

# **SPEECH BY MINISTER OF STATE FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, DR KOH POH KOON, AT THE MEGACITIES THINK TANK ALLIANCE FORUM, 12 JULY 2016, SINGAPORE**

A very good afternoon Members of the Megacity Think Tank Alliance,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

## **Introduction**

1 It's a great pleasure for me to be here today. We're amongst think tanks, people with good ideas, and the brightest people in the industry. So I think this is a good platform for all of us to interact and share ideas.

2 This is the 3rd MeTTA (Megacity Think Tank Alliance) Forum and as you all know, this is an alliance of 7 urban think tanks and experts across several cities in Asia, including Beijing, representing Korea - Busan, Ho Chi Minh, Seoul, Shanghai, Singapore and Tianjin. I was told it was formed in 2014, where the first meeting was held in Seoul. It is a unique platform that provides opportunities for thinkers, movers and shakers in the urban built environment to share their knowledge and experience and to collaborate on research development so that we can develop common solutions to common problems that we face as big cities around different parts of the world.

4 The last two editions of MeTTA Forum were held in 2014 in Seoul and subsequently in Beijing last year. This year, the Centre for Liveable Cities (CLC) in

Singapore is proud and honoured to be able to host this meeting here today, in conjunction with the World Cities Summit (WCS). I hope all of you will also have a chance to participate in the rest of the forum in WCS 2016, and hopefully this will give you all ideas and also share your ideas with people in the industry to make our living environment better and more sustainable.

### **Importance of sharing urban knowledge and solutions**

5 Asia, as you all know, is one of the fastest growing regions in the world.

- In fact, 16 out of 28 megacities in the world are located in Asia. We know that with increasing urbanisation in Asia, we're going to see an increase of urban population from 48% to 61% by 2050<sup>1</sup>. We are going to get more crowded as cities in time to come.
- Many cities today are already experiencing quite a lot of congestion, whether it is in the built environment or the transport systems. With such major changes in the population profile and cities becoming more and more urbanised, we'll face many challenges. How do we house all these people coming into our cities? Other than housing them, how do we move them all around? People do not just come and stay in a place; they need to get to work. I think it is through sharing, and cross fertilisation of ideas for urbanisation and urban growth that we can find solutions to overcome some of these challenges. Oftentimes, the problems that we have, someone somewhere has already found a solution. So it is best not to reinvent the wheel, but to take the

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<sup>1</sup> World Urbanization Prospects 2014 Revision, United Nations.

opportunity to hear from others and to learn the best practices so that we can modify, and take it to adapt for our own use.

6 Today, as I said, we have a gathering of 7 urban think tanks from across Asia. While we may come from different cities, we all share the same desire – to make our cities more liveable and sustainable. I do believe that many of the challenges we face are common challenges as well.

7 MeTTA hopefully will be one of the valuable platforms that all of you will continue to come back and use to share ideas and good practices.

### **Enhancing urban mobility for liveable cities**

8 The theme for this year's forum is "Megacity Mobility Systems And Solutions". I think it reflects the recognition that urban mobility is one of the perennial challenges that all megacities face. It is quite easy to see in many megacities, congested roads, traffic congestion, air pollution, and noise pollution that come with heavily used transport system. So in high density cities, we not only have to find efficient solutions to allow large numbers of people to move around the city, but also we need to ensure that these mobility systems that we create, these solutions that we come up with, complement the urban environment that we live in and is also in line with our lifestyles we choose to live as well, so that while we build a mobility system, we also make the city more liveable.

## **Achieving a car-lite Singapore**

9 For instance, cities are increasingly aware of the negative impact of cars on the urban environment. Of course, with more cars you have more congestion; we also have more air pollution. I think big cities around the world face the same challenges. Other than giving more air and noise pollution, cars also take up a lot of space for more parking. With more cars, it means that we have to dedicate more land space for more roads, which means less space for building houses, less space for industrial development. So in the competition for space, more cars mean more consumption of valuable space.

10 Singapore has been mindful of not being overly reliant on cars since our very early days. And you can imagine why, because we are a very small nation, we have 719sqkm in total. Even in the worst traffic jam, we get from one place to another in about 30 minutes, from one end of Singapore to another, 42km across. So we have limited land space, and controlling the car population has always been something on our minds. To do that:

- we have introduced very tough policies to try and curb the car population. Many of you may have heard about how we use our Certificate of Entitlement to restrict car growth on a year to year basis. And we have achieved some success in terms of stabilising the car population, but that is not enough. We need to go even further to reduce the car population;
- we have also integrated our land use with public transport systems through a rigorous land use and transport planning framework since

early 1970s to encourage more use of public transport system here in Singapore;

- we also took care of the needs of pedestrians by building walkways along every street since we started planning our cities in the 1970s to ensure not just pedestrian safety but also accessibility by walking;
- To encourage people to use other modes of transportation, especially the last mile when they get off the bus to their destination, we want to encourage people to do cycling as well. For the past few years we've been putting out a programme to build more cycling paths in our estates and towns. In the latest endeavour, we are trying to build a round island cycling path and also to connect the estate to the city centre using cycling paths as well. It is a healthier way, it is definitely a car-free way and it is also to encourage people to adopt other modes of transportation without resorting to use a car. Through a large network of park connectors we are now expanding it to a cycling network throughout the city.
- All these policies will ensure that everyone can move around comfortably in a relatively congestion-free city, because Singapore although is a country, it is also a city. We do not have suburbs for people to spill over. So in managing our car population, we are really trying to make sure that the whole country, the whole city of Singapore, is more liveable. What we want is a congestion free environment where people can live, work and play in a very co-located manner.

11 The Singapore Sustainability Blueprint 2015 introduced the vision of a “Car-Lite Singapore”, and we will continue to encourage sustainable travel modes, like taking public transport, walking and cycling, and of course in the near future, we hope to introduce other modes like autonomous vehicles, to reduce the need for car ownership. This is really using technology to explore alternative forms of city mobility.

12 Being “car-lite” is also about making our city more attractive and vibrant. Once we free up the roads, we can convert them into spaces where people can conduct activities and make the whole city life more vibrant. For example, we have been creating car-free space for people to enjoy through various initiatives, like Car Free Sunday, where we have street parties; Car Free Sundays where people can cycle on streets that were previously used by cars. It’s just to see the mindshare in people that actually, it is ok not to drive your car for a day and the roads will be put to better use for other purposes. So on every last Sunday of the month in the Civic District, we will declare a Car Free Sunday just to get people used to the idea that certain roads can be closed and there are other ways to use the space.

### **“Lessons from Seoul and Singapore” and MOU signing**

13 I am encouraged to know that CLC has successfully completed an inaugural joint research project with fellow MeTTA member, the Seoul Institute (SI), on the project titled “*Walkable and Bikeable Cities: Lessons from Seoul and Singapore*”. This project distills the unique experiences of both Seoul and Singapore in promoting walking and cycling through a series of detailed case studies from both cities. Given

Seoul's and Singapore's shared desire on making our cities less reliant on cars, the project is very timely and contributes to the current discussions and better understanding on sustainable mobility in both cities.

14 CLC and SI will also be signing an MOU today to create a stronger partnership between the two organisations and pave the way for more fruitful exchanges of knowledge and experience between these two organisations. I hope this will also lead to more insights and better solutions that we can adopt and share with everyone as well.

## **Conclusion**

15 Besides Singapore and Seoul, many other cities at similar stages of development are also experiencing similar challenges and they are also aiming to change their mobility platforms and paradigms towards a more sustainable one. I hope MeTTA will be a useful platform for such cross sharing and cross fertilisation of ideas and for other cities to learn from one other and hopefully the platform will grow. In time to come, more people will benefit from the ideas generated through this think tank.

16 Let me take this opportunity then to wish you all very fruitful discussions ahead and I hope to see many ideas that come out of this discussion become actualised in a way we live our life in the city.

17 Thank you.