

KL not ready for congestion charge yet

➤ Improved public transport, phased rollout, equity measures keys to future implementation: Experts

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KUALA LUMPUR: While a congestion charge could ease traffic in Kuala Lumpur, experts warn that several critical issues must first be addressed.

Malaysian Institute of Road Safety Research (Miros) head of corporate communications and knowledge management Dr Hizal Hanis Hashim said the main goal is to encourage public transport use to ease congestion, improve infrastructure efficiency, boost road safety, and lower carbon emissions.

Miros, in collaboration with the Malaysia Green Technology and Climate Change Corporation, is currently studying the feasibility of implementing the charge in the capital.

Hizal said public transport readiness is the most crucial factor in determining the success of congestion pricing.

He noted that cities like Stockholm and Singapore had robust public transport networks before introducing such measures.

"For Malaysia, the MRT, LRT and bus services have made good progress, but further enhancement and expansion are needed to meet growing demand," he said.

If implemented, Hizal said a hybrid model using Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) and Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) would be the most viable option for the capital. This would allow integration with existing toll infrastructure to ensure efficient system operations.

"Lessons from global cities suggest that for congestion pricing to work in KL, several key measures must be in place before implementation, beyond just improving public transport.

"This includes dynamic pricing that charges more during peak hours, transparent reinvestment of revenue into public transport and road safety, a phased rollout to test effectiveness, and seamless enforcement using ANPR and RFID."

Meanwhile, Universiti Putra Malaysia Road

Safety Research Centre head Assoc Prof Dr Law Teik Hua said although congestion charges have worked in other cities, Kuala Lumpur's urban layout and public transport limitations require careful planning.

"Currently, only 20% of the city's commuters rely on rail transport, which may not be sufficient to support a major shift from private vehicles if a congestion charge is introduced.

"Expanding services like MRT3 and introducing integrated ticketing are necessary to provide a reliable alternative," he said.

Law said congestion pricing could reduce traffic by 15% to 20%, based on international examples, with fewer vehicles on the road leading to fewer collisions and better road safety.

"There would also be significant environmental benefits," he added, citing Stockholm's 10% to 14% drop in emissions and London's 13% reduction in nitrogen dioxide levels after implementing congestion charges.

He stressed the importance of addressing social equity concerns, suggesting exemptions or subsidies for lower-income groups to prevent financial hardship.

To ensure a smooth transition, Law proposed a phased implementation.

"Starting with high-traffic areas like KLCC

and Bukit Bintang would allow gradual adaptation.

"Exemptions or discounts could be offered to residents, low-income individuals and commercial vehicles during off-peak hours," he said.

The congestion pricing proposal was first raised by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Federal Territories) Datuk Seri Dr Zaliha Mustafa on Feb 27.

She said it could cut traffic by up to 20% while bringing long-term economic benefits such as improved business access and increased pedestrian activity.

However, Transport Minister Anthony Loke clarified in the Dewan Negara on Tuesday that the government has no immediate plans to implement congestion charges in Kuala Lumpur.

Yesterday, Loke reiterated that the charge remains a last resort.

"Forget about that (congestion charge), it's the last option in our minds. We do not want to add to the burden of the people," he said at the Rapid KL On-Demand event at the Rapid Bus depot in Maluri here.

He stressed that the government's priority is to improve public transport services, not to impose new charges.