

Interview with Pasig by Beatrice Ch'ng (BC) 15 July 2020

Robert Anthony Siy
Department of Transport
Pasig City

Introduction

Perhaps we could start by introduce yourself and what you do at Pasig City?

What I do in Pasig City now is that I am in the Pasig Transport Office. It is the Transport Planning office that may be similar to other cities that deals with walking, cycling, ST and PT, except that in the Philippines (PHL), offices that are mandated to provide these services aren't exactly common. In a way our office is quite ordinary and extraordinary in the sense that government in the Philippines does not know how to do this at the local level. In the PHL, transport planning is normally done at the national level. In our city, we decided to take more initiative and under our office. Local government do a lot of traffic enforcement but there is not really proactive transport service planning and that is what our office does. They ordinary function in cities, covering walking, cycling, public transportation. We try to do all these and basically things that help people use cars less. This includes improving on bicycle infrastructure, walking infrastructure, optimizing PT routes by engaging local operators and informal operators, ranging from buses, minibuses, and motorcycle taxis.

That is a wide range of people you engage with.

Yes and it's interesting because when we involve into transportation, we also get into sustainability discussions in addition to transportation like issues related to landuse discussion. We are also the transport and landuse technical officer in the city.

What are the main mobility challenges in Pasig?

The main mobility challenge is the fact that we have **institutional challenges**. The Philippines is currently transitioning to involving LG more in mobility planning although the transition is not quite complete yet. There is still a lot of work being done by the central government. There are still immediate engagements with the city and which needs some time to match up what the central government is doing and the city's priorities. There are ongoing reforms in the PHL and they are trying to address some of these issues but institutionally, I think that mismatch is still a bit of a challenge.

Another thing could be also institutional level, in terms of the manifestation in the transport system. We have a lot of the same challenges as other cities. We have fleet of PT vehicles e.g., jeepneys minibuses that are old highly polluting and inefficient. There is a need to modernize them and change the business models and at the same time preserving the livelihood, incomes and the wellbeing of the people involved in that industry. That is a big challenge now to modernize the PT system. It's not just about converting from older vehicles to newer vehicles. Like I mentioned, many places have motorcycle taxis that people use to get around. There are often overloaded and there are no higher capacity vehicles. So it is not just about older to new vehicles but also smaller to higher capacity vehicles. That is going to take some expertise and industry consolidation and maybe building a new business model and creating new organizational models for people in that industry.

In addition to that, the PHL is also trying to catch up trying to build good active transport infrastructure. There is a bit going on in the public transport but we still need to do a lot more when it comes to active transport. Pasig is 1 of the 7 metro manila regions. Pasig is interdependent on the rest of the Metro Manila mega-region and it is not the place to bikers and cyclists. We have seen during the COVID19 pandemic, many people shifting to cycling but there is not enough infrastructure yet to ensure that the trips are safe. Many people are out cycling but there is no good infrastructure so it's a real challenge to accommodate, ensuring that everyone has a safe cycling experience. That is also a

major challenge; including making sure that there is sufficient PT supply, given that there are guidelines now on physical distancing. You cannot really go into the train to the buses like you were able to before COVID19.

These means increased PT cost and lower service level for many people. Therefore, our challenge for SM is going to be very difficult to make sure that people continue to make SM choices instead of going back to private motorized vehicles.

When you are deep into the expertise and keep up to the current science, we know that the SM makes sense but it is a political challenge to change their mind – many people still don't believe in walking and cycling. It is always a challenge to communicate that.

What do you expect from SOLUTIONSplus project?

One of the big things that we are looking forward to in SOL+ is the assistance and the adoption of EVs, especially EVs that can be powered by renewable and EVs that can also support not just cars but two- to three wheelers for not just private but also for business use. The key we see when it comes to vehicle electrification here is that electric 2- and 3-wheelers in Metro Manila are becoming more and more common in terms of private ownership. Maybe in terms of incentivizing that, there is not much we need to do but there is still a relatively low uptake when it comes to using that for business purposes.

When you start to change the business fleets then you can start to make big sustainable mobility shift. What we were hoping for Sol+ is to gradually introduce some changes that can help other kind of businesses and business related vehicles, esp. lighter EVs like 2- and 3-wheelers. We are expecting Sol+ to help us things like charging solutions, common charging area, pay charging area, and ways for EVs to be used by business fleets throughout the day.

Is there any electric buses being used now in Pasig?

There aren't any electric buses that are running in the PHL but only hybrid buses but no e-buses or even electric cars yet. The most common type of vehicles here are really electric 2-wheelers and 3-wheelers, including the small ones like mopeds which are the most common types. There are also the standing e-scooters to get around. However, they are almost entirely private owned, we do not see them using it for businesses or public transport yet.

At the city level at Pasig or even within Metro Manila, are there already policies in place to promote EVs?

EVs are more national government driven although Pasig is in the process of drafting the Sustainable Transport policies but there is nothing in place yet but looking forward into investing EVs as part of our budgetary policy going forward. One thing that we are doing is that we have guidelines for procuring lots of additional bicycle parking and I think that relates to EVs in the sense that we will start having explicit guidelines to allow e-bicycles and e-scooters to part in them and also to create protected parking areas for EVs – to protect them from the weather and also providing charging depots as well.

For EVs, especially for the types of EVs that are readily adopted here, they are actually the same size as bicycles so it's good that there are complementary policies so when we do things for bicycles, we also do things that are good for EVs. We also have guidelines where if you are riding e-bikes, or mopeds, you can use our cycling lanes if you ride within the appropriate speed limit.

What mobility changes would you like to see in your city within the next 5 years?

What we definitely like a lot is the share of SM, like people using bicycles, non-fossil-fuel 2- and 3 wheelers, like the EVs. We have seen many using now especially related to COVID but we hope to see a larger shift in that. Before this the % of bicycle users in the PHL is between 5 – 10% but I am hoping that within 5 years we can increase to 20 – 30%. That can make a big impact and certainly doable. By my own estimation as a result of COVID, we have already seen maybe 5% of the bikers are now women before COVID. After COVID, the percentage of women cyclists is now 20 – 30%. You can see a

really noticeable change on the street! I ride my bike to work everyday so I pay a lot of attention to this. As someone who feels very strongly about this, this is something important for cities to realize. Besides that, I would like to see more focus on PT provision, in terms of institutional changes. I hope that our cities and other cities can adopt more commuter and passenger-focused regulations. Right now when you look at the KPI or any kind of PT regulations in the PHL, there is really nothing that focuses on improving the passenger experience. It is really kind of crazy to say that out loud but there really is nothing focused on passenger experience and I want that to be a greater priority for the government in PHL.

I think maybe in terms of other changes, just physically, more reallocation of road space towards SM. If I had my way, I would rededicate a lot more road space to PT and active transport over private motorized transport.

What do you think are the greatest obstacles in achieving the changes?

Some of the big obstacles as mentioned earlier are the **political in nature**. It is a little difficult to unwind these thought processes for people on mobility. It is really a big challenge to teach people that when you turn a motor vehicle lane into a bike lane, you are not reducing capacity but instead you are adding it. It is hard to communicate some of these concepts (**mindsets**).

In terms of e-mobility, the big challenge right now is the **lack of network of supporting services**; even simple things like the maintenance and repairing aren't quite there yet for EVs. There are some changes that can be brought along by the private EV market to enhance things. For instance, we definitely need to do things like develop a network of charging stations and repair shops for EVs. For some of those things, we need to review laws that put tariffs to make EVs more cost attractive. Right now even though it is already quite economical to own an EV but the cost of energy and power is still quite expensive in the PHL, so this poses another challenge.

Generally, the **infrastructure** to use electric 2/3- wheelers aren't developed everywhere yet. These vehicles are currently using the same infrastructure as bicycles so the infrastructure is still developing.

Philippines is also quite big on ride-hailing services like Grab, are they already moving towards EV market or incentivizing them to use it?

The thing about companies like Grab, they are still using all traditional FF cars because EVs are still extremely rare in the PHL, almost no one owns them. Many of these companies aren't contributing to any kind of electrification. Grab talked about launching e-scooter sharing system but it may still need at least 1 year to deploy that in the PHL.

What societal changes could come through sustainable mobility in your city?

If we work on SM, we can see a lot of societal and income mobility. It is definitely good for the city if we allow more people to access more convenient mobility based on SM, just shifting to SM would instantly allow many people to access more job opportunities, education opportunities, and allow businesses to have a greater reach of customers and target pool. The benefits of SM are well documented for other countries and I think we could expect the same for the PHL.

What kind the initiatives or programs exist to collaborate or support the informal sectors (e.g. jeepneys) or even women?

One of the things we are working on a city level is that we are trying to establish programs to help our informal transit sector to access capital, infrastructure and technology that can help them formalize and consolidate. Part of the necessary things to work on in modernizing the industry is helping workers to organize themselves and giving them access to the capital. We are currently working on the jeepneys in Pasig city.

One of the things we want to do in terms of fostering more inclusivity in transport is to have better service levels and tenders for PT. As we help the workers consolidate and organize themselves, we want them to improve services and having guidelines for having more inclusive policies for passengers, esp. for women, or more sensitive people when they are on the vehicles. In addition, we

want to allow inclusive and active transport to have bike infrastructure for anybody, not just a pro-cyclist to use it but the old and young on bicycles.

How can the processes started with SOLUTIONSplus best be sustained and replicated?

Some of the important things here are that the changes have to be institutionalized in city policy, having local ordinances and local laws, making it an explicit part of the ST policy going forward. Ensuring that the gains and benefits of the infrastructure and investment are well documented and shown that they can be easily replicated in other cities in the PHL. If we can show that investing in sustainable mobility and e-mobility is low cost and can easily be done with minimal investment and easy. This can inspire scaling up and sustainability of the project.

We covered quite a wide range of topic today, do you have additional remarks to add on particularly on e-mobility?

In terms of e-mobility, the biggest thing and most important thing is the private e-mobility seems to be ok and that sector is progressing on its own and there needs to be additional governmental support for e-mobility for business. That is where e-mobility has a lot of potential but the uptake has been slow in the PHL.

In terms of where the project should focus, it should really be on encouraging business and logistics uptake on e-mobility vehicles.

On a side question, is Pasig considering anything on logistics and freight or is it still mainly focused on passenger transport?

We do have a cooperative project with the local post office. Through Clean Air Asia, we were able to receive donation of e-bikes / three wheelers to deliver mails. What we are doing now is working with the local post office which is the main beneficiary in terms of e-mobility investment. For other business e-mobility infrastructure that we can put up, the most businesses can be benefitted aside from the post office. On this note, it is really also important for us to think how e-mobility can be adopted for delivery vehicles and use smaller delivery vehicles in urban areas. That is also really important.

Abbreviations

SM = Sustainable mobility

EVs = Electric vehicles

PHL = Philippines

PT = Public transport