

A Contribution from the Malaysian Institute of Planners (MIP) Sabah-Sarawak Chapter in conjunction with the upcoming International Urban Public Transport Conference 2010 – A Platform for Change (4-6 August 2010) at the Borneo Convention Centre.

Urban Transport: The Use of Spaces - The Physical Impact

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One of the most significant impacts of transport on the environment is the amount of urban space which is taken up by traffic and for provision of car parking. A large volume of traffic in cities does not just lower the quality of environment by its congestion; it effectively eats up the city's public open space, and causes irreversible impact on the environment in terms of land use and land intrusion. From an urban perspective, the use of urban space by motor vehicles, either stationary or moving is the most visible form of pollution.

In cities worldwide, the pattern of urban spaces being *taken over* by traffic is similar. First, parked cars occupy streets that were once playgrounds and meeting places. As transport by car becomes an integral part of city planning, the street corners and shapes and surfaces of public spaces are all determined for the benefit of motorists. Eventually, the entire city, from its shaping and spacing of new buildings to the design of its kerbs, lamp-posts and railing, is designed according to this criterion.. In addition, road signs and marking, parking meters and other street furniture which are required to direct and control traffic further complicate the organization of space. Large roads have a devastating effect on cityscape as well as severance, and their construction usually involves destruction of buildings and loss of open space, giving rise to 'road landscape'; moreover petrol stations and multi-storey car parks are very rarely attractive buildings or structures in the cityscape.

In the United Ste, we know that large shopping malls have huge car parks; however these were planned for the biggest shopping period i.e. in the run up to Christmas and 90% of them remain unused throughout the year. Ironically, the motor vehicles that are meant to be a transport mode remain virtually unused and are parked from 20 to 22 hours a day. It sets us wondering why people would want to drive to work when for at least nine hours every working day, when the vehicle would not be utilized This is considered the most wasteful characteristic of motor vehicles and road transport of all forms.

Thus in most cities, it is common to see a sea of cars crammed at shopping malls and main streets. The aesthetic beauty of cities is simply changed by massive volume of traffic. Beside the cutting of hills for road construction and for gravel, environmental damages are also known to have destroyed and damaged wetlands which have ecological value .

This is surely one impact that we could do without. In a highly charged car dependence society, we need to change our travel behaviour to order to protect our and sustain our environment. The past thirty years have seen untold damages directed to our environment through the massive construction urban road and flyovers; it is time to plan for people instead of cars.

It is futile to speak of a National Key Result Area when we cannot address the basic issue: Are we planning for people or Car? Are our cities designed for people?

The Malaysian Institute of Planners (Sarawak and Sabah Chapter) is organising an International Public Transport Conference with the theme "A Platform for Change" at the Borneo Convention Centre, Kuching on 4-6 August 2010. A total of 10 speakers will be sharing their knowledge and experiences on this subject.

The focus is on the practical strategies, collaboration of the stakeholders and exchange of workable ideas that will assist the conference participants in carrying out the works - ranged from the planning of the urban transport strategies to the implementation of the urban transport projects. The Institute invites you to join us for this international gathering of experts, practitioners and campaigners dedicated to promote sustainable urban public transport.

Please see the official website at www.kuchingptc.com for details.

The writer is a members of the Malaysian Institute of Planners. Opinions expressed are his own and information quoted are from various sources and literatures used by the writer in his academic research.