



Focus on Solving Current Problems

Analysts say the population White Paper lacks a concrete masterplan and goals. Others say Singapore can do with less population.

By [Khalil Adis](#)



6.9 million by 2030 – that's the projected population White Paper that was recently passed in Parliament.

This was despite much opposition that was generated on social media from a public still reeling from the impact of rapid population growth via immigration that has led to frequent train breakdowns, wage stagnation, record property prices, creaking public infrastructure and a heartland that suddenly seems so foreign.

But can Singaporeans really trust that the government will deliver this time round? Or will it be another policy mistake that future generations will have to suffer?

“Singapore is barely coping with the rapid influx of immigrants over the past decade, so there is the prevalent view that if we can't cope with 5.3 million, how are we going to manage with 6.9 million

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within two decades? There is a sense that the immigration policy will not be of benefit to the average Singaporean," Eugene Tan, an assistant law professor at Singapore Management University told Al-Jazeera

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong recently admitted that his government lacked the 20/20 foresight and aims to do better.

As if to placate the public, the amended motion on the White Paper was passed after much debate in Parliament.

At a glance, it seems to address pertinent issues by emphasising that the government will “place priority on resolving current strains on the infrastructure, particularly in transport” among others.

Subsequently, the Ministry of National Development (MND) issued its Land Use Plan with a statement that promises Singaporeans a high quality living environment.

“To achieve this, we will plan ahead and invest in infrastructure in a timely manner. We will also invest in research, explore and support innovative urban solutions which promote liveability. The strategic intent of the Plan is that our people and our future generations can continue to enjoy a good quality living environment,” said the MND.

Current woes still unsolved

The impact on the immigration policy has had detrimental effect on the current overall quality of life among Singaporeans.

Property prices have kept on increasing despite seven rounds of cooling measures.

Our fourth quarter of 2012's Private Property Index (PPI) and HDB Resale Price Index (RPI) are

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currently at their record highs at 212.2 points and 202.9 points respectively.

In addition, there have been instances of foreigners who do not understand our local laws and customs, especially when it comes to communal living in the heartlands.

So much so that the HDB has had to re-look into its Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP) to include newly converted Permanent Residents (PRs) and Singapore citizens

Suffice to say, the heartland has become a tense area due to inherent cultural differences causing the government to organise 'integration events' and exhorting Singaporeans to be more welcoming of foreigners.

On the public transportation front, frequent train breakdowns have become the norm with the recent Newton MRT station fire incident as the latest in SMRT's fiasco.

Thousands affected

Commuter Rohan N, who was caught in the recent train incident at 9.15 am, said everyone was left in the dark about what was really going on.

“They made an announcement that there was a train delay at Newton and then at Bishan for about 15 to 20 minutes. Subsequently, I saw a few commuters had left the station. I went back to the station control and the SMRT staff said that the train was not in service and recommended I take the Circle Line. There was a lot of miscommunication on the part of SMRT on what actually happened. I saw people still queuing for trains. I expect a lot more from SMRT as there has been many incidents already,” he said.

Rohan was late for work and arrived at 10.30 am.

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“Can you imagine what it will be like in 2030? Already for one train incident 15,000 commuters were affected. If they can't get current infrastructure right in less than 20 years time, it is a cause for concern,” he added.

Meanwhile, the certificate of entitlement (COE) prices for cars in the open category is almost reaching the \$100,000 mark.

Judging by the current woes Singapore is experiencing due to the immigration policy, it was no surprise the White Paper was met with much derision.

Impact on property market

Property analysts say while they acknowledge that the government has been ramping up supply, they have reservations on the White Paper's impact on the quality of life.

“In the last couple of years, there has been a severe housing shortage that has driven up property prices. At the end of the day, our quality of life will be affected. As it is already, Singapore is so crowded. Do we also want to live in a housing environment that does not support conducive living?” said an insider in the property industry who wishes to remain anonymous.

The demand-supply mismatch last year saw an executive HDB resale flat in Queenstown hitting a record price of S\$1 million with a cash-over-valuation of S\$195,000.

With a projected 6.9 million population, there are fears that a 'new normal' could exist with HDB resale flats possibly hitting the S\$2 million mark.

Although some analysts had said it was a one-off transaction, some Singaporeans wonder if this is going to be a never ending cycle.



“Public housing should remain for Singaporeans only. Are we going to look at S\$2 million flats by 2030?” asked Jason Ong, who attended the recent White Paper demonstration at Hong Lim Park.

More details needed

Analysts also say the government could have given a specific time line and a masterplan to make it easier for the public to digest the White Paper.

“The government had the masterplan for the Jurong Lake District back in 2008. Currently, there is no such masterplan for the new housing areas. There has to be schools, hospitals, shopping centres and amenities to make it a liveable place. It will take sometime for these plans to materialise. The question is, is there enough time?” added the insider.

A quick check showed that the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) has not released the masterplan for Tengah yet.

Others beg to differ from the government's stance for more foreigners with a target replacement fertility rate of 2.1.

Professor Chua Beng Huat, head of the Sociology Department at NUS, said Singapore can do with a lower level of immigration.

“We’re investing so much in education, that the quality of the population will be improving consistently, that we do not have to work on 2.1 as the replacement rate. We can actually take a lower rate and we’ll still be economically healthy,” he told Today.

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