

Good public transport system needs reliability, availability
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The members of Transit found the recent comments by Transport Minister Kong Cho Ha to be very interesting – and also a little bit disappointing. Kong commented at a recent function that "convenience" was the key to increasing the number of public transport users and to help the government achieve its goal of a four-fold increase in public transport use.

Unfortunately, like previous ministers (and prime ministers), it appears that the current transport minister seems content to lead the public along the "wrong track" (to borrow a public transport analogy) and give them the wrong idea about what is really needed to improve public transport in Malaysia.

Convenience is not the key to increasing the numbers of public transport users because convenience is not a factor that gets people to use public transport. Let's face it - the members of Transit are public transport users and we know that public transport can never be as "convenient" as having your own private vehicle - whether it is a car, motorcycle or bicycle - waiting at your doorstep.

Therefore, public transport users will never use public transport because it is convenient. They will use it because they do not have to deal with the stress of driving, parking, and paying for the purchase, upkeep and maintenance of a car - not to mention paying for petrol, tolls, etc.

Instead of convenience, public transport users are more interested in two things: availability and reliability. Availability means that the public transport service is within a reasonable distance (500 metres) from where they are and where they want to be. Reliability means that the public transport service is where it is supposed to be, when it is supposed to be and the journey takes a reasonable amount of time.

The other important thing that public transport users want is accountability. Accountability means that public transport operators are answerable to the CVLB, Department of Railways and the Land Public Transport Commission, and they in turn are responsible to the transport minister. The transport minister is responsible to the cabinet, Parliament, and the public - in that order.

Accountability leads to openness, transparency and responsibility. All of these lead to better availability and reliability will increase the number of people confidently using public transport.

The members of Transit find it interesting that the new transport minister, in his focus on convenience, has already forgotten (or perhaps ignored) the importance of accountability.

We note that in his first few weeks as transport minister, there were four derailments of KTM trains, three incidents of service disruption on the KL Monorail, two shutdowns of the KTM Komuter service that left passengers walking on the tracks and one frustrated group of public transport users - with a grand total of zero comments or statements from the transport minister.

The minister's silence is quite convenient - but it is not going to improve public transport in Malaysia.

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