2026 – year to rethink road and infrastructure upkeep

PETALING JAYA: From flash floods to crumbling roads, 2025 tested Malaysia's infrastructure like an unplanned stress test, exposing gaps in maintenance, planning and enforcement that must be addressed in 2026, said an academic.

Universiti Putra Malaysia Civil Engineering Department head Assoc Prof Dr Fauzan Mohd Jakarni said these were not random mishaps, but symptoms of deeper weaknesses in planning and maintenance culture.

"Roads and drains are not supposed to behave like drama series with weekly episodes, but that's what happened.

"Potholes reappear after patching, drains work only when it's not raining and floods show up like uninvited guests who already know the shortcut. The pattern points to a culture that is still too reactive – fix after complaints, fix after viral videos, fix after failures – instead of planned preventive maintenance."

Concrete examples last year showed how small defects can trigger major disruption.

"A stop-work order after flash floods and a mudslide in Seberang Perai last September highlighted how weak earthwork control, poor temporary drainage and inconsistent compliance can quickly escalate into public impact.

"Planning must indude long-term upkeep, maintenance must be a core KPI (key performance indicator) and enforcement must be consistent – because in infrastructure, the 'small stuff' usually becomes the headline."

Fauzan said potholes and cracks like these show why Malaysia must rethink infrastructure maintenance as small defects can become major hazards. – ***ADAM AMIR HAMZAH/THESUN***

Fauzan said Malaysia often prioritises shiny new projects over maintaining existing infrastructure.

"New projects are easy to launch and photograph. Maintenance is the opposite – if done well, nobody notices. Yet that 'silent success' is exactly what keeps roads, drains, culverts and public amenities reliable."

The Works Ministry estimated RM327.8 million would be needed to repair last year's (2025) damage linked to the Northeast Monsoon – a stark reminder that deferred maintenance turns routine upkeep into emergency spending.

Fauzan also warned that climate change is making infrastructure more vulnerable.

"Extreme rainfall turns small weaknesses into big disruptions. When drains, inlets and culverts are undersized, clogged or poorly maintained, they fail to manage water properly and effectively act as storage."

Fauzan said preventing a repeat in 2026 requires systemic reforms in procurement, design standards and maintenance practices.

"Procurement must stop buying the cheapest promise and start buying performance. Design standards need a reality check for extreme weather.

"Maintenance must move from 'only after complaints' to 'before it goes viral'. Routine drain cleaning, scheduled culvert inspections and condition ratings for hidden assets are essential."

Consistent enforcement on construction sites is also critical, said Fauzan, adding that delays in reform have direct consequences for safety, cost and quality of life.

"Small defects can turn into hazards. Cracks become potholes, weak shoulders become collapses, tired culverts become sinkholes. One rainy day can trigger closures and risky diversions. Let 2026 be about ensuring existing infrastructure works reliably under real weather, real traffic and with real lives depending on it."

– By ***Harith Kamal***