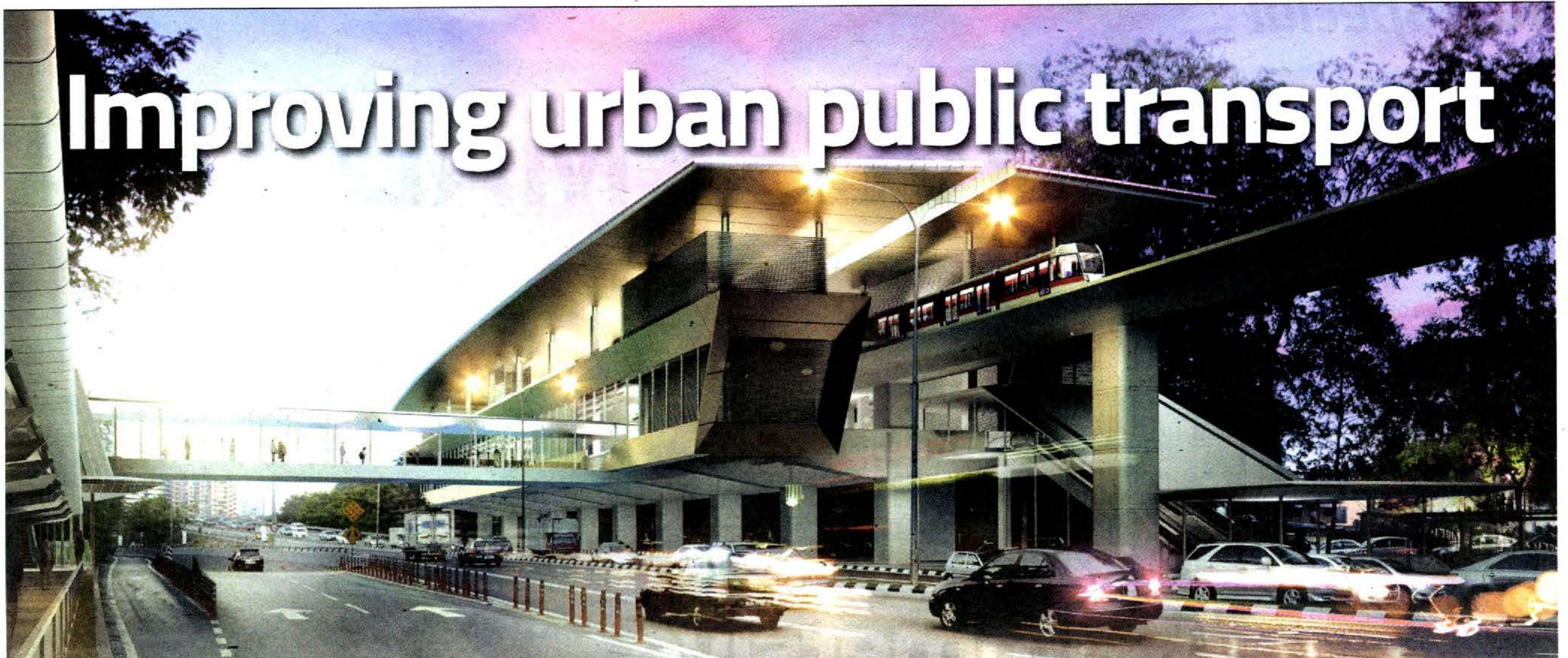


Improving urban public transport



THE Greater Kuala Lumpur/Klang Valley (GKL/KV) region is a result of the capital city and its surrounding areas expanding to cope with a growing population and ensuing development shaped by various socioeconomic considerations and choices.

Based on studies conducted by the Government for the Urban Public Transport Lab in 2009, the population of GKL/KV would grow from six million in 2009 to 10 million by 2020, creating greater pressure for better city liveability standards.

Recognising this, the Government, through the National Transformation Programme, triggered a series of improvements by setting sights on making Kuala Lumpur one of the top 20 most liveable cities in the world by 2020.

To achieve this target, Urban Public Transport was identified as one of the main areas to be prioritised for improvement to avoid the city from becoming paralysed by traffic gridlocks and pollution.

In 2009, private transport made up a bulk of the commutes in the GKL/KV region, with public transport only contributing 11% of commutes.

Land public transport options then were inadequate in reach and coverage throughout the urban sprawl, causing more people to opt for commuting with their own vehicles.

However, with the growing population and urbanisation expected to reach 70% by 2020, there is a no running away from enabling an efficient and smooth flow of people, which will in turn enable the growth of new urban areas through increased connectivity.

"To address the disparity, the National Land Public Transport Master Plan (NLPTMP) was established and is being implemented by the Suruhanjaya Pengangkutan Awam Darat (SPAD) to significantly improve connectivity and reach to achieve a 40% modal share target for urban public transport by 2030," says Mohd Azharuddin Mat Sah, chief executive officer of SPAD.

He adds that, over the last few years, the measures introduced to improve land public transport have moved the needle.

Shifting commute trends

Usage of land public transport in the Greater Kuala Lumpur region is on an encouraging uptrend – modal share for public transport grew from 10% in 2009 to 21% last year.

Specifically for rail transport, average daily ridership figures demonstrate a compound annual growth rate of 6.1% between 2010 and last year, which means more urbanites are opting for rail services such as the LRT, KL Monorail and KTM Komuter for daily commute (see graph).

"We are beginning to see the shift among urbanites to choose public transport for their daily commute due to the various improvements that have been carried out between 2010 and last year to upgrade land public transport infrastructure and services," says Mohd Azharuddin.

According to him, these upgrades include the addition of new coaches for KTM Komuter and the LRT that has helped improve comfort and the frequency of service.

In 2012, the Government

invested RM1.89bil to operate 38 six-car train sets for the KTM Komuter network.

With improved frequency of 15 minutes during peak hours compared to 30 to 45 minutes previously, the ridership for KTM Komuter rose from 34.8 million in 2012 to 49.6 million last year.

"Currently, KTM Komuter Service has been affected by the ongoing Klang Valley Double Track project, which is crucial to upgrade the ageing KTM Komuter tracks constructed 20 years ago," says Mohd Azharuddin.

He assures that passengers can expect improved services upon completion of the exercise by the end of 2019.

"The commission recognises that the duration of the upgrade has caused grievances among users, however, we seek the public's understanding that this is because the service cannot be fully shut down for upgrade as the Government balances the need to meet demand and cost considerations while also ensuring the safety of passengers."

Besides KTM improvements, Prasarana Malaysia Bhd rolled out 35 four-car train sets for the Kelana Jaya LRT line in 2012, which led to 99% service punctuality and improved peak hour frequency to 2.5 minutes.

It has also ordered 14 additional four-car train sets to meet the committed 180-second headways and cater for the growing ridership.

The Ampang/Sri Petaling Line has received 30 new six-car light rail vehicle sets to replace the existing fleet and 20 additional sets for the extended Ampang Line while the monorail service is expected to receive 12 new four-car train sets by next year to replace the current two-car sets.

"In the future, more rail projects such as the recently operationalised Line Extension Project for the Kelana Jaya and Ampang LRT lines as well as the soon-to-commence MRT Sungai Buloh-Kajang Line and future MRT 2, MRT 3 and LRT 3 lines will certainly bode well to attract more people to use land public transport," adds Mohd Azharuddin.

Towards user-friendly public transport

Further creating an impetus for the switch to public transport will be improvements being carried out to boost first and last mile connectivity to the rail systems.

"Through initiatives such as the

Bus Network Revamp, SPAD is working towards more reliable and frequent stage bus and feeder bus services while the Taxi Industry Transformation Plan is aimed at uplifting the taxi industry to keep up with consumer demand patters and technological advancements," says Mohd Azharuddin.

"Working together with operators and stakeholders, SPAD is committed to enhancing other aspects for convenient and seamless connectivity such as integrated payment, better terminals and Park 'n' Ride facilities as well as developing a mobile application that helps commuters plan their journeys better when using public transport."

Central planning is crucial

The establishment of SPAD as a central agency has, to a large extent, led to enhanced coordination and land public transport planning.

With all land public transport-related work in peninsular Malaysia being done under one roof, including drawing up policies, planning and regulating all aspects of land public transportation such as rail, bus and taxi services as well as road and rail-based freight transport, SPAD has been able to focus on realising the vision for a vastly improved public transport system under the Government's national transformation agenda.

"Since its establishment in 2010, SPAD has introduced various reforms to strengthen land public transport while overseeing the intense workload of implementing massive infrastructure projects designed to improve public transport connectivity in both urban and rural areas," says Mohd Azharuddin.

Railing up the economy

Beyond satisfying a growing demand, land public transport plays a catalytic role in accelerating and shaping economic growth.

"The provision of effective public transport services has the potential of opening up new growth clusters, enhancing the attractiveness of existing clusters and driving urban revitalisation.

"In addition, a good land public transport system moves people and goods efficiently and safely, contributing to better quality of life and productivity for the nation," says Mohd Azharuddin.

The Government's focus on improving land public transport is



Mohd Azharuddin Mat Sah.

not just targeted at addressing land public transportation problems but also providing job opportunities for graduates.

Existing projects such as the LRT line extension and the upcoming MRT services have provided job opportunities for many Malaysians in the technical, engineering and service provision roles.

"For example, the MRT 1 project has created more than 2,800 job opportunities for young engineers.

"Similarly, we envisage thousands of job opportunities to be created for qualified young engineers once the construction of the High Speed Rail and various other LRT and MRT projects commence," explains Mohd Azharuddin.

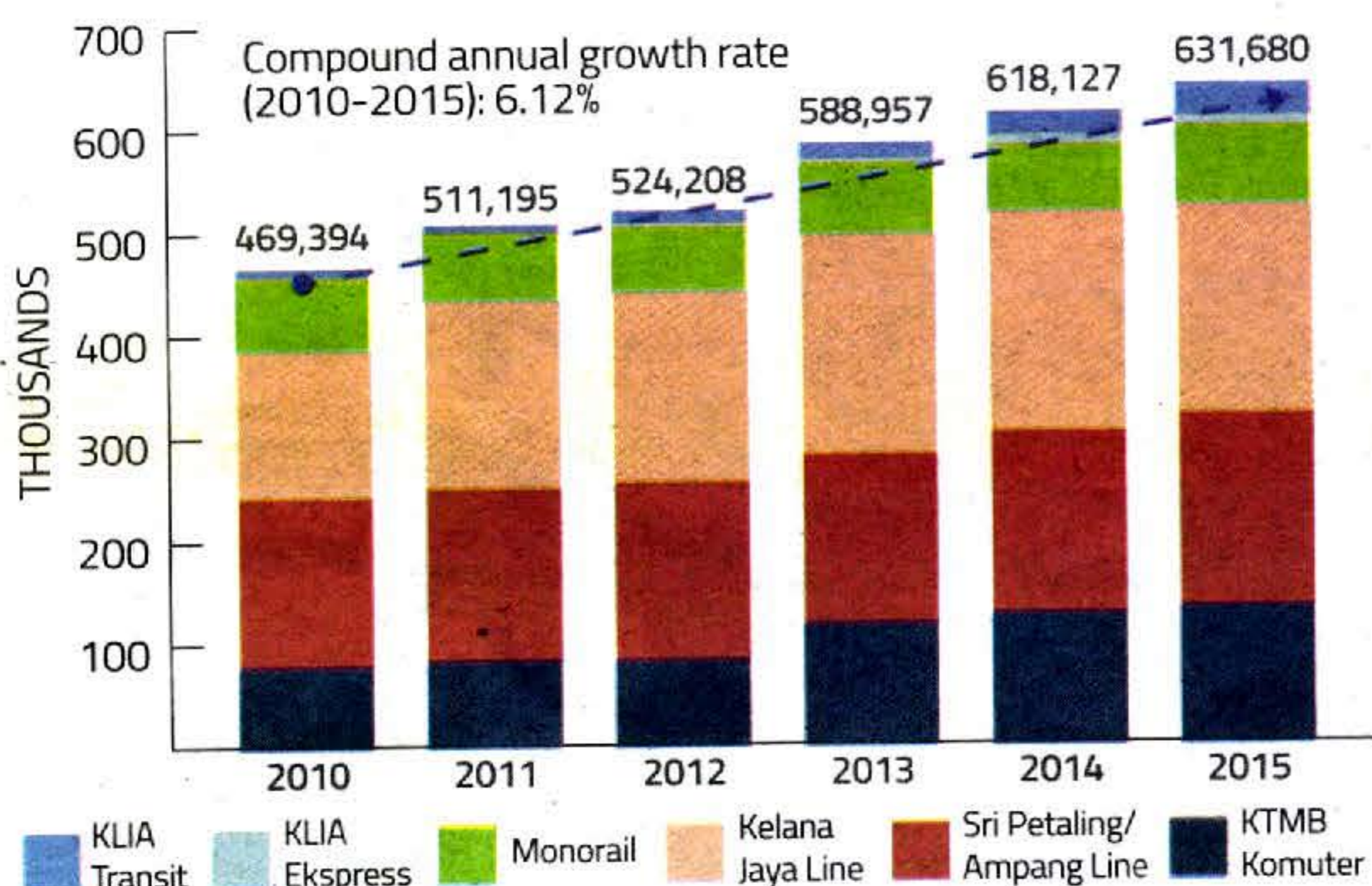
If such jobs were previously only available in developed countries, today, the evolution of land public transport in our country has provided opportunities for young talents to secure good jobs right here in Malaysia.

"In fact, we've also had quite a few professionals return home from their jobs overseas to contribute their expertise to these mega projects that will benefit the nation," he adds.

There are other positive multipliers of increased economic activity built upon an advanced land public transport network – it yields employment and business opportunities in local economies by having synergies with other industries such as advertising, education, retail and property development, among others.

Thus, in carrying out its mandate, SPAD remains committed to delivering better rail connectivity within the Greater Kuala Lumpur region not only to provide effective transportation solutions for the rakyat but to further stimulate economic and investment growth in the country.

■ For more information, visit www.spad.gov.my.



Average daily ridership for rail transport in Greater Kuala Lumpur (2010 to 2015).