

No escape from the gridlock

Traffic jams are going to get worse with more cars on the road

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PETALING JAYA: Traffic jams are not something out of the ordinary for Malaysians, with many “accepting” it as part of life, but congestion has worsened and experts say it will be a bigger headache this year.

Road safety expert Assoc Prof Law Teik Hua said the outlook for roads in the Klang Valley and major highways in 2024 appear to lean towards worsening conditions due to the continued increase in vehicle ownership, among others.

“The ongoing trend of increasing vehicle ownership is expected to persist, amplifying congestion concerns,” said Law, who heads Universiti Putra Malaysia’s Road Safety Research Centre.

Many motorists can relate to how a one-way trip from Melaka to the Klang Valley, which usually takes about two and a half hours, can turn into a five-hour crawl.

For writer Jarod Wong, 34, this was his recent nightmare with the jam beginning right upon exiting the Ayer Keroh toll plaza.

“It was a bumper-to-bumper crawl all the way to Bangi (Selangor).”

“I did expect some congestion since it was the Deepavali long weekend, but this completely caught me off-guard,” he said.

Executive V. Nithya, 29, said her daily commute to work from Shah Alam to Kuala Lumpur was supposed to be only about 45 minutes. Now, it takes her over an hour.

She is among thousands of Malaysians

who decided to purchase a car back in 2020 when there was a tax exemption to stimulate sales after the pandemic hit.

“I used to take public transportation when I first started working. However, during the pandemic I felt it was safer to commute using my own car.

“For the first year, the traffic was still bearable. A journey to my workplace in the city centre would take only a maximum of 45 minutes via highways.

“But after more companies lifted the work from home arrangement (as the pandemic eased), more cars were on the road. That was when congestion started to get bad,” she added.

Driving has got more exhausting for Rabihtul Adawiyah, 30, who regularly travels from Kuala Lumpur to her hometown in Taiping, Perak, on weekends.

“I can understand it if the traffic is congested during festive seasons or school holidays as it has always been that way.

“But last year, the traffic was bad every weekend. There are just more cars lately,” she said, adding that her journey would take almost double the time she usually needed.

“With the traffic congestion, I get tired more easily while at the wheel, so I would stop at the rest area a few times to freshen up and it does take a lot more time to reach my destination,” Rabihtul added.

Law said “unoptimised traffic flow and infrastructure limitations” were also contributing to congestion.

While efforts are under way to enhance public transportation, he said the matura-



Never-ending jam: Bumper-to-bumper traffic along Jalan Profesor Diraja Ungku Aziz is a regular thing for users. — ART CHEN/The Star

tion period for these improvements could take longer.

“Despite policy initiatives, the immediate impact on relieving congestion through public transport enhancements may take time to materialise,” he added.

Law said a combination of infrastructure improvements, smart traffic management and technological solutions is needed to address congestion during peak seasons along major highways in the Klang Valley and other urban areas.

This should include integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into traffic monitoring and management systems to significantly enhance their effectiveness, among others.

“Implementing round-the-clock AI applications for real-time traffic analysis, and notifying authorities promptly about accidents, traffic light performance and road conditions ensure rapid incident detection.

“They can also aid in swift responses for enhanced traffic management, road safety and the utilisation of traffic control infrastructure,” he added.

Law also proposed that policymakers prioritise a clear shift towards public transportation over private vehicle use.

“Comprehensive strategies including the enhancement and expansion of existing transit systems as well as investment in modernising and upgrading public transport infrastructure can significantly contribute to the reliability and efficiency of these services,” he said.

Promoting flexible working hours could also be a means towards staggering the morning and evening traffic rush hours.

“Employers are encouraged to implement flexible schedules to empower employees to start and end their workdays at different times, distributing the commuting load more evenly and contributing to a substantial reduction in the number of commuters on the road.

“This approach not only mitigates traffic congestion but also aligns with the evolving landscape of work preferences, offering employees greater flexibility and work-life balance,” he said.