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Headline: Regional centres bring jobs closer to home

Regional centres bring jobs closer to home

Regional and fringe centres outside the city centre were introduced in Singapore's 1991 Concept Plan with the lifestyle goal of bringing jobs closer to home.

In planning jargon, it was called a decentralisation strategy.

The Concept Plan is a strategic land use and transportation plan that seeks to guide Singapore's development over the next 40 to 50 years. It is reviewed every 10 years, with the next one due in 2021.

"By offering job opportunities

closer to homes, regional centres reduce the need for long daily commutes between home and work and help to cut down traffic congestion to and from the city centre," says Mr Lee Wai Kin, group director for strategic planning at the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA).

The URA noted that more than 40 per cent of the workers in Tampines Regional Centre and nearby Changi Business Park live in the east.

Analysts told The Straits Times that the decentralisation strategy

supports economic development.

"Setting aside sufficient land and infrastructure to create new employment clusters and growth corridors in regional centres will continue to be important in sustaining Singapore's long-term competitiveness," notes Ms Anthea To, head of advisory and consulting at Colliers International.

Global design and consulting firm Arup says that building multiple commercial hubs serves to strengthen the resilience of a city, in that the

metropolis does not depend solely on one central business district to drive commerce.

The different regional centres, though, need to have their own unique identity and varying economic focus to set themselves apart, and to attract related businesses.

Here is where master planning comes in. The process guides land use, transport connectivity and how the area integrates with existing communities, and is critical in creating great places in which peo-

ple love to live, work and play.

"It is important to have a differentiator... The identity of space leads to a sense of ownership. You own a space because you know it has a different feel to it," says Mr Chintan Raveshia, cities and transit development leader at Arup.

He notes that being sited near a major transport node is also a key feature of successful regional hubs.

The "walkability" of the neighbourhood, environmental sustainability, greater use of underground space

and district-level infrastructure such as a district-cooling system, are all key planning considerations.

As a regional centre shapes up, it brings with it more visitors and an increase in trucks making deliveries to commercial buildings. "The challenge is to develop an integrated urban transportation and logistics concept that will regulate people and freight flows simultaneously," says Professor Lau Hoong Chin, of the School of Information Systems at Singapore Management University.

To this end, urban planners can tap smart technology to anticipate and facilitate commuter and freight flows, Prof Lau adds.

Wong Siew Ying

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