

World Bank: KL a 'mini Los Angeles' of inefficient urban sprawl
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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 21 – The World Bank said in a report today that Malaysian cities needed to adopt more compact urban forms to improve livability and attract talent.

The report noted that Kuala Lumpur had sprawled to accommodate unrestrained motorisation and had been referred to as a "mini Los Angeles," referring to the fact that the US city has been widely derided for its unlovely and inefficient sprawl.

The World Bank's Senior Country Economist for Malaysia, Frederico Gil Sander (picture) told The Malaysian Insider in an interview prior to the launch of the report that the country needed to review its land use policies and make it cheaper to develop along public transit arteries and make it more expensive to develop further away from public transport.

"Create incentives for people to develop along public transport arteries," he said.

Sander also called for universities to be integrated more tightly into the urban fabric and attract more city dwellers to take classes or attend cultural events.

The World Bank report "Malaysia Economic Monitor: Smart Cities" noted that cities are central to Malaysia's aspiration to become a high-income economy as higher levels of urbanization are associated with higher productivity and overall economic growth and the inherent proximity facilitates the flow of knowledge that drives innovation.

It recommended that Malaysia make its cities more physically and economically connected as well as become more sustainable and offer a higher quality of life.

The report also noted that for Malaysian cities to become hubs of innovation, it had to increase both the numbers and quality of skilled workers by improving educational institutions and retain homegrown talent while at the same time attracting talent from elsewhere.

"Improving quality of life for citizens by reducing crime and congestion is a key factor both to attract and retain talent – as well as an objective in its own right," said the report.

Malaysia had neglected to expand its rail networks in the past unlike forward thinking countries such as Switzerland.

This was perceived largely due to the need to promote car ownership and support the national automotive industry.

Cheap fuel as a result of subsidies also made it relatively cheaper to drive in Malaysia than in other countries which helped encouraged urban sprawl.

The Land Public Transport Commission (Spad) was formed last year to help address the issue of lack of coordination in terms of public transport as well as to have oversight over the development of public transport in the country.

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