

Is it really surprising that only 16 out of 100 consumers use Public Transport in the Klang Valley? The often repeated reasons are just too many and has been going on for too long: long unpredictable waits, frequent unwanted stops, discomfort and lack of safety, unavailable information on routes, different payment structures, poor pedestrian friendly infrastructure and lack of park and ride facilities. What is particularly saddening is the government's approach or clear lack of seriousness in addressing these concerns. Much too often, budgets have been announced, petroleum subsidies removed on the pretext of improving public transport, fares increased in the end the situation for the public transport is no better.

Three major problems in the policy approach to addressing the public transport issue are the extremely fragmented regulatory system, lack of coordination among the differing agencies and stakeholders and the seemingly lack of political will to focus and address the public transport issue.

Thirteen agencies manage various aspects of public transport and while we have been told that these will be consolidated under a single agency in 2010, why is it taking so long. Will this new agency really be any better?

There is clearly lack of coordination among the various agencies, the transport operators and the needs and concerns of the consumers. The blame game is a common phenomenon, saying that this or that is under another agency and not theirs. The changing policy and program approaches appear often to confound the transport operator, themselves. There is clearly a lack of a clear long-term strategy to address the public transport problems in Malaysia.

Thirdly, almost every Prime Minister declares a concern and a focus to address the issue. There is a big mass media drama when the Prime Minister actually takes the public transport himself and express his shock and disappointment and maybe makes a few dramatic announcements. That is that. Nothing really significant follows.

What commuters want to make it a viable system of personal transport is simple enough a public transport that is accessible, affordable, reliable, safe and comfortable.

Some, maybe often repeated suggestions.

- Need for a single authority and a clear long-term plan.
- Well managed subsidized fares to ensure operators get fair returns and commuters get a good system.
- Limited and regulated competition of operators. Better organized and an integrated system.
- Available and timely information to commuters. Greater focus on the bus system instead of expensive mass transit systems.

Finally, while policy makers often focus their plans and budgets in the Klang valley such as increasing the LRT station or increasing the number of carriages, policy makers should realize that public transport is a serious national problem affecting almost all major and small towns. Not just a Klang Valley solution but a national long-term integrated public transport system is urgently needed.

Dato Paul Selva Raj

Consumer Research and Resource Centre