

Metro Star CENTRAL

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Residents feel that the aspirations for Petaling Jaya, such as whether it is still a satellite city, should be made clear for their benefit. — filepic

Taking TOD out of context

Stories by SHEILA SRI PRIYA
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PETALING Jaya was created as a satellite town in 1942 to ease the burden of a growing population in Kuala Lumpur then.

The township, which was awarded city status in 2006, today enjoys a modern and efficient public transport system as a city and is warming up to the concept of Transit Oriented Development (TOD) with high plot ratios such as 1:8.

Plot ratio represents the gross built-up area of a development to the land it occupies, while TODs are locations with efficient public transport such as the LRT and MRT.

However, the present Petaling Jaya Local Plan 1 (RTPJ1) only allows for a 1:4 plot ratio development in the city.

As a result of this, there has been much public objection in recent times to approvals of TOD with 1:8 plot ratio citing the Selangor Structural Plan.

PJ Utara MCA chief Tan Gim Tuan said the recent case where the Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ) councillors were urging for a 1:7.2 plot ratio for a 20-storey office tower being built on the 0.4ha land, showed that they had missed the point of TOD guidelines.

"They want a development to be granted 1:7.2, which is above the 1:4 ratio currently permitted in the RTPJ1. What the councillors requested for is very high. Even if 1:4 plot ratio is granted, it has to be subject to conditions.

"Petaling Jaya residents do not want the over-development that comes with its fair share of stress," said Tan.

MyPJ, a coalition of 200 residents groups, objects to the high plot ratios for TOD in Petaling Jaya.

The group formed a petition called #TolakPJ TOD last week, in which public signatures are being collected to object to high-rise developments in the city which have been approved by MBPJ using TOD as an excuse.

Esham Salam, who spoke on

PJ folk want MBPJ to justify approval of high-rise projects in areas without adequate public amenities



Petaling Jaya residents want areas with TOD status to have public amenities such as schools, hospitals as well as fire and police stations.

behalf of the group, said MBPJ believed TOD might be the best solution for a liveable city but the residents did not share the sentiment.

He said residents felt the concept of TOD was being abused as there has been no information given to the public on the guidelines that developers must adhere to in high plot ratio developments.

"We need to know whether new public schools, government hospitals, fire and police stations, as well as other public amenities will be built in these areas with new high-rise developments.

"We see approvals being given for high-density and high-end serviced apartments in parts of the city.

"As it is, even the existing population finds it hard to access these public amenities and we fear

things will be worse in the future," he said.

Esham said TOD was the most important aspect in deciding the future of the city and residents want MBPJ to be transparent about it.

"Even at 1:4 plot ratio, we are facing bad traffic condition. Imagine the stress it will bring to residents when it is 1:8.

"We feel the word TOD itself is oversold," said Esham, urging the Selangor government to intervene and address the matter.

He pointed out that Petaling Jaya was not a Central Business District and development here must not be compared to that in Kuala Lumpur.

"Petaling Jaya is not Marina Bay in Singapore or even like Kuala Lumpur. We are a satellite city.

"We urge the Selangor mentri

besar to customise the TOD and make the guidelines transparent.

"We want residents' queries, such as whether there will be new schools and other amenities, put in place first," he said.

Esham also questioned the city's population aspiration, saying MBPJ cannot just say that public amenities are the responsibility of the Federal Government.

"The city has about 800,000 people but what is the future population aspiration? Will it be three million with no new public amenities?" he asked.

MyPJ's Jeffrey Phang, said it was worrying to know that the views of councillors were not taken seriously at the full board meeting.

Another MyPJ member, Kavin Thayalan, said TOD planning must be based on localised policies.

"It cannot be planned only now

Expert: Planners and developers must adhere to master plan

A PROPERTY market expert from the United States says the public is bound to become negative towards any dense development in their neighbourhood due to fear of losing public space.

World Citizen Consulting's principal consultant Bill Endsley said such resistance was common among residents anywhere around the world but the idea of high-density development did not mean that there should be no public space that comes with it.

Ultimately the city's master plan must be fully understood and followed, he pointed out

"People are afraid of losing their public space. There should be a trade-off.

"If the developers are working with city planners, there should be an understanding ahead of time what the objective is going to be.

"The developer needs to take the corporate social responsibility and say they are going to provide a certain amount of public space.

"In Chicago, US, many of the buildings have a setback from the road. They will put benches and create gardens. After the project is

completed and when you pass the street and see the logo of the building, you will get a positive sense of the building with the new public space,

"Developers must think along this way. When you don't think about public space, the public will become negative towards you," said Endsley, who was one of the moderators at the World Urban Forum 9 (WUF9) held at Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre recently.

He stressed that there must be good understanding of the city's master plan by all parties. The plan has to be for a long term.

"The master plan must take into consideration the long-term growth of the city and it needs to be looked at as a positive thing instead of negatively," he said.

Endsley added that there was a new perspective on carparks in high buildings near transit oriented developments (TOD).

"Chicago has now reduced the required carparks in high-rise buildings near the public transit lines. You don't need that many parking bays because the idea with



Endsley says people are afraid of losing their public space.

TOD was for people to use public transport. This is integration in the full spectrum of development," he said.

In most cases, he added, the developers, public transport providers and the government might

all be working in silos. There may be no integration on how these plans may work together well, resulting in other problems including pollution.

"There is this notion that people may never be able to live in the city due to various factors. There's the idea to place people in suburbs and have them commute to the city to work.

"Then it is always mentioned that there will be a green belt for recreational purposes. This idea of living in suburbs and travelling to the city to work has never been truly successful. What happens is there will still be loads of cars and traffic congestion from those who will be commuting, resulting in problems such as pollution.

"The trend is now to live, work and play in the same place," Endsley said.

Another speaker at the forum was New York University Urban Expansion programme research scholar Patrick Lamson-Hall, who said in general, the job of city planners was to ensure there was sufficient availability of public facilities to meet the demand for floor space

in a given area.

The obvious advantage of TOD is that it provides connectivity to places in which the price of land is comparatively low, he said.

"This makes housing more affordable in the city as a whole. It may raise prices locally for existing residents, but overall the benefits will outweigh the losses.

"Technically, all development is a form of TOD. Otherwise, you would never have development in a place without adequate transportation. Unless it is built with subsidies for example," said Lamson-Hall, who has a master's degree in Urban Planning from the NYU Wagner School of Public Service.

"I think residents should decide if they want their housing to be affordable or unaffordable.

"It is clear that people may not be keen to have their neighbourhood look like the KL CBD, but it is equally clear that there are those who are happy to live in that kind of neighbourhood. Otherwise, there wouldn't be people moving into the new apartments; they would be staying put," he added.



Tan says PJ residents do not want the stress of over-development.



Esham says MBPJ must be transparent about TOD planning.



Thong wants issue of high-density projects in TOD areas resolved.



Phang says it is worrying to know councillors' views are not taken seriously at full board meetings.



Yeoh says residents fear that TOD projects will not have setbacks.

and simply because there is the LRT and MRT," he said

"We must have regulations based on the location and also study if these locations that are granted high plot ratio are within a TOD area.

"A TOD area cannot be justified because it has a feeder bus route. In reality, this spot may be far away from the public transport hub. The frequency of feeder buses must also be studied," he added.

Kavin also questioned whether these high-rise developments took into account the need for affordable housing.

"We see high-end apartments and serviced apartments. Where are the affordable homes at these TOD locations?" he asked.

Resident Eileen Thong said the issue of high-density developments in areas with TOD status was an eye-opener for the people of Petaling Jaya.

"We are taken aback by this issue and want it resolved," she stressed.

Former Petaling Jaya councillor Cynthia Gabriel said the TOD concept was raised in MBPJ in 2014 but the concept would only work if sustainable development was at the heart of the intention.

"Both the TOD and sustainable development must be balanced," she said.

"What we see are developments that seem to be taking place at the expense of public interest.

"The TOD concept itself is not



Most TOD projects in Petaling Jaya are located not far from LRT or MRT stations.

wrong but when you don't accompany it with sustainable development then it becomes a problem."

Gabriel said the aspirations for Petaling Jaya must be made clear.

"Is Petaling Jaya still a satellite city? And is it a low or high-density place?" she pointed out.

She said Petaling Jaya mayor Datuk Mohd Azizi Mohd Zain now

shouldered the burden of determining the city's direction and MBPJ's planning department should provide an answer on where the city's planning was headed.

"The council must show some accountability and responsibility towards the well-being of the residents," she said.

"The menteri besar must act fast and preserve the transparency of the council, putting a stop to questionable practises such as shutting of the live streaming while matters are discussed at the full board meeting.

"Our country hosted the World Urban Forum 9 recently so we must be an example for sustainable

development," she added.

Former councillor Richard Yeoh said residents were fearful that TOD developments would not have setbacks.

"We have cases of developments along lanes and not roads. These are public concerns that must be clarified by the city council," he stressed.