

Calls for public transport upgrades and congestion charges

PETALING JAYA: Despite more people using the public transport system these days, Malaysians' love for cars remains strong, with commuters in the capital city being caught continuously in gridlock as traffic worsens.

Even back in 2022, the average Malaysian driver in Kuala Lumpur was already spending about 113 hours on the road due to congestion, according to the TomTom Traffic Index.

Public transport advocate Dr Katherine Poh said the government should invest more in upgrading public transport infrastructure to make the services more appealing: "Improving last-mile connectivity through the expansion of efficient networks, implementing smart traffic management systems and investing in infrastructure upgrades can help alleviate congestion.

"Additionally, urban planning that prioritises mixed-use development and encourages telecommuting can contribute to a more sustainable and balanced transportation system," she said

when contacted.

Poh also said that congestion charges, which has been talked about for years, should be implemented in the near future as the traffic situation has worsened.

Aimed at reducing traffic snarls in busy areas, a congestion charge is a fee on vehicles entering certain zones during peak hours.

The move would discourage usage of private vehicles while boosting public transport ridership, as seen in cities like London, Singapore, and Stockholm.

However, there has yet to be a decision on the matter.

Last month, Natural Resources and Environment Sustainability Minister Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad said the move would be considered once the Mass Rapid Transit 3 (MRT3) project is completed.

The MRT3, which has yet to begin construction, is the "critical final piece" to complete Kuala Lumpur's urban rail network. It will be connected to the MRT, LRT, KTM and Monorail lines through 10 interchange stations.

Universiti Putra Malaysia's Road



Smoother travels: Embracing the return of public transport paves the way for stress-free commutes. — AINA AMIRAH/The Star

Safety Research Centre's Assoc Prof Law Teik Hua said he is supportive of having a road pricing (congestion charge) as seen in cities like Singapore and London where it has been implemented.

"Delaying this intervention is

unnecessary; instead, we can initiate the process in a crucial central area of Kuala Lumpur [starting with a smaller zone], before expanding it to cover larger areas, following the successful model observed in London," he said.

Assoc Prof Law also said traffic conditions in the Klang Valley and along major highways are expected to get worse this year due to several factors, including poor traffic management.

"The trend of increasing vehicle ownership is expected to persist. As more individuals acquire private vehicles, the overall volume of traffic on roads is likely to rise, amplifying congestion.

"The existing state of traffic management, particularly in urban centres like the Klang Valley, faces challenges in maturing to meet escalating demand. Unoptimised traffic flow and infrastructure limitations contribute to congestion-related issues," he said.

Last month, Transport Minister Anthony Loke said the number of registered vehicles in Malaysia had surpassed the population. There are more than 36.3 million vehicles as of October 2023.

He said cars made up the highest number of registered vehicles, at 17,244,978, followed by motorcycles at 16,773,112 and goods vehicles at 1,429,403.