

IF TOLL FREE

'ROAD SAFETY MAY BE COMPROMISED'

Without tolls, highways may be poorly maintained, says expert

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MOTORISTS cannot expect toll-free highways to offer the same standard of road safety as highways that impose charges.

Traffic engineering specialist Dr Law Teik Hua said without the fee, highways would end up poorly maintained and accident prone like federal roads.

"We shouldn't expect toll-free roads because who is going to maintain them? Malaysians need to be reasonable.

"If the roads are not good, will motorists drive 110km per hour on them?

"They will end up in accidents and there will be more fatalities and once again people will complain," he told the *New Straits Times*.

He was responding to brickbats over the government's plan to introduce a congestion charge to replace the current toll structure once it took over a number of highways, instead of doing away with toll collection altogether.

Law suggested that the government sit down with all stakeholders, such as academics and motorists, before finalising the structure of this new mechanism.

He was drawing on the 11pm-to-



Dr Law Teik Hua

5am toll-free period the government had planned as part of the move as well as the 30 per cent discount on tolls for use during regular hours.

"Jams usually start after 6am and peak around 9am or 10am. So the government has to clarify how they arrived at this calculation and structure.

"They have to engage with experts and people on the ground, especially those using public transport to ensure that the system is justified and viable," said Law.

He said there was a pressing need to plug "last-mile" issues by addressing the gaps in bus and feeder bus services to housing estates and so on.

"As the system is based on rewarding those who use public transport and cutting down on jams and pollution, they should also look into car occupancy by slashing rates for those who car pool," added Law.

He said the move was long overdue as countries like Singapore, the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic had implemented such measures many



Ajit Johl

years ago.

Malaysian Public Transport Users Association president Ajit Johl agreed that the system was good as it would encourage the use of public transport.

However, he said the government should also reveal what would happen to taxis and rideshare operators under the new plan.

"They need to clarify whether taxis, rideshare users and buses will continue getting discounts while also enjoying toll exemptions, so that the passengers get the most out of this."

On Saturday, the Prime Minister's Office issued a statement that the government had begun negotiations with Gamuda Bhd to take over the concessions of four highways in which the company is holding majority equity.

The government intends to scrap the existing toll mechanism when it takes over the highways.

The highways involved are Damansara Puchong Expressway (LDP), Western Kuala Lumpur Traffic Dispersal System (Sprint), Shah Alam Expressway (Kesas) and the SMART Tunnel.