



Making A Point

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Overcoming public transport toughest hurdle

THE journey towards building a much better public transportation system in the Greater Klang Valley is underway.

More modern buses, train cars and increased frequency of modes of public transport have all led to a rise in ridership among Malaysians who have started to rely on using such avenues to travel around the sprawling city.

Work on the My Rapid Transit (MRT) has kicked off and this year, more initiatives will be rolled out to improve the public transportation system in the Klang Valley.

This year, the commission will be rolling out a bus rapid transit (BRT) system than aims to connect Klang with Kuala Lumpur by plying the Federal Highway. The BRT will help to move more people faster along

the roads and supplement the absence of a rail system in a lot of areas. It has plans to one day, spread the reach of the BRT system throughout the Klang Valley and that will surely complement the MRT in improving of the network of public transport. Feasibility studies on the other phases of the MRT will also commence next month.

The construction of the BRT and MRT will, however, surely lead to more congestion when work on building BRT lanes using stretches of the existing road and MRT pions starts. It will be a price to pay to eventually have better transport infrastructure.

The second feasibility study on the proposed High Speed Rail (HSR) project that aims to connect Kuala Lumpur and Singapore will also start and consultants to study the rapid transit system that will connect downtown Johor Baru and Singapore will be hired. The economic benefits

of that will be immense but the study needs to show that the HSR will benefit Malaysia, along with Singapore.

All of these are parts of the jigsaw; a 20 year masterplan that calls for a overhaul to the rail, bus, taxi systems in the country.

Furthermore, linkages and connectivity will be improved to make the use of public transportation the choice of Malaysians.

The models that are being rolled out in the Klang Valley, which is now serving as a test bed, will one day be replicated on a different scale in other states. Studies are being done in other states to see how public transport can also be upgraded.

All of this is going to cost an enormous amount of money and appears to be done in a rush. There is good reason for that.

Public transportation has been neglected in the past and now there is a compelling need to improve on

that given the economic benefits it brings.

But to win over Malaysians and have them use public infrastructure will mean more than building infrastructure.

At the moment, though, Malaysians are still choosing their own vehicles to get to their destination. The modal share of public transport dipped a little to 16.42% last year from 2010 and that is due to the increased use and numbers of motorcycles and cars on the road. That percentage pales in comparison with other developed cities in the world.

Getting more people, especially that of the middle class and the rich to use public transport, will need a display of efficiency.

People choose to drive if they can afford to do so because they don't want to waste time using public transport.

Connectivity and, the frequency and certainty of public transport will

have a huge influence on the decision by commuters to pick public transport as their preferred mode of travel.

The other thing needed is the change in mindset. The weather is a powerful influencer in the decision to drive rather than ride and people have to know that they will only need to walk a short distance in the scorching humid heat or pouring rain before they are able to take public transport that can get them to their destination within a reasonable time.

Those intangibles are as important as the hard infrastructure being rolled out.

● Deputy news editor Jagdev Singh Sidhu is somewhat mentally scarred when it comes to using public transport. In his youth, he had to wait for an unreasonable length of time for the bus and had to walk 2km before reaching a bus stop.