

'Improve road safety for students'

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PETALING JAYA: Schools can no longer treat roads outside their gates as someone else's responsibility, road safety experts say, warning that outdated school environments are putting children at growing risk amid worsening traffic conditions.

Malaysian Institute of Road Safety Research chairman Wong Shaw Voon said many older schools, once located along quieter roads, are now surrounded by busy trunk routes due to rapid urban development.

He said schools often regard areas outside their compounds as beyond their jurisdiction, despite students continuing to face danger the moment they leave school grounds.

"Schools, parents and authorities must work together to identify traffic risks and improve safety around schools," he told *theSun*.

Wong said separating pedestrian and vehicle movements remains one of the most effective ways to reduce school-zone crashes, although implementation is often constrained by space, cost and existing road layouts.

"The roads may have been small when the schools were first built, but over time many have developed into major roads with much heavier traffic," he said.

"However, there are constraints such as space, cost and even the local context."

Wong said interactions between pedestrians and vehicles are unavoidable in modern transport systems, but the risks can still be minimised through better planning and traffic management.

"If there is no interaction between pedestrians and vehicles, then there will be no crashes involving pedestrians," he said.

He also stressed that vehicle speed remains one of the biggest factors determining the severity of injuries in school-zone accidents.

"The likelihood of being severely injured at 30kph would be very much less," he said, referring to school-zone speed limits.

Wong warned that roads with lighter traffic could sometimes pose a greater threat because motorists tend to drive faster even when schoolchildren are nearby.

"The challenging part is that when roads become quieter, cars start moving faster even though there are still schoolchildren around."

On May 6, Johor announced plans to tighten traffic management around schools following the death of a pupil who was hit by a vehicle outside SK Sri Maimon in Parit Sulong, Batu Pahat, a day earlier.

Johor education and information committee chairman Aznan Tamin said the measures would include stricter control of school entry and exit points, wider implementation of one-way traffic systems, improvements to pick-up and drop-off zones and better separation of pedestrian and vehicle routes.

Universiti Putra Malaysia road safety researcher Law Teik Hua said poor traffic design was likely the root cause behind many school-zone accidents.

He said environments that rely heavily on ideal driver behaviour, such as obeying warning signs and traffic rules, are considered "weak systems" in traffic management.

"With poor design, including shared-use lanes, drop-off confusion or inadequate buffer zones, cognitive overload and unpredictability will occur with vehicles," he said.

Law added that mixed pedestrian and vehicle movement during school drop-off and pick-up periods created dangerous conditions around schools.

Separate walkways, crossings and designated drop-off areas could reduce conflict points where pedestrians and vehicles intersect.

Traffic-calming measures such as speed bumps, raised crossings, one-way systems and properly engineered drop-off zones would improve safety only if implemented together.

Law said enforcement alone would not be enough without broader improvements to traffic flow systems and school-zone infrastructure.

"A complete overhaul will entail the rearrangement of circulation flows, reallocation of roadways and pedestrian-friendly zones," he said.