

Artists lead the way in dodging commuter drain

By **KARL QUINN**

THE most enlightened workers in Melbourne are the artists of Lilydale, according to research to be presented at the Knowledge Cities World Summit this week. Why? Because 35 per cent of them work from home.

Dispensing with the daily commute is, according to economic geographer Kevin Johnson, the way of the future.

"We spend enormous amounts of time, energy and resources commuting from where we live to where we work," said Dr Johnson. "That commuting time is simply a drain."

Dr Johnson has analysed data from the 2006 census, the most recent information available, to ascertain correlations between various industries and commuting. Tradespeople and retail workers, he found, tend to commute furthest, while workers in the knowledge economy tend to commute least, and artists are more likely than any other workers to favour at-home employment (23.3 per cent work from home).

The main focus of Dr Johnson's paper, to be presented on Thursday, is an analysis of Melbourne's knowledge economy — where the jobs are and where the workers live.

Few will be surprised, perhaps, to find St Kilda is the most popular place for IT/media workers to live, but the fact that the highest concentration of jobs in their industries is in Richmond is indicative of a failure to create jobs where people with particular skill sets cluster, Dr Johnson said.

"We need to make a much greater effort to examine these patterns and understand them so we can develop the best policies to encourage people to live and work in their own neighbourhood," he said.

"We need to understand better the choices that households and firms have made in order to influence those decisions."

It makes good planning sense, said Dr Johnson, who has in the past advocated offering rent or mortgage subsidies to attract knowledge workers to live near where the jobs are. But it's also about personal benefit, he insisted.

"Once people have had a taste of being able to walk to work, most of them think it's pretty good," he said. "I have an expectation that more of us will do it in the future."

The Knowledge Cities World Summit is at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, November 16-19. www.melbourneknowledgesummit.com