

BUSES NOW! BRIDGING THE GAP IN KLANG VALLEY TRANSPORT

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Introduction

Clogged streets; frustrated commuters; stagnant air. No public transport network is perfect, but that of the Klang Valley is at a critical juncture. As our megacity expands, the need for a seamless, accessible system becomes greater. This paper digs into the heart of the matter: completing our public transport network.

The Need for a Complete Public Transport Network

We dive into how a complete network-anchored in reducing traffic congestion, improving quality of life, and ensuring accessibility for all-is crucial for progress in the Klang Valley. As with any thriving metropolis, the ideal is for anyone (rich or poor, disabled or able bodied) to be able to move from any one point of the city to another via public transportation.

Challenges in Building a Rail-Centric Network in Klang Valley

While the advantages of a rail-centric transport system are undeniable, the path to implementation is very expensive. In the Malaysian context, we also have constraints other than budgets: topographical constraints, urban sprawl, and the intricate balance of technological advancements against community integration. In unpacking these challenges, we lay the groundwork for devising strategies that can

transform the vision of a rail-centric network into tangible reality.

The Importance of Buses in a Comprehensive Network

In pursuit of a holistic public transport network, buses emerge as unsung heroes, offering flexibility and accessibility that complement the rigidity of rail systems. Acknowledging the symbiotic relationship between buses and rail, we are free to explore the pivotal role of buses: providing non-rail transport routes, end-to-end connectivity, service to areas not covered by rail lines, and integrating diverse modes of transportation. A comprehensive network, therefore, must recognize the indispensable contribution of buses in achieving a truly interconnected and user-friendly public transport ecosystem.

A comprehensive public transport network should extend its reach to all parts of the city, including suburbs and outlying areas. High-capacity rail lines cater to longer distances, while flexible bus routes only enhance this connectivity. Internationally, Zurich stands out as a city with extensive tram and bus networks, ensuring comprehensive coverage.¹

One crucial characteristic of a comprehensive public transport network is interconnectivity, ensuring smooth transfers between different modes of transportation. This involves

¹ International Association of Public Transport (UITP), <https://www.uitp.org/>

synchronised schedules, convenient transfer points, clear signage, and accessibility features. In cities like Hong Kong, a well-integrated network includes high-capacity MTR lines, ferries, trams, and buses, facilitating efficient² and affordable travel.

Our Solution: 7,000 Buses, Mini Buses, and DRT for Improved Public Transport

As we confront the challenges of incomplete urban rail coverage in the Klang Valley, "Buses Now!" presents a pragmatic solution to bridge the gaps in public transportation. Since the 1990s, Malaysia has made commendable strides in urban rail development, boasting 2 light rail lines (LRT) and 2 urban commuter train lines (KTM). However, the sheer scale of the Greater Kuala Lumpur Metropolitan area, with an estimated population of 9 million people sprawled across 2,500 sqkm, renders it increasingly unfeasible to rely solely on rail infrastructure for a comprehensive public transport network

We call for a significant expansion of the bus fleet with an annual allocation of RM5 billion towards the public transport network. This investment would allow for a total of 7,000 buses, including mini buses and Demand-Responsive Transport (DRT) services. An expansion on this scale should aim to ensure extensive coverage throughout the Klang Valley, reaching areas that are

geographically challenging or economically unviable for rail expansion. Benefits of this approach would include enhanced accessibility, reduced waiting times, and increased convenience for commuters.

Benchmarking Klang Valley Transportation

Recognising the limitations of the current urban rail-centric approach, "Buses Now!" sheds light on the critical role of buses in crafting an inclusive and accessible public transport system. Despite already serving as a versatile mode of transportation, the bus network in the Klang Valley lacks the necessary scale to cater to the diverse needs of its residents. There are currently less than 8643 buses in London and over 5000 in Singapore; both cities with a population and size similar to the Klang Valley.

Comparison with Other Major Cities: Bus Ridership and Network Coverage

Drawing inspiration from successful models in cities such as Singapore, London, and Tokyo, where bus ridership contributes significantly to the overall public transport landscape, "Buses Now!" highlights the importance of a robust bus network. We take a look at some comparisons between the cities:

² World Resources Institute (WRI), <https://www.wri.org/>



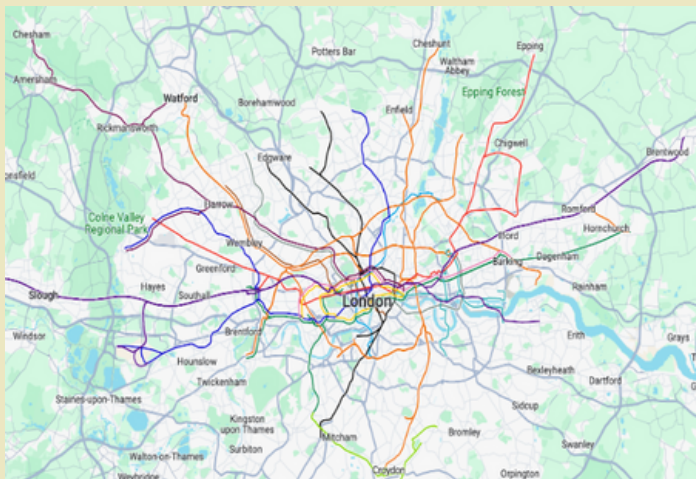
Total Train Stations in Klang Valley: 197

Railway Lines in Klang Valley (2,500 sqkm)



Total Train Stations in Singapore: 188

Railway Lines in Singapore (734.3 sqkm)



Railway Lines in London (1572 sqkm)

The Klang Valley boasts 197 train stations, surpassing Singapore's count of 188; this highlights the substantial investments that we have made in rail

infrastructure. However there is a proven gap in our public transport system-we lag behind significantly in an efficient and comprehensive bus network.

Today, the share of public transport ridership in the Klang Valley is only 20%,³ a far cry from cities like Singapore (83%),⁴ London (80%),⁵ or Tokyo (70%).⁶

City	Size (sqkm)	Population (Million)	Number of Railway Lines	Number of Buses	Number of Bus Routes	Public Transport Ridership
Klang Valley	2,500	9	9	724	323	20%
London	1,572	9.648	11	8,643	670	80%
Singapore	734.4	5.454	6	5,800	352	80%
Hong Kong	1,104	7.4	10	5,800	658 ⁷	90% ⁸
Tokyo	2,194	37	158	1,467	200	80%

A clear distinction in our public transport system in comparison with that of London and Singapore is the investment in a bus network alongside rail infrastructure. The resources that are directed toward developing rail transport does not negate the necessity for an equally robust bus network; a strategy that would serve us well to adopt.

Cities with an Agency that Actively Plans Networks and Routes

In West Malaysia, APAD is the agency that licences all bus operators. The model practised today is for the operators to plan their routes, and

submit applications to APAD for approval. While APAD strives to avoid duplication of service among bus operators, and to encourage bus operators to provide for social (loss making) routes alongside profitable routes, it does not go to the extent of planning the Klang Valley wide bus routes needed to complete the network. The alternative to this model practised by APAD is for the authority to plan the bus routes, and then tender the operations of the bus routes to bus operators. This approach aligns with successful models observed in other major cities, where strategic planning plays a key role in maximising efficiency and coverage of bus networks.

3 Kamarul Azhar, Kathy Fong and Kang Siew Li, "Cover Story: improving connectivity for all Malaysians," The Edge Malaysia Weekly, September 11, 2023

4 Esther Loi, "Public transport ridership hit 93.5% of pre-pandemic levels in 2023," The Straits Times, January 31, 2024

5 Saul Wordsworth, "Booming London exceeds pre-pandemic ridership levels," Traffic Technology Today, August 14, 2023

6 Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize, "Tokyo – Extensive rail network," February 17, 2021

7 Citybus Limited, Accessed December 2023

8 Lam, William HK, and Michael GH Bell, eds. Advanced modeling for transit operations and service planning. Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2002

There are three kinds of route planning in the urban stage: Authority-Planned, where the government plans the routes; Hybrid, a graceful blend of both; and Operator-Driven, where the bus companies call the shots. We explore cities around the world that practise these models of route-planning:

Authority-Planned Model:

a) Singapore: The Land Transport Authority (LTA) plans and operates the entire public bus network. This centralised approach allows for a harmonious collaboration between routes, schedules, and fares, resulting in a well-integrated and user-friendly experience for passengers. The efficiency of the LTA ensures a network that is not only extensive but also strategically coordinated, maximising accessibility and minimising redundancies.

b) London: Similar to Singapore, Transport for London (TfL) plays a starring role in Greater London's public transport. TfL oversees all aspects of the bus network, ensuring cohesiveness of routes, fares, and ticketing systems. TfL's centralised planning fosters seamless integration with other transport modes, creating a unified transportation landscape for Londoners. The London model demonstrates the effectiveness of a unified command structure in complex urban environments.

Hybrid Model:

a) Hong Kong: Hong Kong's public bus network employs a hybrid model, where the Transport Department sets the framework, planning major routes and establishing service standards. However, private operators are given the freedom to fine-tune minor routes within their franchises. This balanced approach allows for both centralised control and operator flexibility, fostering innovation and adaptability to changing passenger needs.

Operator-Driven Model:

Smaller Cities Worldwide: In many smaller, developing cities-Santiago, Manila, and Nairobi, to name a few-public bus networks allow private companies to act independently. With limited government oversight, these operators plan and run their own routes, catering to local needs and constraints. While this model can lead to fragmented networks lacking in overall coordination, it offers a pragmatic solution in resource-constrained environments where centralised planning may not be feasible

No city with a successful transportation system and high ridership around the world runs on routes solely planned by operators. This simple fact is testament to the importance of authority-based route planning, and sets a guide for the proposed model.

Gross Cost Model for Buses vs Operator Profit Model: A Cost-Effective Path to a Robust Public Transport Network

Traditional models where funding fluctuates with passenger fares or direct government management are in contrast with the Gross Cost Model (GCM) operates on a fixed daily fee per bus, paid to private operators, regardless of ridership.

This paradigm shift places the operational responsibility and associated risks squarely on the shoulders of private companies, while transferring the financial/profit risk of ridership and fares to the government. Through competitive bidding, qualified operators win contracts to run specific routes or networks, receiving the fixed daily fee as their primary compensation. Penalties and bonuses are applied based on adherence to the predetermined service standards; further incentivizing efficiency and service quality.

The GCM boasts several distinct advantages over traditional approaches. Firstly, reliable bus services have remarkable ridership. The PJ City Bus that is operating on a 15 minutes consistent interval has now tremendously increased in ridership. Secondly, the model fosters network scalability, allowing for easier expansion into underserved areas and increased frequency based on demand fluctuations.

Third, the inherent performance-based incentives drive operators to optimise routes, reduce costs, and enhance service quality, ultimately attracting larger ridership and contributing to a more sustainable transport ecosystem.

In the GCM, private operators take on the responsibility of maintaining their bus fleets, alleviating the government's financial burden. This reduction in upfront costs enables a more flexible and phased implementation of public transport initiatives, aligning with constraints in budget. By empowering operators to manage their fleets, the GCM promotes financial prudence and resource optimization, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable and adaptable public transport infrastructure.

Comparing the Models

Feature	Operator-Profit Model	Gross Cost Model
Operational Focus	Operational costs and profit	Performance and efficiency
Network Coverage	Limited to routes that operator can derive profit	Extensive, scalable routes, with regard for connectivity
Incentives for Punctuality and Reliability	Low	High

The Road Ahead: Embracing a Sustainable Future

Opting for the Gross Cost Model presents Klang Valley with a future characterised by a comprehensive, efficient, and cost-effective bus network. This approach fosters broader public transport use, reduces dependence on private vehicles, and contributes to a more sustainable urban environment. While a detailed economic evaluation is crucial for informed decision-making, the advantages of the GCM are clear. Embracing this innovative model provides a transformative opportunity to build a robust public transport system that caters to the needs of all Klang Valley residents and paves the way for a sustainable future.

Cost Effectiveness of 7,000 Buses vs. Expanding the Rail Network

In making the case for buses as a primary mode of public transportation, "Buses Now!" proposes a cost-effectiveness analysis comparing the

financial investments required to expand the bus fleet to 7,000 vehicles, against the challenges and costs of further expanding the existing rail network. This analysis serves as a compelling argument for the feasibility and practicality of prioritising bus-centric solutions to achieve a complete and efficient public transport network in the Klang Valley.

"Buses Now!" stands as a progressive and realistic approach, aiming to transform the Klang Valley's public transport landscape by leveraging the adaptability, scalability, and cost-effectiveness of buses in addressing the unique challenges posed by its expansive geography and growing population. Our proposal of 7,000 buses and an RM5 billion budget reflects an up-to-scale prediction drawing from previous conversations surrounding the PJ city bus and with Prasarana.

As we navigate the complexities and nuances of developing a public transport network in the Klang Valley,

We aim to shed light on the multifaceted considerations that are essential in creating a system that is not only robust but also reflective of the unique needs and aspirations of the region's inhabitants.

"Buses Now!" is a strategic proposal to complete the Klang Valley public transportation network with buses. Since the 90s, Malaysia has embarked on building urban rail to promote the use of public transport, with 2 light rail lines (LRT)⁹ and 2 lines of urban commuter train (KTM)¹⁰.

In the effort to both reduce carbon emissions through the reduction of private vehicle ownerships, as well as to reduce traffic congestion arising from a high usage of private transport, it is imperative that the Klang Valley develops a complete public transport network so that anyone can move from any one place to another by public transport.

Enhancing the Bus User Experience

Public transport in the Klang Valley is by no means inaccessible. In fact, there are a number of factors that stand in defence currently. We already have a monthly transport pass, at RM50 a month. This makes travelling by public transport very economical for users.

Another positive factor is the integration of public transportation information with Google Maps and Moovit, enabling route planning. But it stands to reason that we can still do better, building on ease-of-use for commuters.

Operational Hours and Frequency

Currently, bus frequency on most lines is inadequate for the needs of a growing metro area of 9 million inhabitants. Outside of a few frequent lines like the 250, 300, and 303 on the RapidKL network, and the 01, 02, 03, and 04 of GOKL, in the core of Kuala Lumpur, most bus lines practise 30-60 minute frequencies.

Even then, these frequencies are not reliable because buses are often caught in traffic. Increasing route frequency is the best way to improve ridership.

A 2017 University of Utah study examining 157 US cities found that increasing the frequency of service on existing routes was 20% more effective in increasing public transport ridership than adding new routes to the system.¹¹

Real world examples of this include Houston, Texas seeing an overall ridership increase of 11% and increase in weekend ridership of 30% once its bus grid was redesigned to accommodate more frequent bus routes covering more

⁹ Gamuda Berhad, "The History of Malaysia's Rail System," September 30, 2022

¹⁰ Ministry of Transport Malaysia, "Current Rail Services," Ministry of Transport Malaysia Official Portal, Accessed December 2023

¹¹ Angie Schmitt, "Richmond Shows How to Boost Small-City Transit," January 7, 2019

of the city,¹² and Richmond, Virginia, where the opening of a new BRT line, hand in hand with more frequent bus services and a network redesign, increased bus ridership by 21% within a year.

Bus Routes and Coverage

Currently, there are 318 bus routes across the Klang Valley that connect towns and cities from Tanjung Malim and Sabak Bernam in the North to Tanjung Sepat and Beranang in the South.

RapidKL is the single largest bus operator in the Klang Valley, with buses covering much of the region. Because RapidKL also run the LRT/MRT rapid transit network, the MY50 monthly transit pass and MyCityPass work on the RapidKL bus network, but not with other operators

There are parts of the Klang Valley which are mainly served by other bus operators. Outside of the MRT feeder buses, Kepong is mainly served by Selangor Omnibus and Causeway Link. The main bus lines connecting Klang to Kuala Lumpur as well as the Smart Selangor free bus lines within Klang are operated by Causeway Link and Handal Indah.

Currently, none of these operators are in communication. Planning is largely done in silos and there is little interconnectivity or discourse. Riders transferring from a RapidKL bus to a Wawasan Sutera or Causeway Link bus would have to purchase another fare, discouraging them from transferring between operators or even using public transport at all. This is further discussed on page 14.

Infrastructure and Amenities for Bus Riders

At present, bus and street infrastructure, i.e., bus lanes, bus stops, shelters, and benches, falls under the control of local authorities. This is how the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur has been able to enforce more bus lanes. RapidKL has engaged with the Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) to begin pilots of new bus lanes along Jalan Ampang and Jalan Genting Klang,¹³ and better enforce 14 existing bus lanes.

This had the equivalent impact of adding 41 buses to the network¹⁴ by improving bus reliability. Increased reliability and frequency of the RapidKL 300 and 303 bus lines along the Jalan Ampang corridor also contributed to a 15% increase in ridership along that corridor.¹⁵

12 National Association of City Transportation Officials, "Metro Bus Network Redesign, Houston," Accessed December 2023

13 Bernama, "Additional two dedicated Rapid Bus lanes at Jalan Ampang, Genting-Kelang to begin operation this Wednesday," November 10, 2023

14 Bernama, "Stricter enforcement to clear bus lanes in KL," Free Malaysia Today, July 15, 2023

15 Bernama, "Prasarana: Public Transport Usage on the Rise, Average of 1.1 Mln Commuters Per Day," December 1, 2023

Here, bus infrastructure refers to bus priority measures that can improve the frequency and reliability of bus routes serving a particular road or corridor. These include:

- Dedicated bus lanes
- Queue jumps at junctions to give buses a head start over mixed traffic
- Bus priority signals at traffic lights
- Bus priority box at bus stops
- Bus bulb/Sidewalk extension at busy non-terminus bus stops

Bus-only lanes help buses from being caught in traffic congestion, improving bus reliability and allowing bus operators to run buses more frequently. Other bus infrastructure like queue jumps and bus priority signals at traffic lights give buses priority at intersections, allowing them to get a headstart at junctions and proceed without stopping, allowing for more reliable, faster journeys.¹⁶

On top of this, adequate amenities should be provided at every bus stop. A study of perceived waiting times conducted by researchers at the University of Minnesota Center for Transportation Studies found that perceptions of wait time decreased at bus stops with more amenities. Bus users at bus stops that were nothing more than a pole in the ground reported that a wait of 10 minutes felt like a wait of 21 minutes.

This increased substantially for women in neighbourhoods that were perceived to be unsafe. However, once amenities like bus shelters, real-time arrival displays, and benches were added, this time penalty almost completely disappeared.¹⁷ Benches are also able to provide accessibility to the elderly or those with mobility issues while shelters provide safety from the elements. These might not be rolled out to every bus stop, but can be prioritised on the busiest bus routes.

In addition, there should be a complete network of accessible sidewalks connecting bus stops to places of interest including shopping centres, commercial areas, residential developments, places of employment, and places of worship. If there is no safe way for potential users to get to and from where they live, work, play, and pray, they are more likely to choose the safer, more convenient option: which is to drive.

A good exercise is to map a 500m radius around each major bus stop, and where it would be possible to walk safely (given the nature and completeness of existing pedestrian infrastructure) as well as priority areas that should be targeted for sidewalks and shade.

¹⁶ Better Streets For Buses, "Toolbox of Street Treatments," Accessed December, 2023

¹⁷ Fan, Yingling, Andrew Guthrie, and David Levinson. "Perception of waiting time at transit stops and stations," 2016

Integrating Public Transport Information and Ticketing Systems

Currently, each bus operator functions as an island, with little information about other operators. This can be acutely observed at major bus hubs owned and operated by RapidKL where there might be adequate information on what RapidKL routes serve the hub, their frequency, and real time arrival information, but little resources for users who need to take a bus run by a different operator, like GoKL, Causeway Link, or the Selangor Omnibus.

This can make using public transport a nerve-racking experience for those who aren't already familiar with the routes. On top of that, as previously mentioned, there is no fare integration between bus operators. While less of an issue for free bus lines such as those operated under the GoKL, Smart Selangor, and the PJ City Bus umbrella, it is still an issue for bus operators that require payment like the Causeway Link or Wawasan Sutera.

This means that a RapidKL user may not use their *MY50* monthly pass or *My City Pass* daily pass on a bus from a different operator. To deepen this well, there is no mandate for these bus operators to accept a common payment platform.

So while RapidKL accepts Touch n Go, private operators may still only accept cash payments, requiring users to keep exact change on hand to pay for their fare; creating unnecessary friction,

which can put off potential public transport users from using the bus service.

Advocacy

Gross Cost Model

The government should invest in the Gross Cost Model (GCM) for buses, as it is the pathway towards rolling out a complete public transport network throughout the Klang Valley.

The GCM offers an alternative to conventional structures by paying private operators a set daily charge per bus, regardless of ridership. This transfers operational accountability to private enterprises and establishes a competitive bidding process; kept in line by strict service requirements that the government has privilege to establish, while avoiding financial risk.

Bus services that are dependable and run at regular intervals have shown to significantly boost ridership, proving to be an effective means of satisfying public demand. The difficulty is addressed by the GCM's scalability, which makes it easier to expand into underdeveloped areas.

Using the Gross Cost Model (GCM) for buses presents a workable solution to the challenges the Klang Valley has faced in developing a complete public transport network.

Authority vs. Operator Route Planning

Page 8 of this paper explores examples of the three kinds of route planning: Authority-Planned, Hybrid, and Operator-Driven.

The foremost advantage of an authority-planned network lies in its inherent comprehensiveness. Unlike profit-driven operators who may neglect less lucrative areas, a public authority prioritises social inclusion. No neighbourhood gets left behind in the carefully planned routes, ensuring equal access to essential services, education, and economic opportunities. This holistic approach fosters a more just and sustainable city, where mobility doesn't hinge on postcode.

Beyond serving immediate needs, an authority-driven approach also allows for long-term vision. Unlike operators focused on fleeting profit margins, public authorities can invest in strategic route development, anticipating future growth and ensuring the network evolves alongside the city.

This forward-thinking approach protects against short-sighted decisions that might leave emerging areas disconnected or essential services inaccessible. In this way, authority-planned networks become a cornerstone of future-proofed urban development and anticipate the city's changing needs.

'Buses Now!' champions the implementation of a bus network

overseen by a government authority specifically designated to comprehensive planning of bus routes.

The aim is to integrate with the current rail network, allowing for efficiency in our transport system. This vision is driven by commitment to safeguarding the mobility rights of every individual, making it accessible for anyone at all to traverse the expanse of the Klang Valley.

Emphasising the importance of thoughtful route planning, this advocacy lays the scene for a public transportation landscape that not only connects points efficiently but also prioritises convenience and freedom of movement for all residents.

While the allure of operator-driven flexibility exists, it is the authority-planned model that offers the most compelling vision for a truly equitable, efficient, and sustainable urban transport system. By prioritising inclusivity, integration, long-term planning, and safety, authority-planned networks create a framework that empowers individual journeys while strengthening the city itself.

Public Transport Items in National Development Plan

Malaysia's National Development Plans (RMK) have consistently prioritised public transport in the Klang Valley, with each iteration laying the groundwork for a more efficient and integrated system. As we enter RMK-13, "Buses Now!" presents a transformative opportunity to

address remaining challenges and create a truly comprehensive network.

Previous NDPs have undoubtedly established a solid foundation:

- RMK-11 (2013-2020): Enhanced rail infrastructure with MRT Line 2 and initiated MRT Line 3, modernised the public bus system with BRT in Sunway, and promoted non-motorized transport options.
- RMK-12 (2021-2030): Completed MRT Line 3 and commenced construction of MRT Line 2 extension, focused on integrating systems with a single ticketing system, enhanced public bus services with increased fleet and improved frequency, and continued promoting active mobility.

These solid initiatives paved the way for a paradigm shift, not just in funding allocation, but also in planning and payment models. While requiring a significant annual investment, we offer a cost-effective and scalable solution complementary to existing rail networks.

By aligning perfectly with the foundations laid by RMK-11 and RMK-12, "Buses Now!" represents the logical next step. It builds upon past successes, filling remaining gaps, and propelling the Klang Valley towards a truly world-class public transport system. While the shift in policy and financial commitment might seem substantial, the long-term benefits for citizens, the environment, and the city's overall sustainability are undeniable.

Embracing these goals within RMK-13 is not just an investment in infrastructure, but an investment in the future of the Klang Valley. It is a chance to create a more equitable, efficient, and vibrant city for all residents.

Conclusion

The Klang Valley stands at a critical crossroads. We have laid a solid foundation for a robust public transport system and yet crucial gaps remain; it is imperatives we build on the bones of our rail system with an accessible, efficient, and equitable bus network that will allow mobility for all. This leap is embodied by "Buses Now!", reiterating the importance of a complete network through the gross-cost model where we emphasise an authority-planned public transportation system.

It is time for significant action: moving from operator-centric models to a system guided by a dedicated authority with comprehensive, long-term vision.

Implementing this vision requires commitment; the seemingly daunting financial investment is an investment not just in infrastructure, but in a more vibrant, sustainable, and equitable future. Each ringgit spent translates to increased economic opportunities, improved environmental health, and a city where mobility ceases to be a privilege, but a fundamental right.

"Buses Now!" is the missing keystone that will unlock the full potential of our public transport system.

We at Social Democracy Malaysia are dedicated to paving the way for a more socially democratic Malaysia. Our focus is on empowering policy makers with insights that have the potential to shape the nation's future. We believe in the power of progressive policy-making to drive change and create a better tomorrow for all Malaysians.

The principles of Freedom, Justice and Solidarity form the pillars of Social Democracy, and the basis to every structure that enables it.

We hope to achieve these through advocacy on three fronts:

- Climate Action
- Democracy and Governance
- Urban Planning

Social Democracy Malaysia provides policy-makers with the information they need to make informed decisions that will only benefit us all.



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