

Do thorough study before drawing manifesto, says expert

National transport infrastructure needs to be enhanced further to give travellers more options that are similar in terms of price, comfort and safety

by AUFA MARDHIAH

BOTH Pakatan Harapan (PH) and Perikatan Nasional (PN) had not thoroughly studied their manifestos, particularly those related to transportation beforehand, which were made solely to appease voters.

Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Head of Road Safety Research Centre from the Faculty of Engineering Prof Dr Law Teik Hua said the PH government must think carefully of Malaysia's direction in terms of its transport policy.

"I am proposing to have a white paper on the policy because we must have a foundation, otherwise we are going to suggest many different manifestos. Even in PH's manifesto, many points contradict each other, particularly on private and public vehicles.

"For example, they claim that there will be more highways built in the future, possibly because they believe that people prefer more highways but at the same time, they want to provide subsidies, reduce public transport fares and build additional mass rapid transit (MRT)/light rapid transit (LRT) networks.

"They are encouraging Malaysians to use private vehicles as well as public transport, which are contradictory," he said to The Malaysian Reserve.

From an academic point of view, he said there are greater issues pertaining to public transport.

"Malaysians are aware that using private transport has its own significant challenges, including safety, congestion and the environment. These three issues can be addressed to some extent by enhancing and encouraging the usage of public transport.

"Our future lies in encouraging the improvement and use of public transport rather than private vehicles," Law added.

He also urged for the national transport infrastructure to be enhanced further to give travellers more options that are similar in terms of price, comfort and safety.

"More roadways are fine, but not in urban areas where there are already so many highways with never-ending tolls. If the manifesto wants to abolish tolls, who will maintain the highways?"

"The expressway is not like other roads; it requires a high level of maintenance without which, we risk a higher rate of fatalities," he elaborated.

On the other hand, Law recommended high-speed rail as an alternative mode of transport in Malaysia.

"This could also help with our economy by linking a high-speed rail between Singapore and Kuala Lumpur (KL), as well as between KL and Bangkok.

"Transport services are a requirement for us to expand further. It is an indirect yet sustainable mode of income," he said.

Commenting on the use of the e-scooter in the manifesto for the first-last mile initiative, Law said when investing in building the MRT and LRT, a portion of the funds must be set aside to maintain and sustain the first-last mile service first.

This, he said, should not be left

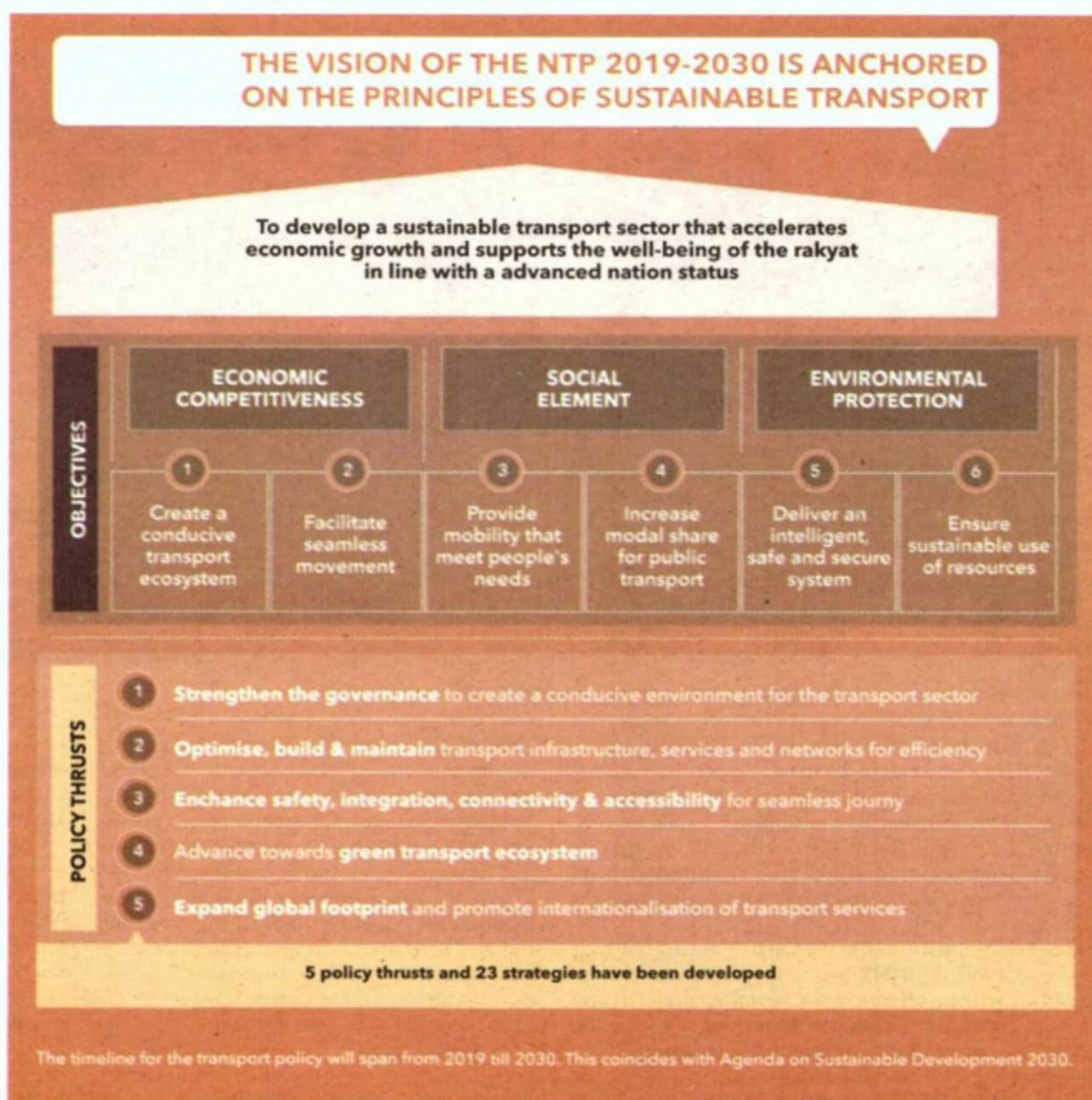
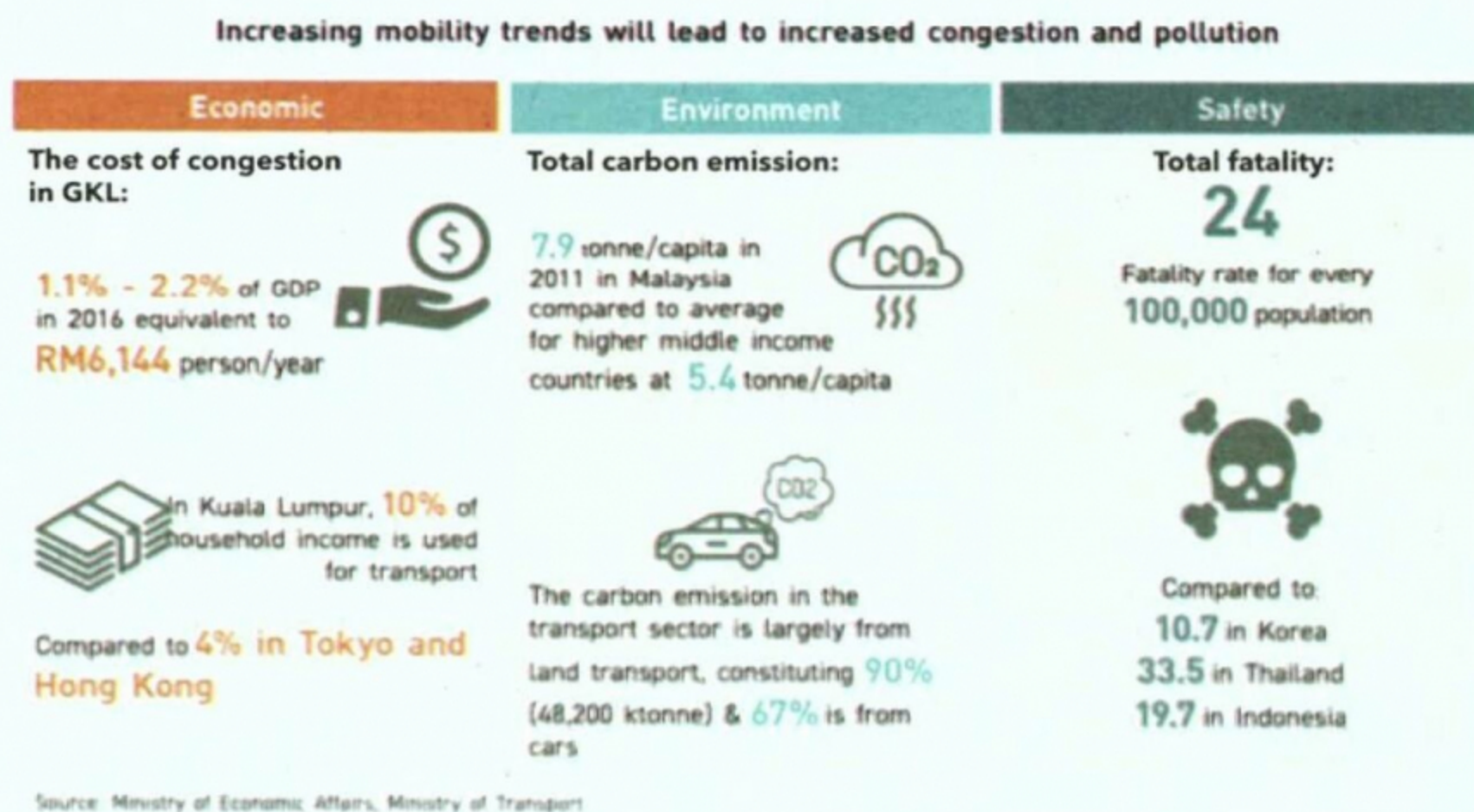


FIGURE 2: MOBILITY TRENDS AND IMPLICATIONS



to e-scooters, because the first-last mile service should be free.

"If the investment to develop this entire ecosystem is insufficient, the government must seek alternative funding to finance the first-last mile service," he added.

More on e-scooters, Law said the use of e-scooters to increase job opportunities in the gig economy is ridiculous, moreover with the addition of motorcycles on the roads.

"Working in the gig economy is beneficial but more high-quality occupations should be created for the long term. The other reason is safety. We will have too many motorcycles on the road if we encourage more people to work in the gig economy," he said.

Explaining further on Malaysia's first-last mile services, Law said that the service was not initially included in the transport ecosystem plan.

For example, the bicycle lanes in Malaysia are neither safe nor proper; they are essentially a section of the car lane.

"When we first built the LRT in the Klang Valley, it was too late to include the first mile service as the

city was already developed, which is why we must avoid repeating the mistake in other cities such as Melaka; Kuching, Sarawak; and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah — they still have a chance and it is not too late for them to develop the entire ecosystem," he said.

On road safety, Law stressed that the primary issue is motorcycles and that Malaysian roads were not designed for them, but rather for cars.

"I am not sure whether our previous governments were aware of this issue or not, but if they were, it appears that they ignored it.

"Yes, we have an inclusive motorcycle lane on the Federal Highway, which is preferable to nothing, but the volume is insufficient," he said, adding that not every motorcyclist takes advantage of it.

"So, looking back at the manifestos, none of the parties mentioned anything about transport ecosystem safety, which is critical.

"I suggest the PH government should act and prevent too many people from dying on the roads,

regardless of the mode of transport in question," he added.

Additionally, Law suggested for the government to fully utilise local experts to help in developing the country's transport system.

Bringing up last month's LRT disaster, Law said we still had to bring in experts from Canada which took a lot of time and caused inconvenience to thousands of people.

For a long-term solution, he said it is advisable to establish a local expert team to look at such problems and avoid the same issues from reoccurring.

"To improve the country, we must change our country's work culture and collaborate with the right people and experts," he said.

Law also advised against introducing new services. Instead, he emphasised on improving efficiency, cost, comfort and safety.

For example, he said the high-speed rail can be put on hold for the time being and attempts should be made to improve what we already have and transform the system.

On when Malaysia can be fully ready for a complete ecosystem,

Law opined that the entire transformation may take three to five years.

"As road users, we will have to go through a very difficult process to achieve this. For example, to ensure greater bus mobility inside the city, we must remove one vehicle lane and replace it with a bus lane. Drivers may protest at first and this will undoubtedly increase congestion, but it is beneficial in the long run.

"However, my concern is that if our policymakers look at this from a political standpoint, they will not be brave enough to do so," he said.

Law noted that the procedure will take time, as with reducing parking spots throughout KL or raising parking rates, which will, first and foremost, irritate the people.

He added that it should not be done in a rush, but rather in stages. After going through the process, people will adapt to the changes in their surroundings.

"Concurrently, bus services must be significantly enhanced so that people are more ready to abandon their private vehicles and take the bus.

"Timing is extremely crucial. I believe we can see changes if they are willing to take on this issue. Our first-and-last-mile can be replaced by bicycle or walking in the future, rather than an e-scooter," he concluded.

Alternatively, according to the National Transport Policy (NTP) 2019-2030, Malaysia has constructed over 200,000km of roads, over 2,900km of rail, as well as 18 ports and 22 airports which form the backbone of Malaysia's growth as a key player in the South-East Asian and global markets.

Among the objectives of the 2019-2030 NTP are: Creating a conducive ecosystem for the transport industry to enhance productivity and competitiveness; facilitating seamless movement of goods to boost trading activities and ease of doing business; providing mobility that meets the expectations of people and promotes inclusivity; increasing modal share for public transport; delivering an intelligent, safe and secure transport system; ensuring efficient and sustainable use of resources; and minimising environmental pollution.

In 2017, the transport and storage subsector contributed 3.6% to GDP (RM48.8 billion) and 6.6% to the value-added of the services sector. Between 2005 and 2017, the subsector expanded at an annual rate of 5.6% on average and is expected to grow at an annual rate of 8.9% or higher in the future.

NTP was also created for the purpose of providing strategic direction and acts as a reference point for ministries and agencies for planning towards developing an efficient, integrated and sustainable transport system; consolidating and streamlining initiatives and efforts towards common objectives and goals, contributing to efficient use of resources; addressing the bottlenecks that hamper the growth of the transport sector; stimulate domestic growth; and create regional footprint.

According to NTP, five primary policy thrusts were established based on a series of focus group talks, technical meetings and workshops involving approximately 150 government individuals, academia and the commercial sector.

The policy's key action items will be continuously modified and amended to address a wide range of national and regional issues.