



Throw Forward Thursday: The end of rush hour traffic

It's 2022 and one of the dumbest things that are still happening is rush hour traffic. Good grief, I thought covid might have cured us of that. Why does everybody have to get to the office at precisely the same time? And I mean, everybody in your city is heading to the office at exactly the same time and then we do the reverse every afternoon.

It's crazy. This is Throw Forward Thursday. My name is Graham Codrington and every week we jump into the future and see what's going on there. Sometimes it really irritates me because I see something different in the future and I wonder why we don't have it yet. Yes, in the future I see the end of traffic.

There are a number of reasons why that might happen. The first might be we actually take flexible working hours a little bit more seriously. If we don't have to go to the office, well, then why do we have to work office hours? Covid should have caused us to have this conversation. Too many people are just waiting to get back to normal and rushing to get back to the office.

We should have learned the lesson of Covid, that there can be and should be much more flexibility, so that even if you do have to get in the car and go to the office, we should be able to stagger the times at which we do that so that we don't all end up in the traffic at the same time. And by the way, I think schools should do that too. I don't see any reason why one school can't start slightly earlier and another school starts slightly later, and that all the schools in a particular suburb might have an actual conversation about this. Oh, there we go. That's not the dumbest idea you'll hear this week, but sadly, it's not the sort of idea that some people are open to, so we can bring flexibility into the system.

The second thing I see in the future is driverless cars, but not just individual cars here or there for the rich people who can afford them or those people who enjoy them, but driverless cars being compulsory. If every car on the road is driverless, then every car can speak to every other car, and the people who have modelled this in traffic reckon that we can get a 70% improvement in traffic flow and of course, we can also increase speed limits because now all the cars are speaking to each other, every car knows what every other car is trying to do and cars can move faster, safer.

It's a 98% improvement in safety and 70% faster, and so even if we are all on the road at the same time, we're not going to have traffic as we used to. Of course, we should also factor in some sustainability thinking here and say that we need to build cities and infrastructure that is not reliant on individual transportation modules and that we need better public transport. Who was it who said that the sign of an advanced civilization is not that all of the poor people have cars, but that all of the rich people use public transport? There's a vision of the future that is a little bit outside of my imagination, living here in Johannesburg, South Africa, where that feels a very long way away, but there are lots of parts of the world where I think that public transport approach, which might include flying buses and taxis, might help us to see the end of rush hour traffic.

So, there are a number of reasons why I think that the future will not include rush hour traffic and that Hollywood movies of future cities should not be future cities filled with vehicles and pollution. That's a dystopian future but rather filled with people going easily and casually on their way because nobody is rushing at the same time as everybody else.

A little bit of paradise predicted for the future? Well, I'm not sure it's a prediction, but it would certainly be a possibility and a hope. Throw forward Thursday. Every week we jump into the future and see what's going on there, sometimes with hopeful glasses.

Join me next week as we continue our end of series and have a look at what's happening in the future. I'll see you then. Bye.

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