

'CLEAR POLICY NEEDED'

WIDENING ROADS COSTLY, SAYS EXPERT

'Better to improve public transportation to ease highway traffic during festive seasons'

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EXPERTS believe that improving public transportation is one of the most important ways of easing traffic flow on highways during festive seasons.

Traffic engineering specialist Dr Law Teik Hua said instead of widening roads and highways, the authorities should focus on upgrading the public transportation system.

"It is not necessary to widen roads to ease traffic. It will be costly and time-consuming to do this.

"We cannot say that widening roads will solve the congestion problem. That is not right.

"We must have a clear policy whether we want to promote private or public vehicles.

"Perhaps it is okay to have roads widened to ease traffic flow in the future, but what about the off period (non-festive season)?"

"It is wasteful. Why don't we use our resources to invest in upgrading public transportation?"

"We have to think about how to improve public facilities to accommodate the demand," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Law was commenting on plans by the Malaysian Highway Authority to widen major highways and roads to ease traffic flow during festive seasons.

It was reported that traffic built up to 20 per cent more than the usual 1.7 million road users during festive seasons.

Law said travellers should plan their journey as it would ease traffic.

On the government's move to ban heavy vehicles during peak seasons, he lauded the move. However, he said, it would be challenging for business owners and travellers.

"Commercial vehicles that carry fresh produce and other goods need to meet demand (for the goods). The festive season is the time when supplies are needed the most.

"They need to send supplies to meet the demand. If they don't, businesses, especially in rural areas, will not flourish.

"It is crucial for petrol companies too. They need to meet the demand, especially during festive seasons, because this is when vehicles need fuel when travelling."

Professor Dr Wong Shaw Voon, who is Universiti Putra Malaysia's head of vehicle, engineering and mobility, said a study on road widening, especially in major bottleneck roads, needed to be carried



The Malaysian Highway Authority plans to widen major highways and roads to ease traffic flow during festive seasons. PIC BY MOHD YUSNI ARIFFIN

out to determine if it was necessary.

He said if the road widening project was carried out in bottleneck areas, the chances of other locations experiencing bottlenecks would be higher.

"This will worsen traffic. I think the authorities should carry out a study first before implementing such a project.

"This needs to be studied as it involves changes in traffic dynamics.

"Traffic congestion cannot be solved if the road-widening project is carried out in the wrong place. This will lead to more problems."

National Road Safety Council

member Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye said traffic congestion was not only due to heavy vehicles on the road, but also the increased number of vehicles and the inability of highways to accommodate this increase.

While lauding the government's move to ban heavy vehi-

cles during festive seasons, he said the matter should be discussed by the authorities and stakeholders.

"The government should get experts and other parties' opinions first to ensure that the move will be implemented in a more practical and realistic manner.

"They need to know what kind of vehicles that must be banned.

"Heavy vehicles that transport fresh produce, gas and petrol should not be banned from using highways as the demand for these supplies is high, especially during festive seasons."