

Effective use of traffic info system

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LAST Thursday, we took off in a nice Volkswagen Passat, the new CKD model, for a drive to meet some senior officials at Putrajaya.

Instead of cruising, and enjoying the ride and comfort of the D-segment sedan, we got stuck in a crawl along the LDP highway.

The LDP, as most Klang Valley salesmen and commercial vehicle drivers know, is notorious for its tightness and congestion. We cursed ourselves for not going by the NKVE or the NPE but it was too late. There was no escape from the LDP until after the Sunway toll.

It took us 40 minutes to travel 5km and by the time we passed the Sunway toll, we had already decided to abort the mission and return to the office. It wasn't an ordinary jam. There must have been a reason but there was no public information.

On arrival at the office, we bitched about it with our colleagues. Our two Klang Js - Jaswir and Joe - shared their experience of getting to work in the morning. They said they were also caught in a two-hour traffic congestion getting to our New Straits Times office in Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur. They would have got in later if they had not taken alternative routes - Jaswir by entering Subang Jaya and then the NPE, and Joe by using the Sunway and Elite highway to the NPE.

Which brings us to our excellent infrastructure, including the integrated traffic information system (ITIS), a live video network that has been used at a fraction of its capability. To give an analogy, it's like using a Samsung Galaxy S3 to merely make voice calls, when this Android hand-

BETTER RESULTS: City Hall and the police should co-operate more to push the flow of live data to update motorists on congestion in the Klang Valley



The ITIS network wasn't working at three places that we passed by at the time of writing last Friday.

phone is the latest computer hand-phone that provides GPS, internet browsing, business card scanner, geomancy and match-making, if you desire.

Have you for instance noticed that we have variable message signboards (VMS) along our major highways? This is part of the RM365 million ITIS but probably because of overlapping jurisdictions and territorial disputes between the police and Kuala Lumpur City Hall, which owns the system. Because of the conflicts, the VMS displays banal messages - Drive safely, abide by the speed limits, etc.

Static outdoor signboards are more cost-efficient ways for sloganeering. The essence of variable message boards is to push live traffic information so that people are able to make their own decisions, including re-routing their journeys when there is an unexpected event such as last Thursday's twin traffic jams.

In the morning, a burst water pipe at Jalan Templar caused traffic to tail-back on Federal Highway 1. In the

afternoon of the same day, a tipper truck flipped on a car - no deaths but light injuries to humans - which affected traffic on the LDP and around Puchong.

The greater Klang Valley is a major conurbation with a population of about six million inhabitants. We're happy, or we should be, that the government is implementing a major extension of the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system. We'll have to tolerate and plan our drives according to the traffic congestion - for example, Subang Jaya and Pudu - caused by the MRT construction on the central dividers.

The construction is going to take years and it's time that Putra Jaya take stock of the situation and maximise the use of the ITIS. Rather than let a multi-million ringgit system be under utilised, City Hall should consider handing over the ITIS assets to the police or another implementation agency to port the information to the public domain using the VMS.

Imagine if the ITIS could be

employed to update greater Klang Valley road users in real time via its variable message signboards about the crawling traffic on Federal Highway 1, and consequently, the Puchong congestion.

The ITIS also has a website, www.itis.com.my, that provides live traffic information system for those who care to log in, but it's a cumbersome tool and not user friendly.

In the next five years - with every year bringing on an additional 600,000 cars and 600,000 motorcycles on the road - the "normal" traffic congestion in the Greater Klang Valley will be worsened by the construction of the MRT. Now's the time for the government to get its road transport act together and optimise the ITIS to fulfil the vision of its proponents.

If the police feels that its role is enforcing law and order rather than traffic calming, perhaps the Land Public Transport Commission (SPAD) can be given the task of porting ITIS live data to the VMS and also to seek

collaboration with the GPS community so that a live traffic system can be available for subscription to participating Malaysian GPS mappers.

SPAD has an over arching national role and should be considered for the task of managing ITIS to facilitate land public transport. After all, as a new entity, it has little baggage. Secondly, since it can't enforce a simple matter, such as taxi *potong* at the Kelana Jaya MRT station and Pasar Seni, amongst the other notorious taxi ranks, it might as well be given the task of traffic management. Not because it's incompetent or that some of its errant enforcement officials are on the take.

It's just that the Land Public Transport Commission (LPTC) Act 2010 clearly mentions that police officers should accompany SPAD officers in their enforcement duties. For those who are fuming about how the taxi *potong* are getting away with sabotaging public transport and the national tourism industry with impunity, blame it on the drafters of the LPTC Act 2010 and why they are so insistent that police officers are the enabling officers in the enforcement of the SPAD Act. Perhaps the drafters of the law didn't want a new agency, SPAD, to be given enforcement powers too early?

Perhaps, the LPTC Act can be amended. In the interim, a quick way would be the secondment of police traffic officers to the SPAD enforcement team.

Whatever, the outcome should be to give greater Klang Valley motorists timely warning on extraordinary traffic congestion by VMS and on the real-time GPS traffic information system for subscribers, including bus operators.

See the LPTC Act 2010 by scanning the QR code with your smartphone or go to <http://goo.gl/s4NPd> (<http://www.spad.gov.my/sites/default/file/pad-act2010.pdf>) → See V13

EDITORIAL

Hammering car thieves

→ From V2
CONGRATULATIONS to the police for securing nine-year jail sentences on the Kampung Black Water gang of car thieves. The four pleaded guilty to 186 counts of stealing and shipping about 460 cars worth RM49 million (that's an average of RM106,000 per vehicle).

It's understood that one or two more masterminds remain at large in neighbouring countries. DPP Nor Azilah Mat prosecuted before Sessions Court judge Siti Nuraida Sulaiman.

For every car the four self-confessed thieves stole, two charges were levelled against them.

Bail has been set at RM1.75 million each pending appeal for a lower sentence.

This is the heaviest penalty ever imposed, sending out a strong message to the thieves.

The police also recovered several vehicles from Laos.

Hopefully, the judgment will also include the confiscation of the unlawfully earned assets of the guilty.

Society also has to ask itself if it could have done better for those who are less well off but are competent with their mechanical skills, in the context that the thieves were primary school leavers and one had finished SPM.

There should be more vocational schools with more investment in vocational training for all races.

We don't want to be a nation where car theft is common place. We want to be a high income nation and that means upgrading our citizens' skills so that they are gainfully employed or are entrepreneurs in legal enterprises.