

Experts praise plan to reduce reliance on roads

PETALING JAYA: Transport experts are optimistic about the positive effects of the government's plan to shift more people and cargo away from roads under the 13th Malaysia Plan (13MP).

Road safety expert Law Teik Hua said the government's plan to push for increased adoption of its road-to-rail initiative was necessary to reduce heavy traffic on busy highways.

"This is a good first step towards reducing dependence on road transport by getting the logistics sector to switch from only transporting goods using large trucks.

"This may take a lot of load off key roadways like the North-South Expressway, resulting in lower carbon emissions as well," he said.

However, Law said for the plan to work, rail freight infrastructure needs to be improved so that it can compete with vehicles in terms of cost, flexibility and reliability.

"People can also lose faith in rail as a viable option if there are delays in maintenance or service," said Law, who heads Universiti Putra Malaysia's Road Safety Research Centre.

He also praised the government's plan to add 300 Demand-Responsive Transit (DRT) vans, 217 new train sets, and over 1,000 new buses to the public transport ecosystem.

"This is a big step towards fixing the last-mile connectivity problem.

"By reducing the existing load on extremely congested routes



Railway overhaul: A file photo of KTMB cargo containers parked on tracks near the Setia Jaya station in Petaling Jaya. Experts say rail freight infrastructure needs to be improved to support the government's plan to shift more people and cargo away from roads under 13MP.

like the LRT Kelana Jaya and MRT Kajang lines, passengers might finally see wait times between trains cut down to reasonable periods and less overcrowding.

"This would make rail travel much more comfortable, convenient and competitive.

"But infrastructure, maintenance and integration too must be updated and modernised to keep up with the growing fleet," he added.

Malaysian Public Transport Users Association president Ajit Juhl said the push to get logistics companies' trucks off the roads would help reduce accident cases.

"The challenge now will be on the government's ability to get these companies to come on board, as rail transportation may not be feasible for all forms of

cargo.

"Last-mile delivery challenges might also be an issue, so we suggest setting up a task force to learn why rail usage is low," he said.

However, Ajit said the government must consider removing or lowering the current fuel subsidy once the planned increase in the number of trains and buses is operational.

"It would not make much sense to continue subsidising petrol at such low prices if they want to encourage public transport adoption," he added.

Zac Cheong, vice secretary of Transit Malaysia, acknowledged that increased public transportation is a positive step.

"In countries like Hong Kong and Singapore, they have between

5,000 and 8,000 buses.

"If we want these services to be efficient, we need a large number of buses and vans, especially in the Klang Valley. Otherwise, it will not be impactful," said Cheong.

He highlighted that with a Klang Valley population of around 10 million, the public transport services must match this scale to truly benefit the people.

Cheong also suggested that if a DRT service proves popular in a certain area, a dedicated bus service should be introduced to accommodate the demand.

This comes after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the government would focus on promoting its road-to-rail initiative to shift cargo transport away from roads with the goal of raising rail usage to 13%.