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Follow that narrow trick road

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I DIDN'T think there could be so much ado over a mere slip of a road.

Then again, that slip tried to slip across surreptitiously into some people's front yard and wham! people power came to the fore. It's amazing what can be achieved when people get together for a cause.

The builders of the alternative toll by-pass road from Sungei Pencala through Bandar Sri Damansara in Kuala Lumpur must have thought it a cinch to connect their access road through the yet to be fully-occupied residential area. The roads were already there in the housing estate, just waiting to be connected, and the people who did not want to pay toll would have another road to use. Everyone would be happy. Or so they thought. But homeowners in the area said no. They didn't pay so much for their homes, they said, just to have a mini highway run through them.

What's the use of calling it a residential area then, they ask? Might as well just let us build houses all along the main trunk roads and highways.

I can just picture children cycling and skateboarding in between 10-tonners and dodging speed fiends. They may even become so good at it, they can represent us at the next Olympics. If they survive the training. So, the incensed group rallied round, called in The Paper That Cares and after getting the issue front-paged for two days, managed to get the attention of the relevant authorities, including the Works Minister himself, who then called it off. The completion of the access road, that is.

How wonderful. There would be no need now for a human barricade although some, I'm sure, must have been looking forward to it. Nothing like a good sit-in to get to know one's new neighbours.

However, even as the sighs of relief resonate past the by-ways, many are starting to feel the toll of having to fork out the ringgit daily at the toll plaza on the new Damansara-Puchong highway - the reason for having the access route in the first place.

Imagine a family who still has children studying in Bangsar or Bandar Utama. That's already RM3 spent every morning. It's another RM3 for the spouse who works in Damansara Utama.

Forget something you left in your sister's place in Damansara Jaya? That's another RM3. And the cash register at the toll booth clicks on and on.

Although I'm sure the residents are grateful to the good Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu for his timely decision, there must be many who are miffed by his seemingly flippant reply to their plea to have the toll rate reduced to 50 sen. "Why not one sen?" he had asked.

There must be a way to, as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was reported to have said on Tuesday, not "make the people suffer," and yet not cause losses to the highway concessionaires. Or have the Government burdened with having to pay compensation on the people's behalf.

I'm sure many are aware that they have to pay for having a good thing. Nothing comes for free. And our lovely highways make for smooth travelling.

But having to pay so much daily just because you live around toll areas without alternative by-pass routes can be damaging to the purse. Especially in these times.

In the case of the Bandar Sri Damansara residents, I'm sure a special

pass issued at a nominal monthly or yearly sum would be welcomed. All it takes is for residents to prove they live in that area - electric or water bill as proof? - to qualify for the pass.

As Segambut MCA Action Task Force representative Tan Hoe Chieow had said on Wednesday, there are about 20,000 cars using the Damansara-Kepong stretch of road daily. "I'm sure they will break even in no time."

Of course, it is hoped that Samy Vellu will find it in his heart to rethink the building of another by-pass road for residents in Bandar Sri Damansara.

It is not that the residents there do not want an alternative road, dear Datuk Seri, they just don't want it going through their peaceful homes. And rightly so.

After all, don't the highway concessionaires still have to fulfil the requirement of giving residents an alternative by-pass route? I'm sure, in this instance, they will be clever enough to find an alternative to the alternative.

Remember. Don't let the people suffer.

(By the way, wonder who okayed the building of the slip road in the first place when the housing developers, Land and General Berhad, had rejected it? Hmmm).

(END)