



Convenience at a Cost

By Bill Poorman

Even though Singapore has a wide variety of public transport, having a car remains a real convenience. Sometimes, it's a time saver, useful for quick trips to the store or cutting out some of the downtime of public transit. Other times, it's just easier to drive when you have to pick up people or packages. And, honestly, if you're in a lazy mood and don't feel like walking, sitting in your own personal space (complete with air con) is pretty attractive, especially during the rainy and haze seasons. But in Singapore, all of those perks are going to cost you big time and that's on purpose.

As part of a national environmental plan called Sustainable Singapore Blueprint 2015, Singapore wants to preserve its limited land area by keeping the number of cars and the kilometers of roadway as low as possible. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong affirmed this commitment to

creating a "car-lite" city during the launch of the blueprint in November of 2014. "We have to rely less on cars on the roads because we cannot keep on building roads, more roads for more cars. So we will provide more options for Singaporeans that are better than cars."

Those options include expansions of the commuter rail and bus networks, promoting bicycling and car-sharing services and even trying to create new business districts that are closer to where people live.

But along with those carrots, come the sticks. A variety of policies are designed to squash the attractiveness of owning a car in Singapore, mostly by making it really expensive.

Probably the most well-known disincentive is the Certificate of Entitlement (COE) system. You cannot own or drive a car in Singapore unless you have a COE. You're free to

buy one, but the government limits the number of certificates, then prices them through an open bidding process. They don't come cheap and the cost of the car comes on top of that.

Singapore uses other disincentives, too, like road taxes, duties on petrol and the Electronic Road Pricing (ERP) system. The ERP system tries to discourage driving into congested areas during peak times by charging for the right to enter that part of town. Starting in 2020, ERP will even launch into space. Singapore's Land Transport Authority recently announced that companies had been picked to create a satellite-based system that would cover the entire island. If you drive, they will find you, and they will charge you accordingly.

All of these efforts will add up to making the cost of other transport options (in terms of both money and time) way more attractive in comparison to owning a car. And while you might have a car now, just know that Singapore is committed to eventually getting you to put it in the car park for good.

Photo by William Notowidigdo

Bill Poorman is a part-time writer and a car-owner (but only thanks to a supportive expat package).



For more about COEs in Singapore, be sure to pick up the 14th edition of *Living in Singapore*, due out next month.



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