



Pollution: back to the future

LORD BILL DEEDES, WHO DIED A FEW MONTHS AGO AFTER a long and fulsome life, was a journalist, soldier, politician, cabinet minister and confidant of many eminent people.

For many years he was the doyen of British journalism and a regular columnist for the Daily Telegraph.

His publication of selected articles over 75 years - between 1931 and 2006 - *Words and Deedes*, provides a wonderful panorama of key social and international issues for much of the last century and into the present.

Under Social Issues, I was intrigued to find a 1932 contribution headed Motor Car Poisoning, which dealt with carbon monoxide poisoning in the streets from motor vehicle emissions and led to a UK Home Office inquiry.

Even though the number of vehicles on the roads of the 1930s was a fraction of today's, there was already concern over the quality of air being breathed by pedestrians and the overall impact on the health of the population.

Earliest days of pollution.

THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT EMISSIONS FROM MODERN vehicles are less than that of older models, assuming they are properly looked after. Emissions from today's more efficient cars are significantly lower compared with vehicles that appeared even 20-30 years ago.

However, on the adverse side is the sheer number of vehicles on today's city streets and, in particular the pollution generated by the millions of motorcycles, buses and cars that buzz around Jakarta and other major Asian cities.

While a car owner is somewhat cosseted from the effects of fumes, especially when sitting in a sedan in one of the many daily traffic jams, motorcyclists and their inevitable pillion passengers, anywhere between one and five in number, are steadily inhaling filthy exhaust.

This must inevitably cause regular loss in production due to ill health, never mind the long-term health costs.

Even in today's health terms the cost per annum from vehicle pollution for a major city is in the hundreds of millions of dollars, and this on top of the billions of dollars in fuel losses from idling engines sitting in traffic jams.

It is pleasing to note that some of the buses plying Jakarta's busways are using environmentally friendlier fuels. It is also encouraging that two of the major Japanese car manufacturers have taken the lead in the development of hybrid, lesser polluting ve-



hicles and future car models that will be even better.

In this, a key development, which is also receiving attention, will be the ability for automatic engine switch-off while stationary, while maintaining a degree of comfort inside the cab.

All vehicle manufacturers will have to address the same requirements, if they are to be competitive in tomorrow's market. And motorcycles?

Of course, the above has been concerned with today's motor transport. Despite the laudable and essential attempts to introduce the monorail, MRT and other upgraded urban rail systems for the city of Jakarta - and these must be pressed on with urgency - most journeys in the city will continue to be made by some form of motorized transport for many years to come.

The cleaner this can be, the better for the health of the city's residents, along with savings from losses in fuel and from sickness. GA

■ Scott Younger is the president commissioner of Glendale Partners and Nusantara Infrastructure.