

SEVEN TRENDS FOR PLANNING POST-OIL CITIES



Though we like to go about our ways as though nothing is going to change, the depletion of oil is inevitable. As supply decreases, so the extent of our dependency will become more evident. In order to survive, the City of Cape Town must take decisive action and begin preparing itself for what, unless properly planned, could be a massive disaster. Seven trends were outlined by Allen Rhodes in his excellent Masters Thesis, *Planning the Post Oil City* which neatly defines some of the obstacles and opportunities for Cape Town to prepare itself for a post oil world.

1. Rhodes identifies our unsustainable energy procurement and heavy reliance on fossil fuels as his first trend, drawing attention to our heavy reliance on coal and oil. These must be addressed if sustainability is to be seriously considered. It is fortunate, at least in a practical sense, that South Africa's large supplies of coal will be available to smooth the transition to a post oil city. However, this should not be considered a sustainable alternative for oil.

2. The second trend identified is our city's heavy reliance on oil dependent transport, without which our economy and society could not function. This must be addressed if we do not wish to see a collapse. Transport needs must be reduced or eliminated and alternative sustainable means created, such as trains or trams powered on clean energy.

3. This trend addresses the mono-functionality and sprawl of Cape Town. These are the direct results of the cheap fuel which facilitated easy movement in the past. This extensive sprawl is land intensive; the development is consumptive and the result – unsustainable. Particularly for the urban poor who find themselves isolated without economic opportunity and a costly transport fare away from employment.

4. The Fourth trend identifies our heavy dependence on a globalised system of trade, leaving us vulnerable to shifts in economic conditions.

Consider the impact unaffordable flights would have on our tourist industry in an oil scarce environment. Unable to transport goods long distance, our local production systems will need to be improved. In light of this Rhodes proposes that local-government should promote means of self-sufficiency, reducing our reliance on external global resources.

5. The Fifth trend Rhodes identifies is the lack of localised food producers and the industry's current reliance on oil for mechanised labour, transport and processing. Unless these systems are improved we may find ourselves without food on the table. The production of labour intensive, organically grown foods on the periphery as well as in small open spaces within the city may offer the solution to this problem, whilst strengthening the local economy.

6. The Sixth trend deals with the consumptive lifestyles so many aspire to, and the disconnection from natural resources it results in. This wasteful mindset, which also includes the *One house, One Plot suburban dream*, is ultimately unsustainable. Promoting sustainable living at a domestic scale could result in a greater degree of conservancy as well as a higher quality of life.

7. Finally, the Seventh trend is the Mono-functional infra-structural development which is both wasteful and expensive.

Rhodes' response to this is a call for us to seek holistic and creative solutions which aim to promote sustainability and conservation of energy and resources. He proposes this could potentially be achieved through the implementation of multi-functional and integrated infrastructure systems. Should we actively start to address these trends we may avert a crisis. If we approach them as design opportunities we stand to benefit further.

Picture a cleaner, quieter self sufficient city where opportunity is not dependent on your location, and everything is walkable. Where an approach to the post oil city has resulted in a local booming economy specializing in sustainable practices. Imagine this and it's not difficult to see the value of the opportunities the post oil challenge poses.

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