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Spokes in the City

By Ian Malczewski

Getting around the city is something all of us have to do in our daily lives. Whether we're commuting to work, shopping for food, or simply going to meet friends, we all have to travel some distance every day.

This is an easy task for those who own a car; one simply has to get behind the driver's seat, navigate traffic, and arrive at a destination. Of course, these trips are now getting more and more expensive as the price of gas rises. To make matters more complicated, emissions from private cars are often cited as one of the driving forces behind climate change.

For those without cars, the main mode of transportation is the jeepney. In terms of convenience, these trips are second to taking a car, since one often has to take multiple routes or combine rides with walking in order to reach his or her destination. Just as with private cars, the costs associated with riding the jeep are rising, too - in the last year, the fare to ride the jeep has risen one peso, an increase of 14%. And, of course, jeeps also emit the same emissions that cars do, meaning they also have a negative effect on the environment.

If, as many urban planners and environmentalists predict, these trends continue into the future, the costs of traveling are going to continue to rise, making our daily lives more and more expensive. What alternatives exist? An answer already lies right under our noses.

Bicycling has traditionally been a recreational activity reserved for children or people on nature-treks; until recently, few considered it a viable means of moving about the city. This is for good reason, too: in places the road is barely good enough to drive a car on, let alone a bicycle. Bicycling is also a much more active means of transportation than driving, meaning cyclists often arrive at their destination hot and sweaty, which is not a good combination for heading to the office.

Still, bicycling offers many benefits to those looking to escape the rising prices of car ownership or public transportation reliance. The cost of the bicycle and its associated safety gear is considerably less than owning a car, and, over time, can even be cheaper than riding the jeep every day. Better yet, the bicycle offers a kind of



freedom that jeeps and even cars cannot. There is no need to hunt for a parking space or to walk between different jeepney routes; one only has to go from A to B and lock up to the nearest solid structure. Bicycling also offers a form of exercise, which is an added health benefit over less active modes of transportation such as driving or public transportation.

Metro-Iloilo should be a region that encourages bicycling. How might it begin to do this? First, the roads need to feel safe for cyclists. This means a quality of paving that makes riding on them a smooth and comfortable ride. Cyclists should also not have to fear being struck by drivers of cars or jeeps, and one way of doing this would be to dedicate a portion of the road to cycling. Cities around the world have created the necessary infrastructure to accommodate cycling, and Metro Iloilo should be no different.

The city should also encourage the development of infrastructure that supports a cycling culture. Adding racks to which bicycles might be locked is an important first step in this process so that cyclists do not have to worry about their bicycles while they go about their business. Such racks should cluster around popular gathering places like plazas and markets, taking up a much smaller space than car-oriented parking lots.

Metro-Iloilo is not as far away from being able to encourage this kind of lifestyle as one might think. The presence of tricycles and trisikads shows that smaller modes of transportation are already in place and supported here, they merely need to be prioritized through the support of infrastructure and legal enforcement. With a little will and investment, Metro-Iloilo could be rolling into a more sustainable urban future.

Photo by Reuters