



POLICY BRIEF

No. 2020-19 (June 4, 2020)

Developing the National Bicycle Policy

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As the economy gradually opens up amid the pandemic, Filipinos keenly anticipate whether many of the Old Normal conditions will still hold true or whether new developments will prevail in the New Normal. One of the challenges that would probably still be present would be the traffic situation. It is therefore an opportune time for the government to assess what it needs to continue doing, what it needs to stop doing and what it needs to start doing in addressing the issue of traffic.

Traffic hurts health through its impact on emissions that dampen the quality of the environment.

Emissions Inventory per Region (in percentage)

as of 2018

Region	Stationary Sources	Mobile Sources	Area Sources
Region 1	11%	79%	9%
Region 2	0.03%	95.29%	4.68%
Region 3	20%	75%	5%
Region 4A	7%	87%	6%
Region 4B	9.48%	90.42%	0.10%
Region 5	3%	76%	21%
Region 6	12%	61%	27%
Region 7	29%	67%	4%
Region 8	1%	90%	9%
Region 9	0.2%	99.2%	0.6%
Region 10	43%	44%	13%
Region 11	4%	35%	61%
Region 12	2%	62%	36%
Region 13	4%	91%	5%
NCR	18.42%	81.15%	0.43%
CAR	0.05%	54.77%	45.18%
Total Philippines	16%	73%	11%

Source: Environmental Management Bureau

Mobile sources contribute the bulk of emissions both in the total country perspective and in the majority of the regions. The Environmental Management Bureau further adds that the major pollutants coming out of the mobile sources are Volatile Organic Compounds and Carbon Monoxide. The New Normal ushers in a heightened sense of awareness in health. A healthy Philippines is where emissions can be addressed. Healthy citizens help build a wealthy economy.

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Traffic also has a huge economic cost.

The long hours spent by people in traffic lead to a lot of lost productive labor hours and high opportunity costs. The Metro Manila Development Authority estimated that the traffic in Metro Manila cost the economy PHP 3.5 billion daily in 2018. The Japan International Cooperation Agency adds that the daily number can escalate to PHP 5.4 billion by 2035 if changes would not be implemented. A productive Philippines is where good traffic solutions help people save time.

Addressing the problem of traffic may imply having a wide array of plans and programs. However, one possible solution could be the passage of urgent legislation related to the development of a National Bicycle Policy. In terms of health, bicycles do not have harmful emissions unlike motorized vehicles. In terms of cost, regular bicycles are significantly cheaper than motorized vehicles. In terms of space in the road, bicycles occupy a lot less space than motorized vehicles.

The National Bicycle Policy will hopefully provide the framework for bicycle policies and support programs to be coordinated well across the national and local governments. The Philippines can benchmark with how other progressive countries have been able to successfully draft and implement bicycle plans and programs. Government must liaise closely with various private sector stakeholders who have keen interest in biking so that the programs will be inclusive and realistic.

There must be a specific and accountable portion of the national budget and local government funds that must be allocated to the National Bicycle Policy. One major initiative that can be done is to increase the number of dedicated bicycle lanes and links in applicable major and minor roads. The budget can initially focus on the top regions where the mobile sources contribute the most to emissions. These are Region 9, Region 2, Region 13, Region 4B, Region 8, Region 4A and NCR.

To complement the bicycle road network, investments in necessary infrastructure projects should be earmarked toward structures and equipment that protect the collective safety of bikers, motorists and pedestrians. Parking facilities for bicycles must be provided in establishments. Fines can be imposed for road violators and the proceeds from fines can be utilized by the national and local governments to fund environment preservation, health care and other development programs.

To further promote the use of bicycles, special loan facilities and special subsidy programs can be made available at the different local government units so that a good number of people can be influenced to adopt the healthier mode of transport. From a human capital view, the increased use of bicycles can improve wellness of people and may even spur more entrepreneurial activities.

Success of the National Bicycle Policy will entail sustained investment in terms of continuous educational awareness. Schools can incorporate in curricula the benefits of biking to the youth. Local governments can initiate seminars that tackle responsible biking and the importance of the environment and health. The national government can promote advocacy campaigns in popular communication platforms that will encourage people to explore bicycles as transport alternatives.

Clearly, for the Philippines to thrive economically, government and the citizenry should work well together in ensuring that both health and wealth improve in a sustainable manner. Promoting the active use of bicycles can help protect the environment, improve health and boost the economy.