

Reaching Mutual Agreements on Jakarta's Transportation Modes

Jakarta Globe, Nov. 16, 2017

By Jonathan Richmond

Governor Anies can successfully reform Jakarta's transportation and also many other pressing issues if he will bring interests together to reach a consensus and then closely coordinate implementation of measures agreed in that process.

The importance of unity is sidestepped when a government all too often fails to bridge dissenting views. International development agencies cause particular harm when they come up with technical solutions that ignore the need for social harmony. Working on development projects around the world teaches that finding a basis for unity amongst good people, a key principle of the Pancasila, comes before all else if projects are to succeed. The seemingly "best" possible technical solutions often get rejected or simply fail in implementation because of lack of local support. It is far better to figure out what all parties can support even if it isn't quite what an economist or engineer would recommend and get it done than to continue with a status quo of doing nothing and achieving nothing.

Sometimes technical tasks simply have to be put aside to make space for opposing interests to reflect on the options available and come together for the common good. Learning to see each other as a family with diverse needs, all valid, makes it possible to challenge and change assumptions in ways that leave all better off. Such discourse inspires creativity in designing new solutions and a united will to implement them.

Unity is sorely needed to deal with Jakarta's transportation chaos. Jakarta is

a beautiful and exciting city, but not only trapped in impossible congestion but home to a failed bus-priority system that should be a key to solving its mobility problems.

Transjakarta is failing because of inertia in confronting diverging assumptions about governance of the city's infrastructure. The system was built with the visionary idea of speeding bus passengers on congestion-free bus lanes and now carries around 124 million annual passengers on about 145 route miles. However, riding Transjakarta is an uncomfortable experience, making it the choice of only people who have no other choice. The system's dysfunctionality encourages wealthier people to abuse Transjakarta's facilities by driving their unauthorized vehicles in bus lanes, slowing operations and harming reliability.

Illegal cars clog up facilities, leading to massive delays and bunching of buses, long waits for the next unpredictable bus departure during peak travel times, and great inconvenience for passengers. When buses take much more time than they should to cover a route they make less journeys per day. With less frequent buses, there is more crowding and discomfort, encouraging Jakarta's car owners to increasingly invade reserved lanes rather than ride the bus. A few drivers benefit from their illegal activity but, when every inch of roadspace gets congested by their incursion, everyone else loses.

Delays are worsened by a failure to give buses priority at intersections, frequent traffic conflicts that lead to gridlock, and by the absence of traffic and parking management. Such measures, applied properly, could greatly relieve the city's daily paralysis at little cost.

There have been periods when use of bus lanes has been officially allowed. In 2016, however, when such usage was illegal, the city administration faltered in its stated attempt to stop the use of bus lanes by cars because of an erroneous perception that excluding cars worsened congestion. The then governor of Jakarta gave instructions to focus enforcement on only one major corridor, sending a message to motorists that they were welcome to cause mayhem in all others. The police, who see their major task as moving traffic, have been reluctant to enforce bus lane use in the face of terrible traffic jams and discouraged from enforcement by a lack of clear direction from government.

How do we deal with this? Governor Anies should get people talking and facing up to the dysfunctional consequences of blurred transportation policy. Bring together politicians and civil servants from a range of government departments. Also invite representative bus passengers, community groups, business organizations, bus and automobile as well as taxi and motorbike drivers and police to join the conversation. Be sure to call both police in senior management positions and those that bravely go out on the roads in the heat of the day. Have this group learn about each other's perceptions and concerns and come together with a new vision.

I'm not talking about a typical "tim gabungan" with its dry conversations conducted by experts such as engineers and economists. Include a few of them, but focus on an array of people that operate and use Jakarta's transport systems to discuss their daily raw reality and how it can be improved. Let us hear what it is like to be a bus passenger and or car driver caught in traffic, a police officer on the street, or a bus manager facing increases in operational costs as well as losses in service that result from misuse of bus

lanes.

Set out the facts and have all present come to terms with them. Then ask all assembled to jointly develop a new policy response based on a desire for the unity that comes from the development of mutual respect.

Perhaps a focus on better intersection control and more scientific traffic management to improve speeds for one and all could gain support. Perhaps luxury buses can be run using the Transjakarta system from South Jakarta to key points to entice wealthier passengers with cars in return for strict enforcement of bus lane rules. Perhaps stations can be made cleaner, more secure and also more accessible to the elderly, handicapped and ladies with babies as another way to welcome a broader range of Jakartans. These are only a few ideas amongst many: the idea is to get good people to exercise good will and come together to enable the city as a whole to make progress.

Some people just won't agree to certain measures that sound good to others: put them aside if consensus cannot be reached: focus on what can be done. If it is too hard to agree on exclusion of all vehicles that are not buses from Transjakarta lanes, for example, home in on which invaders do least damage -- 10-15 seat vanpools, for example -- and establish rules all can support.

Compile a list of consensus actions to be taken and have everyone participating sign to indicate their agreement and will to cooperate in its execution. Then empower and coordinate parties to ensure it is brought to reality.

Independent Indonesia was forged with the ideal of unity, mutual respect and

justice for all. Building a consensus through a process of give and take promises to create viable policies and a mandate for all responsible to come together to enact them and make Jakarta a greater place to live together. While this approach promises to improve transportation policy, the principle can also be applied throughout city policymaking and show what local insights and good will can achieve: results that are often far better than any external expert can produce, and that are blessed, above all, by ownership by the people of the city.

Jonathan Richmond, a graduate of the London School of Economics, was a Fulbright Scholar at MIT where he received masters and doctoral degrees in Transportation and a fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. He advises governments in Asia and Africa on implementing effective transportation policy with special interests in helping leaders and communities make good decisions and establish strong systems of governance. His slideshow about Transjakarta can be found here:

<http://jonathanrichmond.com/opportunities/opportunities.html>