The Fattest Nation in Asia
and how the Built Environment can help

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Contents

1) Malaysia, the fattest nation in Asia
2) Fat, but why?
3) Health implication
4) The ‘nudging’ principle
5) How the built environment can help (examples)
Malaysia, the fattest nation in Asia

Overweight prevalence (%)

Source: WHO Non-Communicable Diseases Country Profiles, 2011
Our love of fat and carb-heavy dishes, coupled with a preference for a sedentary lifestyle, has earned Malaysia the nickname ‘The Fattest Country in South-East Asia’.
Malaysia, the fattest nation in Asia

International press coverage (February 2016)

Health

Obesity statistics ring alarm bells in Malaysia
Officials blame high-calorie diet and sedentary urban lifestyle as half the population is deemed overweight or obese.
Stephanie Scawen | 03 Feb 2016 17:51 GMT | Health, Asia Pacific, Malaysia
Obesity statistics ring alarm bells because....

The Malaysian Health Ministry of Health says there is an **epidemic** of non-communicable diseases (NCD), including diabetes.

(medical condition or disease that is non-infectious or non-transmissible)
Why is 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

Malaysian’s don’t even like to drive
40% of Malaysians say that stress from traffic congestion is their primary frustration (Source: Frost & Sullivan)

By IEN Consultants, The Star, Dec 2016

Some answers in this article (link)
Slow Traffic, Faster Death

Cartoon by IEN Consultants, 2016
Why is Malaysia the fattest nation in Asia?

• Hot & Humid climate is not conducive for walking / cycling

• But even in air-conditioned environments, people decline to walk

“Travelators are the only form of transportation that actually slow people down”

Getty Images
Using the Nudge Principle

Guiding people to a more controlled state such as eating healthier, stop smoking, exercising as saving more money

Example:
Urinal in mens toilet, but how to improve their aim?
The Nudge Principle examples in the Built Environment

Prominent staircase and hidden lift

GEO Building, Greentech Malaysia, Bangi

Fun ‘piano’ staircase versus normal escalator

Odenplan subway station in Stockholm. 66% increase in stairs usage
The Nudge Principle examples in the Built Environment

1. Make it easy and/or cheaper to run or bicycle to work
   - Implement shower/changing/locker facilities
   - Implement bicycle parking
   - Give incentives

2. Give staff opportunity to work
   - at standing position (adjustable table)
   - standing/walking meetings
   - flexible working hours and/or from home

3. Give healthy food choices at work
   - pantry
   - staff cantine

4 folding bicycles (2 of which are electric) made available to staff of IEN Consultants
1 million hours waste per day
in the traffic congestions of greater Kuala Lumpur

My proposed solution:

BICYCLE & MAKAN
(Bicycle and eat)

The city of Kuala Lumpur

1. Builds proper bicycling infrastructure linking suburbs to the city

2. Builds a few centrally located Bicycle Centers, where a free and healthy breakfast is given to all bicycle commuters

3. While eating, the cyclist cool down and are ready to shower and change at a Bicycle Center near their work place

Both congestion and health are improved
Concluding remarks

• Obesity is epidemic in Malaysia

• Obesity is unhealthy and costly to society

• The build environment can nudge people to healthier lifestyles

• Urban planning and incentives are also part of the solution

• It’s a collaborative effort to reverse the obesity epidemic!
Thank you

ANY QUESTIONS?

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