

I LIVE in a neighbourhood that's just around the corner from a bustling commercial area. It's got almost everything, from a few mamak stalls, a supermarket, and a wet market to a hospital even, across the road. Yes, there are no playgrounds or libraries, but it's still a pretty good place to be.

Now, when I say it's "just around the corner", I mean it's a five-minute drive. But sometimes, it's actually faster to take the 20-minute walk.

Why? Because finding parking is like playing musical chairs, if it's a game with 20 moving players looking at 30 full seats, one of which is occupied by a Vellfire that's actually too big for its space.

Things get even more chaotic on Fridays during prayer time, or on pasar malam days. And if there's a Ramadan bazaar? Forget it. I imagine some might find it worthwhile taking taxis from where they park.

To be fair, enforcement is hard. Malaysians find it easy to forget to pay for their parking, which then means there's no cost to keeping the car there for as long as they like.

How bad is it? According to Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL), there are 59,000 street parking bays in KL and prior to 2024, they generated about RM12mil a year from these spots.

This now becomes one of those maths word problems. Let's assume a parking rate of 80 sen per hour (this is the lowest rate, which is about a third of the maximum possible). How many parking bays do you need filled up Monday to Saturday, from 7.30am to 6pm, to generate that much revenue?

Answer: Just over 4,500 parking lots need to be occupied full time



for a whole year.

This represents about 7.7% of all street parking bays available. Which might mean over 90% of people who park don't pay for parking, and really should.

It's OK, because these malefic transgressors will then be fined, and we will get income through that, right? Except that parking related fines only contribute an additional RM3mil annually (and that includes those who parked on a yellow line, or double park).

While it's easy for us to bemoan Malaysians and their lack of civic-mindedness, I should point you to

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Parking hell

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a study on Bangkok which reported that, in 2020, only 18% of motorists paid their fines.

Meanwhile in the United States, one study showed more than 20% of drivers don't pay for their parking, depending on the city.

All this of course results in less income for the local authority. For example, DBKL projected in its 2025 budget presentation that they will collect RM34.12mil in parking revenue, representing 1.41% of its budget.

You will note that its anticipated earnings is significantly higher than the RM12mil quoted before. The bulk of it is because they hope to be stricter in enforcement – or at least the perception of it. As the DBKL Enforcement Department director said, "When people see enforcement officers on the ground, they're more likely to pay for parking".

However, I'm fairly reluctant for the city to fund itself by fining its citizens. It almost creates a perverse incentive where you're hop-

ing as many people as possible break the law so you can collect more money.

Indeed, there is a news report from 2013 where in order to meet quotas set by councils in London, civil enforcement officers (fundamentally, privatised traffic wardens) were pressured to issue more tickets, with threats of withholding holidays or overtime pay.

But I'll even go one step further. I think city councils should not see parking lots as a cash cow to maximise profits. They should see them as tools with which to manage traffic flow in and around the city.

Take for example an initiative in New York City in 2012. The city introduced higher parking rates during peak hours, which then discouraged long-term parking, and encouraged turnover. The result? People parked 20% less long in time, more people found available spaces (18% increase in unique visitors), and overall traffic dropped by 7% as people stopped having to circle endlessly looking for spaces.

Seattle, in the state of Washington, meanwhile tries to find the lowest hourly rate that leaves at least one or two parking spaces available on every block throughout the day. They adjust

their rates three times a year, and use time of day, day of the week, and events to modify rates.

Amsterdam increased parking rates by 65%, resulting in fewer cars from outside the local area coming in, and more space for locals who have parking permits, and better traffic flow during rush hour.

The point isn't profit, but to help the people in the city. Parking that is expensive enough also discourages people from taking cars, and encourages us to take public transport.

Of course, all of this only works if enforcement works, and is seen to be fair. And, at least in the short term, fines should be used to fund strong enforcement teams.

The other requirement is improved public transportation links, which further reduce overall traffic. My personal hope is that somewhere like KL's Bukit Bintang area will be car free.

And if we're really hopeful, in some future utopia with self-driving cars and artificial intelligence-aided traffic control, all this will be irrelevant.

But until then, parking availability is part of an integral system, rather than just a piecemeal add-on feature to a neighbourhood. Imagine how much more we would benefit if we could erase the parking lines, take away cars, and build – dare I say – playgrounds and libraries.

Logic is the antithesis of emotion but mathematician-turned-script-writer Dzof Azmi's theory is that people need both to make sense of life's vagaries and contradictions. Write to Dzof at lifestyle@thestar.com.my. The views expressed here are entirely the writer's own.