



Makeover

needed beneath flyovers

Elevated expressways criss-cross our cities but little thought goes into using the land below to benefit the community, say stakeholders who want this to change. >2&3



Space underneath this flyover in Bukit Jalil, Kuala Lumpur, is underutilised. — Photos: LOW LAY PHON, MUHAMAD SHAHRIL ROSLI and ONG SOON HIN/The Star.

Chance to create urban oases under highways

Stakeholders suggest ways to turn barren spots into lively spaces

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ELEVATED highways are a fixture in the Klang Valley as the demand for connectivity grows and land becomes increasingly scarce, especially in urban areas.

But as more flyovers cut across the skyline, questions have arisen over how the empty spaces underneath could be better utilised.

Apart from being an eyesore, there are concerns that these areas trap heat and pollutants.

Petaling Jaya resident and retired biology teacher Alice Tan said solid particles and liquid droplets could accumulate beneath flyovers.

She pointed out that these harmful particles were released from vehicles.

"This will worsen air quality," said Tan who opposed the now-shelved Petaling Jaya Dispersal Link elevated highway project.

Another protest unfolded in Jalan Yew, Kuala Lumpur, over the plan to widen the flyover heading towards Jalan Sungai Besi.

Business operators under the flyover expressed concern that the project might reduce foot traffic and affect trading activities.

In Kampung Pandan, resident Aminul Rahman Zainal was also upset with a flyover project near his home.

"I keep my windows shut as I am worried about dust entering my home.

"I am also concerned that the project might affect the value of my property," he added.

In a 2017 academic paper titled "Elevated Highways and their



IOI Group Berhad has taken the initiative to plant trees and shrubs at the space beneath this flyover in Bandar Puteri Puchong.

Lost Spaces" by Mohamed Ikhwan Nasir and Raziah Ahmad, the areas beneath flyovers were deemed empty and leftover spaces.

The paper said, "They radiate a sense of abandonment and lost opportunities – a stark contrast to the managed and planned infrastructure above them."

StarMetro spoke to stakeholders on how such spaces can be rejuvenated.

More greenery needed

Universiti Putra Malaysia Design and Architecture Faculty dean Assoc Prof Dr Suhardi Maulan said more trees should be planted in these areas.

He also stressed that a comprehensive study was needed to identify suitable species that require minimal maintenance.

"Prioritise greenery that can absorb pollutants, not just ornamental flowers which serve little purpose," he said.

Suhardi also pointed to the concrete columns supporting elevated highways, which he said often displayed commercial advertisements.

"We should consider putting up artworks there which showcase local talents.

"Although local authorities allow advertisements to be put up to generate income, they must balance this against their social responsibility," he said.

Community activist Yee Poh Ping agreed that more greenery was needed to bring some colour to these empty spaces.

He pointed to several barren spots beneath the Duta-Ulu Kelang Expressway (DUKE) that cuts across Kepong Baru Tambahan.

"Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) should instruct the highway concessionaire to beautify these areas.

"This will also help absorb carbon dioxide which is in line with DBKL's mission to cut emissions by 30% by 2030," he said.

Town planning consultant Ihsan Mohtar said these spaces offered plenty of potential uses ranging from storage, rest areas,



The bare and dull area under the DUKE highway in Kepong Baru Tambahan can be transformed in several ways.



There is plenty of space beneath the recently opened Sri Petaling Interchange in the Sungai Besi-Ulu Kelang Elevated Expressway (Suke).



Ali says suitable areas should be turned into shelters for motorcyclists when it rains.



Suhardi: Consider putting up artwork on highway columns to showcase local talents.



The wall near the LDP interchange entering Bandar Puteri Puchong has creeper plants.



Chung: The company relies on a rainwater harvesting facility to water plants under the flyover.



Yee says more greenery underneath flyovers will help absorb carbon dioxide.



Motorcyclists sheltering under a flyover during a downpour. - Filepic

guardhouses and eateries. "Each site will have a different characteristic, depending on their location and the amenities found nearby.

"The planning authority should conduct an audit to ascertain the most suitable use for each site to ensure optimal usage of space," he said.

Datuk M. Ali, chairman of non-profit Save Kuala Lumpur, proposed that suitable spots be turned into proper shelters for motorcyclists when it rains.

"It's usual to see them taking shelter under bridges and flyovers, which is a safety hazard."

Beautification attempts

DBKL, in a statement to *StarMetro*, said it had made efforts to beautify several spaces

beneath the elevated highways by having more greenery.

These areas included the space underneath the flyovers in Jalan Sultan Abdul Halim, Mont Kiara, Jalan Tun Razak and Sprint Highway as well as areas along DUKE in Bandar Baru Sentul and Jalan Genting Klang, Setapak.

DBKL, however, said it faced constraints when undertaking beautification and landscape projects in such areas.

Apart from the high cost, it also said that many of these areas receive minimal sunlight and this limits the types of plants that can be grown there.

"Other parties such as the highway concessionaire and Public Works Department are also involved in the maintenance," it added.

In Selangor, developer IOI Group Bhd took the initiative to have greenery underneath the flyover heading towards the Bandar Puteri Puchong township.

Located near the Puchong Financial Corporate Centre (PFCC), the area under the 250m-long structure is also lit up from 7.30pm to 6.30am daily.

IOI Properties Group property development senior general manager Chung Nyuk Kiong said it cost RM2mil to set up.

He said that the company forks out RM30,000 monthly to water, fertilise and prune the plants.

"As part of our sustainability drive, we also rely on a rainwa-

ter harvesting facility located at PFCC Tower 1 to water the plants," he added.

Good ideas worldwide

Our local authorities should be taking inspiration from some projects implemented worldwide.

More cities are taking steps to turn the spaces beneath flyovers into functional venues.

Early this year, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation in Mumbai reportedly made plans to spruce up the area under the Western Express Highway, a 25.3km artery that connects local suburbs.

It was reported that walkways, parks and children's playgrounds would be developed.

It was part of the "Mumbai Beautification Project" and was aimed at keeping vagrants and beggars away from these areas.

In Toronto, Canada, spots under the Don Valley Parkway - a municipal highway that cuts across a local neighbourhood and links to the downtown areas - were turned into a public park.

It was named the "Underpass Park" and features a playground, basketball courts, skate parks and murals by indigenous artists.

Opened in two phases - 2005 and 2013 - the park project cost \$9.5mil (RM31.3mil) and was funded by the Canadian government.

In London, United Kingdom, a space under the A12 motorway in the Hackney Wick neighbourhood became a venue for public arts exhibitions and performances by locals.

A non-profit organisation called "Assemble" set up the site in 2011 using donated materials and named it "Folly For A Flyover".

In the daytime, the area hosts a cafe, while at night, there are movies screened near the river.

In Texas, United States, the San Antonio River Walk is located under the Interstate 35 Highway.

The walkway, which is lit up at night, connects local attractions such as restaurants, shops and cultural spaces.