

Bangkok and its car footprint

Bangkok, an over-200-year old capital of Thailand is still growing and expanding with the population of almost 10 millions. The city is promoted as a hub of everything in the Asia Pacific – communication hub, tourist hub, international transportation hub, food culture and hospitality hub, health care hub, UN and international development organizations hub, drug smuggling hub, human trafficking hub, money laundering hub, etc. and etc. Its identity is really fluid and diverse, oftentimes confusing. Nonetheless, so far Bangkok has never known as even want-to-be environmental hub. Its environmental performance, if any, should disappoint the representatives attending the UN Inter-sessional Climate Talks many times held in Bangkok.



According to a study jointly published by the UNEP, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) and Green Leaf Foundation in 2007^[1], each Bangkok resident emitted 7.1 ton of carbon dioxide per year, exactly at the same level with residents of New York and even higher than the Londoners.

| City | Millions of tons of carbon dioxide | Tons per capita of carbon dioxide emissions |
|----------|------------------------------------|---|
| Bangkok | 43 | 7.1 |
| Toronto | 24 | 9.6 |
| New York | 58 | 7.1 |
| London | 44 | 5.9 |

Source: Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, 2007

The largest contribution of CO₂ emission in Bangkok is the transportation sector. The report quoted data from the Ministry of Energy which indicated that, in 2007, the transport sector in Bangkok emitted almost 23.07 million tons of CO₂ from consuming around 9 billion litres of gasoline, and diesel oil (8,948,683 million litres). Petrol consumption by cars is identified as the main source.

| Source | Emission (Million tones per year) | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------|
| Electricity | 20.43 | 33.37 |
| Transportation | 23.07 | 37.68 |
| Solid waste and waste water | 12.16 | 19.86 |
| Other | 5.57 | 9.09 |
| Total | 61.23 | 100 |

Source: Ibid., 2007

Amazingly beginning from September last year, the current government initiated a brand-new policy to encourage people who have never owned a car to purchase a brand-new car. The government waives actual tax up to the amount of 100,000 baht or equivalent to 2,500 euro per any new car purchased between September 2011 and December 2012. This policy is the result of Thailand's tragic flooding disaster last year aiming to revitalizing the car producing industry and increasing the low income populations' capacities to afford their first cars. With that, Bangkok is emphasizing its well-known position as the traffic monster hub of the world, moving up the rank to the 1st place in recent BBC

survey.^[ii]

Records from the Department of Land Transport show that there are more than 7 million registered cars in Bangkok whereas the capacities of road space can accommodate only 1.6 million of them.^[iii] This new policy is extremely successful in terms of raising the purchase order for the major car producers, mostly Japanese companies which acquire the largest share of automobile market in Thailand. There are averagely 50,000 new cars registered each month in Bangkok alone or accounted for more than 670,000 cars more on the road for this year (in a normal situation, there are 20,000 new cars registered per month). Budget allocation of 30 billion baht^[iv] (7.5 billion euro) for tax rebate scheme can better be expensed for greening the city or improving other public transportation but of course environmental initiatives are not attractive for swinging politics in Thailand.

There is no record if the bike lane exists in Bangkok at all but even so, a survey by the Green World Foundation showed how people react to this strangeness of bike lanes as if they have not existed.^[v]

