

Commuting by Bicycle

From the "bicycle capital" of Copenhagen to Kuala Lumpur



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Everybody bicycles in Copenhagen



Member of parliament
Magrethe Vestager



Future Queen, princess Mary
Blue jacket. Photographed from car in front

My own story: First 2 years in Kuala Lumpur



My own story: First 2 years in Kuala Lumpur



There is **NO WAY** that I am going to bicycle here!

- 1) Traffic is crazy!
- 2) Hot & Humid climate!
- 3) No bicycle paths!

But then I bought a bicycle....



My 1st bicycle in Malaysia:
Proton mountain bike
(Proton T-Bolt)

.... and found that bicycle commuting **IS POSSIBLE** insofar you choose your roads carefully. My rules are:

- 1) Don't go on roads with fast traffic (max. 50 km/h traffic)
- 2) Don't go on narrow roads, where cars cannot easily pass you
- 3) Be as visible as possible, bright clothing and use bicycle lights, even in the daytime

But what about the Hot & Humid climate?

My bicycle commute is 9 km and has elevation of 145 meters

<https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/features/2013/09/21/cyclings-cash-benefits/>



The RM50 shower retrofit

All Malaysian toilets have a bidet hose, buy a dual valve + a showering hose. Not ideal, but it works.

NB. After 4 years, the building management installed a real shower

Link to article:

<https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/features/2013/09/21/cyclings-cash-benefits/>

What about safety?

I often hear people say “You will not live long”

On the contrary,
by exercising I am
adding years to my life!

FACTS:

Malaysia – the fattest nation in Asia

1. Physically inactive lifestyles (less than 150 minutes of exercise per week)

More than half of Malaysian are physically inactive, whereas the global average is only 20%


2. High car ownership

80% of KL inhabitants use car for daily commute, hence, reducing walking



STARA, MONDAY 7 DECEMBER 2015

ecowatch 5



Traffic snarl: Hours wasted in traffic congestion cost the country billions annually. — AZHAR MAHFOF/The Star

Costly congestions

A World Bank study shows that traffic jams cost us billions.

By MICKEY JENSEN and GREGG REIMANN

THE morning and afternoon commute, the hours spent driving those dreaded kilometres to and from work - have you ever wondered how much sitting in a traffic jam really cost you and Malaysia?

Here's the answer: A World Bank study showed that in 2014, economic losses due to traffic congestion in the Klang Valley was RM2.0bil - that's RM454mil a day. The majority of this cost is associated with lost productivity, followed by wasted fuel and environmental damage caused by tailpipe exhaust fumes.

The report *Malaysia Economic Monitor - Transforming Urban Transport* calculated that the value of the total time lost when people are stuck in traffic jams in Kuala Lumpur, doing nothing productive, ranges from RM1.0bil to RM2.0bil annually. Notably, this also amounts to one million wasted hours per day.

As for fuel, RM1.1bil to RM2.0bil are wasted because of traffic congestion. This extra petrol burnt means greater environmental and social damage. According to an International Monetary Fund study, the environmental cost to society (primarily due to air pollution) from using one litre of petrol is RM2.20. This adds another RM1.1bil to RM2.5bil to the annual cost of congestion in Kuala Lumpur.

There are also indirect hidden costs, such as a decline in public health induced by inactive lifestyles and stress from traffic congestion. A city built around the car means less space for pedestrians and cyclists. A World Health Organisation report states that Malaysia has one of the most physically inactive populations in the world, with more than half of the population classified as being "inactive" compared with the global average of 20%. Being "inactive" is classified as having less than 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week, such as a brisk walk.

Britain's Department of Health has termed inactivity as the "silent killer" or "the new smoking" as a lack of physical exercise can lead to health conditions such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease and various forms of cancer.

With its inactive lifestyle, it is no wonder that the Malaysian population has the highest overweight rate in Asia - 66% of the population is in this category and about 14% is classified as obese. This is significantly higher than number two on the list, Singapore, where 38% of the population is overweight and 11% obese.

Long, congested morning and afternoon commutes are also associated with higher stress levels. A report by market analysis consultants, Frost & Sullivan, discovered that over 40% of Malaysians found road congestion as their number one frustration. On the whole, commuting seems to lead to a general decrease in happiness and individual well-being.

Causes of congestion

The key causes of congestion are the lack of public transportation options, coupled with increased car ownership. Over 70% of Malaysia's population now live in urban centres, compared to 40% in 1985. As income increases, the desire and ability to own a car grows.

Increased car ownership does not necessarily lead to road congestion on its own; it only becomes a problem if everyone uses their car on a daily basis. For example, you can use your car on weekends, but commute daily using public transport. The lack of competitive public transport options, long connecting and waiting times, and the problem of getting to and from key public transportation lines (the first and last mile problem), means it can take people up to three times longer to commute with public transport than by car, according to the World Bank study. This has led to 80% of Kuala Lumpur inhabitants using their private car for their daily commute. However, where public transport options are available, such as in Hong Kong and Singapore, private car use for commuting is only 10% and 40%, respectively.

Given the limited alternate transport choices in Malaysia, there is almost no way around owning a motorised vehicle. As a proportion of an average household's income, Malaysians spend 50% more on transport compared to households in cities with effective public transportation, such as Hong Kong or Tokyo, according to the World Bank.

Even with new roads and expressways, congestion is still a growing problem here. One obvious solution is to build more public transportation networks, for example new MRT lines.

The second step, according to the World Bank, is to implement taxation policies that can influence behaviour. Such policies can include taxes on petrol, congestion charges and increased toll fares at peak hours. This may seem unpopular but the taxes collected can be used to fund public transportation projects. If a viable alternative to private transport existed, opting to move away from the car could save each household money on transportation costs.

Livable cities

Using bicycles to mitigate the "first and last mile" problem is worth pursuing. Battery-assisted bicycles can alleviate perspiration problems in the hot and humid tropics. Imagine if you can cycle to the MRT station from your home,

take your bike with you onto the MRT, and cycle a few kilometres from the station to your work place. Such a model is already practised in European cities such as Copenhagen.

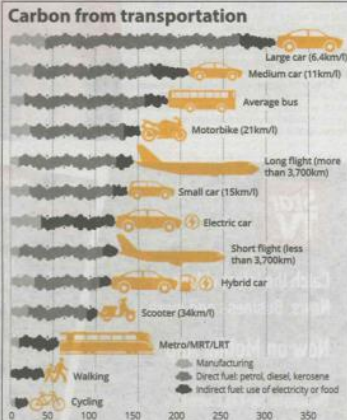
This mode of transport not only reduces the cost to your wallet, but has health benefits as it keeps you physically active as well as reduces your environmental footprint. Building an infrastructure for such a mode of mobility may include more bicycle lanes and green areas. By moving in this direction, the city will become more "livable" as more green spaces often lead to greater social interaction.

Some European cities have gone as far as banning cars in their city centres. This is the case for Oslo, which plans to re-focus the city centre around people by 2019. Madrid plans to achieve a car-free centre by 2020. The benefits of livable cities are many: greater mental and physical well-being, reduced environmental impact, and reduced financial cost.

Our car-centric society has many unwanted consequences. The emergence of more and more cars on Malaysian roads has outstripped our ability to expand road capacities. Traffic congestion has hidden costs amounting to billions of ringgit. It is time for city planners to reclaim city roads as that attractive social space with human interaction that they used to be, and to perceive cars and their associated air and noise pollution as not part of the solution but as part of the problem.

The writers are from IEN Consultants Sdn Bhd, a green building consultancy. Read the report at www.worldbank.org/en/country/malaysia/publication/malaysia-economic-monitor-june-2015.

Carbon from transportation



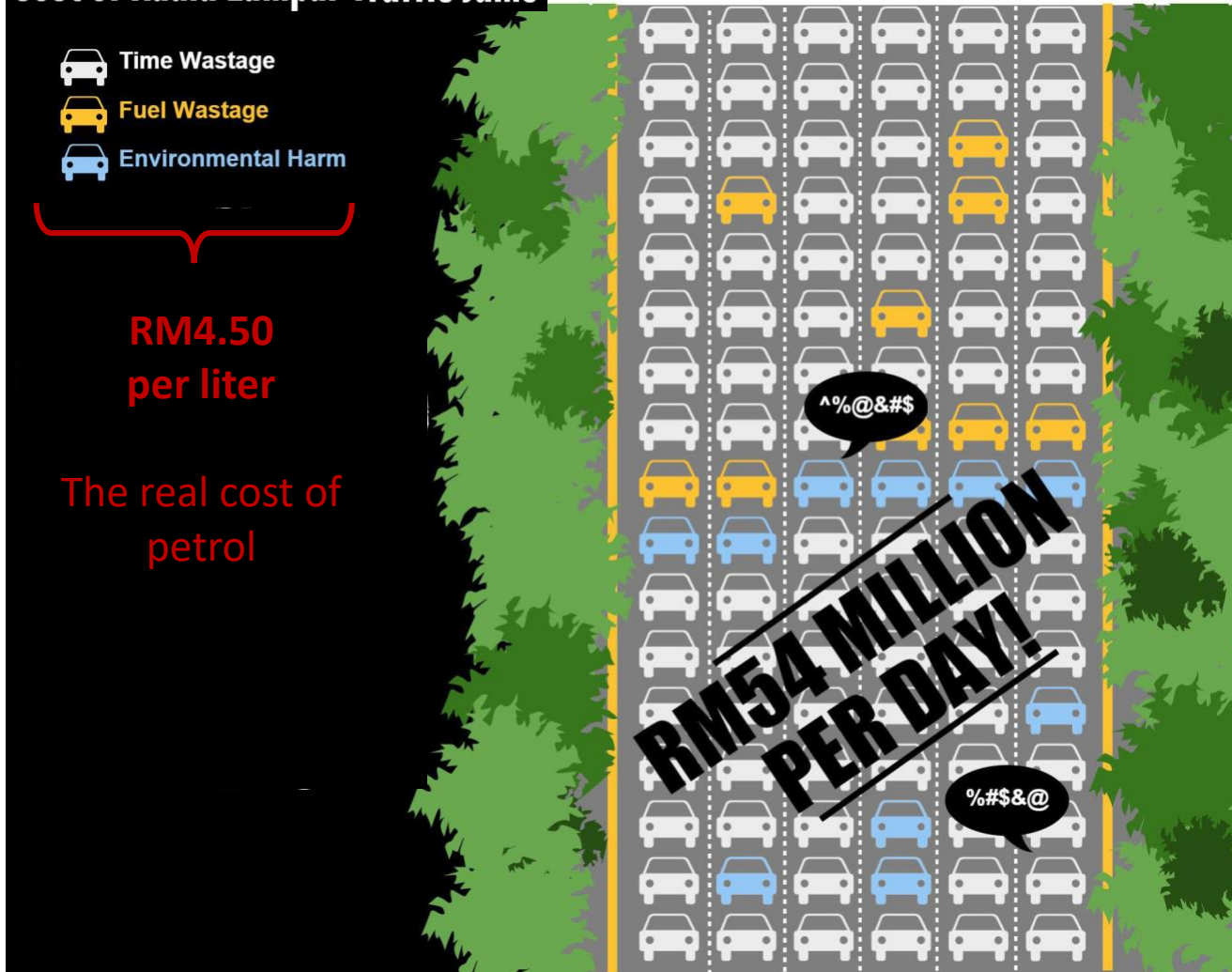
CO₂ emissions per km travelled per person (g)

Sources: University of California, Berkeley / IEN Consultants

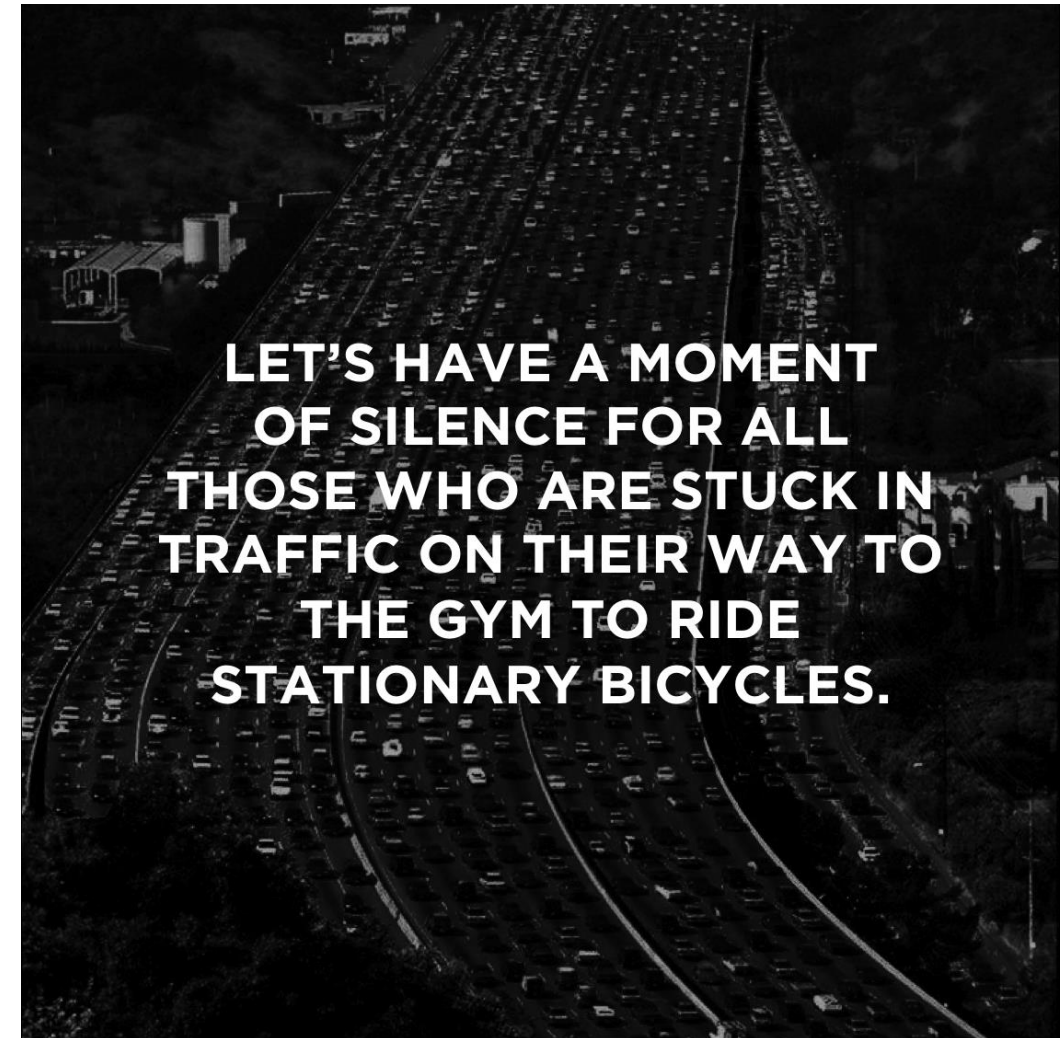
1 million hours wasted per day

in the traffic congestions of greater Kuala Lumpur

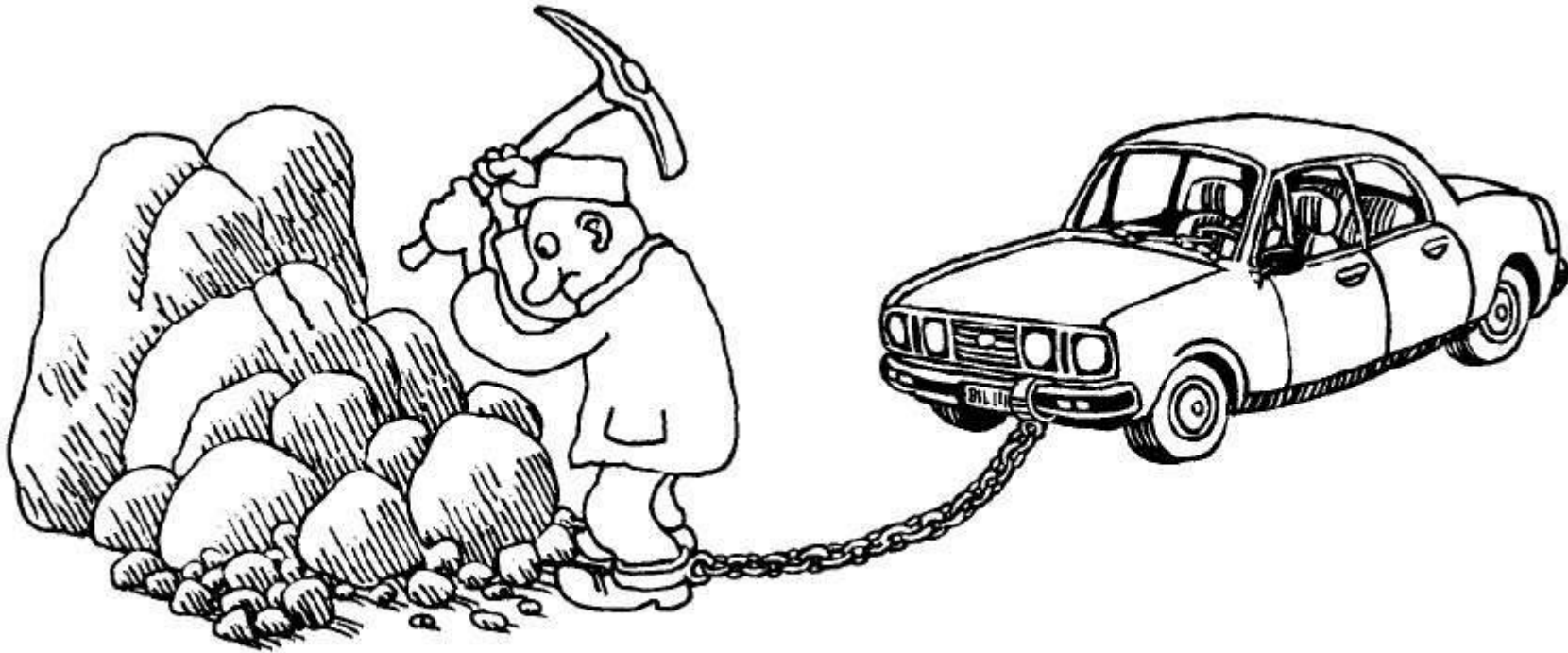
Cost of Kuala Lumpur Traffic Jams



Infographic by IEN Consultants Sdn Bdn based on World Bank Study (2015)



“Freedom” of the Car



The average Danish car owner works more than one week per month in order to achieve the freedom a car provides.

Danish cartoon (1984) still relevant today

For example, 80% of bicyclists in Manila quote cost savings for choice of transport

Video uploads of my bicycle commutes in KL



Brompton bicycle in Kuala Lumpur - very useful and fast

74,355 views 412 18 SHARE SAVE ...

<https://youtu.be/qgS0SW67kdE>



Yike Bike through Kuala Lumpur - fast, convenient, fun!

20,172 views 225 5 SHARE SAVE ...

<https://youtu.be/7tzvEC73ovo>

Video uploads of my bicycle commutes in KL



Cargo Bike in traffic filmed from Brompton

1,143 views

43 0 SHARE SAVE ...

https://youtu.be/tFt_p89Tbjk



Brompton bicycle commute 3-4 times faster than by car!

15,002 views

209 5 SHARE SAVE ...

<https://youtu.be/GfCr71eT9TY>

Concluding remarks

Improving pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure would have these benefits:

1. Make cities more livable
2. Give people an alternative to the car
3. Reduce energy consumption
4. Reduce noise pollution
5. Improve public health

“Make bicycle commuting convenient and safe, and people will use it”



Giving a cargobike ride to the mayor of Subang Jaya (Yang Di Pertua Noraini Roslan) at MUF2019

Photo credit: Annette Gartland