 319-328 explore the interactions of invariance, contestability and context.

## Michael Young on Mayer Hillman

I was sympathetic to Mayer, when I first met him, because he was a distinguished member of staff of the Policy Studies Institute. PSI, where my almost lifelong colleague, Peter Willmott, also worked for a time alongside Mayer, was an organisational descendant of PEP (Political and Economic Planning), where I had served my apprenticeship as a researcher a good deal earlier on.

Mayer's work on transport was outstanding. He was one of the period's greatest advocates of the virtues of bicycling, not just for the sake of the health of society. Apart from walking, which is not exactly pleasant in a car-stifled city, bicycling is the only pollution-free mode of transport and far and away the cheapest. But to make London a city fit for cyclists Britain needs to copy Holland and parts of Germany, where the needs of cyclists are respected: to be segregated from the monster trucks and cars driven by youngsters drunk on the sense of power that their antiquated internal combustion engine gives them. Drunk under the influence of machine power could be a new offence. Cyclists may carry little bottles strapped to the frame with which to refuel themselves, but the liquid does not make them drunk.

I read some of Mayer's outpourings on this subject. They certainly made their mark. But that long-drawn-out campaign, starting with Bernard Shaw in his knickerbockers and continuing through the valiant work of Mayer and others, still awaits completion in our own benighted country.

Even more striking was one of his other campaigns, driven by the most careful analysis while he was still a senior member of staff at PSI, for the reform of the calendar. This has been a long-fought campaign, which numbers amongst some of its foremost figures Julius Caesar and Pope Gregory the Great, with Mayer the most notable of its champions in the century just past. He was

tireless, and to me a completely convincing advocate of Britain joining Europe in this respect and aligning our clock-times with those of the Continent. If that happened, people would not have to juggle their watches back and forth when they step out of the Eurostar in Paris or off the ferry at Calais. What he proposed with such brilliance would also have given the people of this island, not exactly blessed with the most benign climate in the world, more daylight as well as removing the ridiculous time barriers which separate Britain from the other countries of the European Union. In one hopeful period he very nearly convinced government ministers that for them to follow Pope Gregory, and Mayer, would serve their interests and secure for them the gratitude of a nation – this nation and others. We may or may not enter a common currency zone, but the case for a common time-zone is much stronger, especially since it was put with the force and passion of Mayer. If it had not been for the dug-down-deep opposition of farmers in Scotland he would have won.

It was because of this interest of his that I wanted Mayer to be a founding member of a society I set up called ASSET (Association for the Social Studies of Time), which was administered from my office. I was convinced when I did it, and I still am, that time had not, and has not, been given the central place it should have in the study of society, especially modern society. Our miniature society met annually in the summer at Dartington Hall, one of the two places on earth where I feel most at home – the other being Bethnal Green – and there was a ritual about it. Mayer was the only member of the group who was trying to change the way in which time is organised. I nearly always prefer the person who is trying to do something about it to the person who is merely talking about it. Most of us were talkers; Mayer was the doer. I therefore always asked him to open the proceedings at Dartington by giving us a rundown on the progress he had made with his campaign in the previous year. Amongst other things it gave us talkers the feeling that we were, or might be, in touch with the practical politics of time.

This is not to imply that Mayer was uninterested in the many other themes that came up for debate. I think he recognised as much as any member of the group that 'hurry sickness' was *the* (or at any rate *a*) serious disease of modern society. People are

constantly trying to do more in each span of 24 hours than is possible, and spread themselves more thinly than ever. They feel harassed because they can't keep up with grandma, take the children on enough outings, buy the bread they like to eat, read the journals and books that interest them if they are lucky, book their next flight, talk to cousin Alfie, visit their doctor, and can't speed along in their cars as though there is not a tiger in the tank but a devil. There is no time to ride a bicycle along a quiet path and look at the trees or the gathering clouds above them. Mayer has been a far-sighted man all his life.

ASSET meets no longer. But it played a part in the start of a journal, *Time and Society*, edited by Barbara Adam. It carries on the tradition of which Mayer was such a worthy and formidable upholder.

February 2001

For fuller information on Pollock's publications, including newspaper and journal articles and conference papers, see his many papers. What follows is a list of Mayer's books, reports and articles and papers that have been published in book form. A full list is available from the Policy Studies Institute Library on 020 7665 0400.

'Towards the Liberal New Town' in *Studies in Local Government* (Edinburgh: E. Hillman (ed.), The Martin Press, 1955).

*Personal Mobility and Transport Policy* (with Irwin Henderson and Anne Whalley), Political and Economic Planning, 1973.

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*The Social Consequences of Rail Closures* (with Anne Whalley), Policy Studies Institute, 1985.



## Books and reports

Mayer Hillman

*Policy Studies Institute: Head of Environment and Quality of Life Research Programme 1970–1991; and Senior Fellow Emeritus 1992–*

A full list of Mayer Hillman's publications, including newspaper and journal articles and conference papers, runs to many pages. What follows is a list of Mayer's books, reports and articles and papers that have been published in book form. A full list is available from the Policy Studies Institute Library on 020 7468 0468.

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- 'Closing rural railways' (with David Wiggins), in *Town and Country*, Anthony Barnett and Roger Scruton (eds.), Jonathan Cape, 1999.

## Notes on contributors

**John Adams** is Professor of Geography at University College, London. He is the author of numerous books and articles on transport planning and risk management. His recent report for the OECD Project on Environmentally Sustainable Transport, *The Social Implications of Hypermobility*, considers some of the problems that would remain after the invention of the pollution-free perpetual-motion engine.

**Nicholas Albery** was Chairman of the Institute for Social Inventions and helped to run some of the many projects that the Institute developed, such as the Natural Death Centre, ApprenticeMaster Alliance, the Global Ideas Bank, the Poetry Challenge, the Saturday Walkers Club and [www.dobe.org](http://www.dobe.org), the online participatory events magazine for every city in the world. Nicholas was killed in a car crash on 3 June 2001.

**Anne Ashe** worked extensively with Mayer Hillman at PEP/PSI in the 1970s and 1980s, researching (as Anne Whalley) social and environmental aspects of transport and planning policy. She subsequently worked in research management at the Department for Education and Employment, and on research into ageing at Sheffield University. Anne is currently a member of the Peak District National Park Authority.

**Ian Christie** is an associate director of the Local Futures Group and previously was deputy/acting director of the think-tank, Demos. He has been an associate director at the Henley Centre for Forecasting, and Senior Fellow at the Policy Studies Institute. He has written extensively on sustainable development issues, and is the co-author of *Managing Sustainable Development* (Earthscan, 2000), and *From Here to Sustainability* (Earthscan, 2001).



**Adrian Davis** is a transport consultant specialising in the health aspects of road transport. He is currently researching policy commitments on health-promoting transport in Health Improvement Programmes; and the implementation of Travel Plans in the NHS, and in schools. He is an adviser to Sustrans on Safe Routes to Schools.

**Paul Ekins** is Head of the Environment Group at the Policy Studies Institute, and Professor of Sustainable Development in the School of Politics, International Relations and the Environment at Keele University. He is also a founder and Associate Director of the sustainable development charity, Forum for the Future, Senior Consultant to Cambridge Econometrics and a specialist adviser to the Environmental Audit Committee of the House of Commons. His book *Wealth Beyond Measure* (Gaia Books), written with Mayer Hillman and Robert Hutchison, was published in 1992.

**John Grimshaw** manages Sustrans 'as a rather hands-on and practical Chief Executive'. The main ambition of Sustrans is to realise projects on the ground – including the National Cycle Network, and Safe Routes to Schools – which will encourage the public to walk and cycle. Sustrans has an active sculpture programme to win public participation and is building up a team of 1000 volunteer route rangers.

**Harold Hillman** is the Director of the Unity Laboratory of Applied Neurobiology, and was formerly the Reader in Physiology at the University of Surrey. He is the author of several books and publications, some of which are unpopular with his colleagues.

**Heidi Hillman** used to work as a sub-editor and assistant editor on architectural journals. She then taught young children in schools to read, and ended the 20th Century as a mature student with an Open University degree in Humanities with Art History.

**Josh Hillman** is currently Head of Education Policy at the BBC. He has previously worked for a number of think-tanks including the

Institute for Public Policy Research and the National Commission on Education. He is also a keen traveller and musician.

**Saul Hillman** has a background in child development and psychology. Currently he is based both at the Anna Freud Centre, where he is researching how 'hard to place' and maltreated children adapt with their families, and at Education Extra, the national charity which promotes after-school activities.

**Robert Hutchison** was Senior Fellow and Head of Arts Research at the Policy Studies Institute from 1988 to 1993. He is now Chief Executive of the Southern Arts Board.

**Aubrey Meyer** was a professional musician before founding the Global Commons Institute in 1990. He spent the next decade contributing to the policy working-group of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and campaigning at the United Nations negotiations on climate change to win acceptance of the global ethic of 'equity and survival' and the policy framework known as 'Contraction and Convergence'.

**John Pinder** was Director of Political and Economic Planning (PEP) and then the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) from 1964 to 1985. He was Visiting Professor at the College of Europe in Bruges until 1999, is chairman of the Federal Trust, and has written much on the European Union and federalism. His most recent book is *The European Union: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

**Stephen Plowden** has done considerable research on the impact of transport on the environment and on daily life. His first book, *Towns Against Traffic*, was published in 1972. His most recent, *Speed Control and Transport Policy*, written jointly with Mayer Hillman, was published by PSI in 1996. He is a technical adviser to the Slower Speeds Initiative and believes that there is a huge scope for reducing all the impacts of transport by vehicle design, in particular by reducing the top speed and acceleration of vehicles.

**Lynn Sloman** is Assistant Director of Transport 2000, a national campaigning organisation concerned with sustainable transport.

Lynn's main work is on the transport and environmental impacts of road-building, road safety and speed, designing streets for people, and non-motorised transport. She is also a Special Adviser to the Board of Transport for London and a trustee of the Environmental Transport Association.

**Juliet Solomon** is known for campaigning, writing and academic work on environmental and social topics. Recently she has been coordinating a major DETR research project on transport and social exclusion. Her book, *Green Parenting*, was published by Macdonald Optima in 1990.

**John Whitelegg** is Professor of Environmental Studies at Liverpool John Moores University and Director of Eco-Logica Ltd, a transport consultancy based in Lancaster. He has written eight books and over 50 papers on transport and environment topics including (with John Adams and Mayer Hillman) *One False Move... a study of children's independent mobility* (PSI, 1991) and *Greening the Built Environment* (Earthscan, 1998). John is the editor of the journal *World Transport Policy and Practice*.

**David Wiggins** was the Wykeham Professor of Logic in the University of Oxford from 1993–2000. His chief publications are *Sameness and Substance* and *Needs, Values, Truth*. He was Chairman (1977–79) of the Transport Users' Consultative Committee (TUCC) for the South East and at the same time a member of the central TUCC. In 1972–73, he was a member of the Independent Commission on Transport chaired by Bishop Hugh Montefiore.

**Michael Young** has pioneered over 50 social innovations including the Consumers' Association in 1957; the Open University, which grew from the National Extension College; the Social Science Research Council (now the Economic and Social Research Council); Education Extra, which was established to provide opportunities for children outside the school system; and Tower Hamlets Summer University, set up to provide summer activities for thousands of children. He is the co-author of *Family and Kinship in East London* and the author of *The Rise of the Meritocracy*. Michael Young (Lord Young of Dartington) has been a member of the House of Lords since 1978.

She has been involved in the transport and environmental impacts of the motor car, road safety and speed, designing streets for walking, cycling and transport. She is also a Special Adviser to the Mayor of Transport for London and a trustee of the Transport and Environment Association.

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