Traffic: a hindrance to philippine development

Parts of the World, Asia

The Philippines has the sixth worst traffic index in the world (Traffic Index by Country 2018 Mid-Year, no date). It’s average road commute lasts 45 minutes during peak hours (Philippines: Manila voted worst city to drive on Earth – BBC News, no date). Larger issues such as widespread corruption, unorganized infrastructure, and overpopulation contribute to this. Apart from that, policies regarding road congestion are clearly making a negligible impact. This paper argues that implementing stronger vehicle policies in the Philippines or other traffic-riddled countries will benefit its overall development.

Development and traffic are two factors that are occasionally linked together. People usually see traffic as a lingering nuisance. However, it is a matter that has far more implications. Taking on an economic context, restricted travel capacity that results from road congestion appears to be associated with decreasing regional employment rates and slower productivity growth per worker (Sweet, 2014). Harmful pollutants and toxic emissions such as nitrogen oxides are heightened during these types of congestions. As people spend more time in roads, their exposure to pollutants sharply increases and may pose a number of health hazards (Levy, Buonocore and von Stackelberg, 2010). In the light of inequality, the effects of traffic on the poor and lower income groups have seldom been touched on. Despite this, recent reports show that in certain developing countries, the difficulties and unpleasantness of traveling in peak times are increased. For instance, “ people in Karachi, Pakistan have to travel hanging onto the doorways or sitting on the rooftops of buses. More than 60 types of problem were recorded and particular concerns included having to travel

either standing up or hanging partly out of the bus; suffocation and accompanying nausea; losing one’s balance and even falling over while standing in the fast-moving vehicles” (Starkey and Hine, 2014). Moreover, private transport such as motorcycles and cars are not as affected as compared to public transport using the same road space (Starkey and Hine, 2014). That being said, traffic has considerable effects on economic development, public health, and inequality. Thus, mitigating traffic will be of value in maximizing a country’s overall development.

Current policies that target traffic in the Philippines seem to be ineffective in making an impact. Taxation schemes do not really affect the vehicle buy rate of richer people because the rates are not enough to discourage the people to stop buying vehicles. Recent reports have shown that vehicle buy rates have not declined despite the implementation of a renewed tax policy. Private cars carry a mere 30% of the total people in a metropolis and make up almost 72% of total traffic in the country. Due to this, the government has implemented a current plate coding policy where only certain plate numbers would be able to use the road on certain days. However, people have resulted to buying multiple cars to be able to use a private vehicle every day. Adding to that, traffic laws are not being enforced properly due to police corruption and bribery (IRBC, 2008).

An effective way of alleviating road congestion without dealing with all of the aforementioned factors would be reducing cars on the road. Policies that would be strong enough to disincentivize people in buying and using more

cars and encourage them to use public transport instead. The country’s southeast-asian neighbor, Singapore, is a prime example of this.

Within the past decades, Singapore has been able to reduce traffic congestion drastically through three major methods: restraining the growth of car ownership, traffic management, priority to public transport, and fuel pricing (Ang, 1990). Despite having one of the smallest land areas and a growing population, its traffic index still remains low (158. 26) as compared to the Philippines (202. 20).

The Philippines may be able to benefit from taking from these traffic policies —specifically, Area Licensing Scheme and General Price Restraints. Singapore’s Area Licensing Scheme produced a whopping 45 percent drop in road congestion when it was initially implemented during June 1975. It was a system of charging toll fees that were dependent on the type of vehicle, entry time, and the congestion zone. These prices were thoroughly tested and computed to divert traffic to different paths and to limit the use of private vehicles in the road (Rex S. Toh and Phang, 2018). It is effective because it is a very dynamic system where the scheme could zone in on private vehicles without affecting delivery and public vehicles. Some similar policies are the London Congestion Charge, Edinburgh Congestion Charge, etc. On the other hand, General Price Restraints are a form of aggressive taxation for the use and ownership of private vehicles. The cost of owning a car is so high that people end up using public transportation instead. To illustrate, a $22, 000 Honda Civic can have a total price of $149000 in

Singapore. These policies have been effective because they were aggressive enough to disincentivize the citizens from using private vehicles.

Implementing these would provide a viable answer to road congestion. Besides the obvious benefits on economic development, it could possibly help the issue of having too many buses in the country because people will be encouraged to use these buses more as compared to using private vehicles. The decrease in vehicles could also help address some environmental problems such as air pollution and fuel usage. More so, the increased taxes could be used by the government to spend on better public systems and other development projects. Through this, people no longer have to spend 45 minutes in horrendous transport conditions.

However, these possibilities are limited by the government’s ability to manage and implement such a policy. Meticulously testing and computing for the right prices, places, and systems is crucial. Foreign investment by car companies, logistic companies, and other external factors need to be monitored extensively. The government would need to weigh the cost and benefits properly to ensure a positive impact on development.

In conclusion, if implemented correctly, using a similar form of Singapore’s Area Licensing Scheme and General Price Restraints would help relieve traffic in the Philippines and indirectly benefit its overall development.