

(4 JANUARY 2021) The Star, P. 2

# DBKL not ready to dismiss use of e-scooters

Stories by BAVANI M  
bavanim@thestar.com.my

KUALA Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) is carrying out a feasibility study to determine if electric scooters can be allowed to continue operating in the city.

A task force is already working on collecting data from various government agencies on the matter before deciding whether to allow the usage of electric scooters (e-scooters) in Malaysia's capital city.

Mayor Datuk Mahadi Che Ngah said a decision on the matter would be announced in the middle of this month.

He said the study was crucial now that the Kuala Lumpur police had banned individuals from riding electric scooters on the road starting Jan 1 this year, with the exception of designated zones such as public parks and shopping centres.

"Kuala Lumpur traffic enforcement and investigation department chief Asst Comm Zulkefly Yahya has announced the police's decision to ban the use of e-scooters on public roads, and we respect that," said Mahadi.

He revealed that DBKL had been approached by e-scooter companies seeking permission for such vehicles to be used at designated areas and zones in the city.

He said it was important that a proper study be carried out before a decision was made on the matter as DBKL did not want a repeat of the situation it faced with oBike.

"We have learnt from our mistake with oBike, so we don't want to repeat what happened before.

"But neither do we want to close the door on the possibility of e-scooters without thinking things through first," he added.

DBKL had legalised the usage of the yellow bicycles operated by oBike two years ago as part of the local government's green initiative to reduce carbon emissions in the city.

DBKL had partnered with oBike during the 2017 SEA Games and Asean Para Games.

However, the initiative proved to be a failure and a logistical nightmare as Kuala Lumpur was saddled with the unenviable task of having to collect the abandoned bicycles ridden by the public in every nook and cranny of the city.

Some of these bicycles even ended up in rivers, drains and back alleys.

The once-ubiquitous two-wheelers were piled up like hillocks in DBKL's already crowded depots, waiting to be sold as scrap metal.

"We have established a task force and we are studying the viability of e-scooters very carefully.

"Our own research find that some cities have allowed it (e-scooter) and some have not," said the mayor.

"Which is why we are thankful that agencies such as Transport Ministry, the Road Transport Department, the police and Miros (Malaysian Institute of Road Safety Research) are willing to share their data with us as it will help us make a decision on the matter."

## Decision soon

Mahadi elaborated that the task force had been tasked with studying the data provided by all the other agencies and come up with a solution by the middle of this month.

He said that besides looking at the feasibility of e-scooter usage, the task force would also have to look at areas where riders would be allowed to park the scooters.

"Based on their findings, we will then make a decision whether it is a go or no-go," he said.

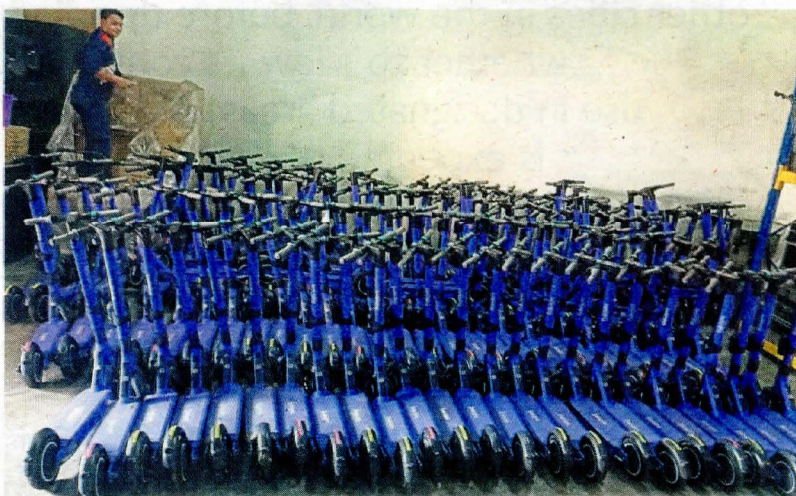
"If we agree to go ahead with it, there will be restrictions or conditions so that their usage does not contravene the police's ban," he explained.

While the e-scooters are not allowed on

## Task force collecting data from other agencies to help in decision-making



An e-scooter station in Bukit Bintang where the scooters for rent are parked.  
— MUHAMAD SHAHRIL ROSLI/The Star



Confiscated e-scooters stored at a DBKL depot.

the roads, Mahadi is willing to consider its usage in city parks and inside shopping centres.

He said another idea being mulled was creating a zoning system where the scooters were only allowed in certain zones and when anyone breached that zone, the scooter would automatically shut down.

Already reports are emerging from DBKL Enforcement Department that there are abandoned scooters in various parts of the city centre.

From September to December last year, the department confiscated 248 e-scooters from areas such as Bukit Bintang, Jalan

Ampang and KL Sentral.

## An operator's view

In an emailed response to *StarMetro*, Beam vice-president (corporate affairs) Christopher Hilton said: "The company has had numerous conversations with DBKL and has always been supportive of a regulated solution for these scooters.

"We are encouraged by the process thus far and hope to continue working with all stakeholders."

When asked about the scooters that were sitting in a DBKL depot, he said the company

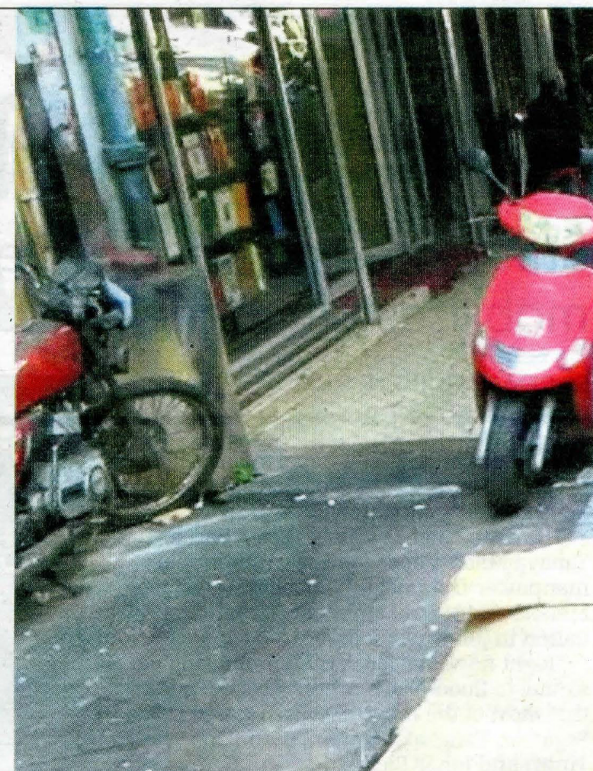




With the temporary licences issued by DBKL, hawkers often set up stall on walkways like this. — Photos: LOW BOON TAT/The Star



Bags of rubbish left on the pavement in Brickfields are a danger to the visually impaired.



Motorcycles are often parked on five-foot ways obstructing pedestrians. — Filepic

KEEP them off pedestrian walkways!

That is pretty much the sentiment of city folk in Kuala Lumpur when asked what they thought of electric scooters being allowed to be used in the city.

Many who spoke to *StarMetro* said that while they were not against the e-scooters, they would want it banned from sidewalks.

"As it is, motorcycles and bicycles are using pedestrian walkways even though they are not supposed to and that has made it dangerous for us," said Malaysian Association for the Blind's (MAB) accessibility and advocacy executive Siti Huraizah Ruslan.

"I hope the mayor will give further thought to allowing electric scooters on pedestrian walkways.

"Sidewalks currently are full of obstacles.

"The visually impaired have to contend with barriers like pillars, dustbins, rubbish and parked motorcycles and they have often been injured because of such objects in their paths.

"Those in wheelchairs are also affected," she pointed out.

Siti stressed that walkways with tactile blocks for the blind should be solely for pedestrians.

Senior citizen M. Ramoo said that as an

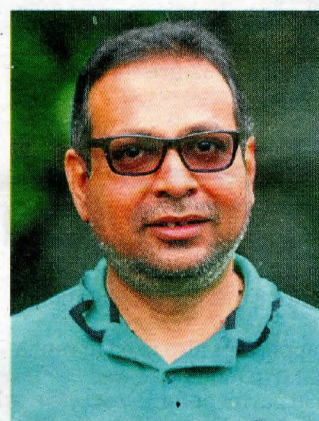
## City folk want DBKL to ensure e-scooters stay off sidewalks



Siti says walkways with tactile blocks should be solely for pedestrians.

elderly man in his late 70s, he had always felt afraid when walking on city streets in areas like Brickfields.

"I have seen blind people injured when they knock into obstacles on the street.



Viknendran says many street hawkers are operating on sidewalks even though they are not supposed to.

"A broken leg or hip is the most frightening thing for a man of my age," he said.

"While able-bodied people can move quickly to avoid something coming their

way, it is not possible for the elderly and the disabled," he added.

Bangsar resident M. Viknendran agreed with Siti and Ramoo, saying that Kuala Lumpur's streets were more cluttered now than ever with DBKL allowing traders to operate with temporary licence.

"Even though street hawkers are not supposed to operate on sidewalks, many do so," said Viknendran.

"While we cannot expect DBKL officers to be everywhere, they should at least make sure that people stay off pedestrian walkways," he said.

Cheras resident N. Ramesh said that he found e-scooters handy whenever he went shopping in Bukit Bintang.

"It is cheaper to use, easy to carry and friendly to the environment.

"I hope DBKL allows it, but there must be enforcement and the public must also be responsible with it," he said.



Mahadi says the task force will also have to look at areas where people are allowed to park the e-scooters.



oBike two-wheelers piled up at one of DBKL's depots, waiting to be sold as scrap metal. — Filepic

had not deployed several hundred scooters.

He acknowledged that some scooters had been confiscated at various times over the last 18 months but never more than 20 at a time.

"DBKL has never given specific reasons for the confiscation. Some have included our scooters being taken from private land."

Hilton said Beam had in place a virtual docking system that tracked riders and provided incentives for them to park in specific locations identified in the app.

"These locations are selected to ensure

that scooters are not an obstruction. Many of these spots are not on public land.

"More than 90% of all Beam trips end in pre-allocated spots.

"In addition, we have offered DBKL a 24-hour hotline to report any misplaced scooters and have committed to a 90-minute response time to collect," he said, adding that to his knowledge, DBKL had not used the hotline.

On Dec 12, 2020, ACP Zulkefly announced that legal action would be taken against anyone caught riding e-scooters on the

streets in Kuala Lumpur after the ban was in force.

He said that anyone caught riding the electric scooters in non-gazetted areas, like public roads, would be charged under Section 54 of the Road Transport Act 1987.

Offenders can be fined up to RM300 for their first offence, and up to RM1,000 for the second offence or jailed three months.

"It is dangerous and we have received numerous complaints from the public about it," said ACP Zulkefly.

He said that such scooters could only be

used in designated areas around shopping centres, and users must apply for a special licence from the Road Transport Department if they wished to ride the vehicle on the road.

Electric scooters became popular in 2019 as it was easy to use and one needed only 10 to 15 minutes to learn how to ride such a scooter.

However, just like the oBike situation, cases of vandalism, obstruction and the scooters being indiscriminately abandoned began to crop up.