Disposal dilemma

There is a growing problem of abandoned cars in Kuala Lumpur, especially in public housing where they take up 10%-15% of parking bays. While residents fume, City Hall's effort to remove and scrap these vehicles is hampered by cost and time factors. >2&3

Marked for removal: Kuala Lumpur City Hall officers tagging abandoned and unclaimed cars at its depot in Cheras for disposal. — SHAARI CHEMAT/The Star

YOUR RIGHT to KNOW

Sharp increase in notices for derelict cars in KL

Irresponsible owners a blight to urban communities, says DBKL

By BAVANI M
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BETWEEN 10% and 15% of parking bays at government housing projects in Kuala Lumpur are being occupied by abandoned vehicles.

Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) Socio-Economic Development executive director Ismadi Sakirin said this only exacerbated the parking shortage issue at these projects as other residents were deprived of these bays.

"These valuable parking bays are being occupied by residents' old, non-functional vehicles," said Ismadi.

Although he did not have the exact figures at hand, he added that the problem was more prevalent in high-density areas in the city.

"Given that parking is often limited in such areas, losing that many bays to abandoned vehicles can cause considerable inconvenience for other residents," he said.

"This also contributes to traffic congestion and residents end up parking illegally or haphazardly."

Ismadi urged vehicle owners to act responsibly and avoid using public spaces for abandoned cars, thus putting further strain on limited parking resources in these communities.

It is no secret that DBKL is facing challenges and pressure to manage the city's growing abandoned vehicles problem, as the latest data from the local authority reveals a sharp increase in the number of notices issued for such cases up to August 2024.

With almost 2,000 notices served in the first half of this year, this figure exceeds what was recorded previously, signalling a looming vehicle disposal crisis.

In 2022, some 722 notices were issued to owners of abandoned vehicle.

Despite these challenges, the local authority claims that the situation remains manageable and is stepping up enforcement efforts to tow away and dispose of these derelict cars.

A DBKL contractor moving a car to be disposed for scrap metal. — Photos: SHAARI CHEMAT/The Star

"The situation is still under control, largely because of the opening of a third depot in Pantai Sentral, which can take in 800 vehicles at any one time," said Ismadi.

"No doubt our resources are being stretched to the limit, but we are hopeful the new depot will give us the additional time needed to carry out the legal process to dispose of these vehicles."

Pantai Sentral depot in Pantai Dalam, Kuala Lumpur, was launched by Ismadi in May.

The depot spans 1.01ha and was built at a cost of RM600,000 on DBKL-owned land.

The construction of this depot was fully funded by Amona Development Sdn Bhd as part of its corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative, in partnership with DBKL for the development of Pantai Sentral Park.

Other than the Pantai Sentral depot, DBKL operates two depots in Taman Connaught, Cheras, and Sentul.

The three depots have a combined capacity of 3,000 vehicles.

Identifying areas

Ismadi said abandoned vehicles could be seen throughout the city, particularly in low-cost government housing such as people's housing projects (PPRs) and public housing (PAs).

StarMetro recently reported that there were more than 1,600 abandoned vehicles in public housing projects across Kuala Lumpur.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Federal Territories) Dr Zaliha Mustafa revealed that the abandoned vehicles were located in 64 PPRs and PAs.

This is not surprising as data from the Statistics Department shows that 450,000 of Kuala Lumpur's 1.6 million population, referring to a quarter of the city's residents, live in PPRs and PAs.

"When we built public housing for low-income residents, they were only meant for rental and never intended to be a permanent living arrangement because of limited space per unit," Ismadi said.

"Originally, every four units were meant to share just one parking bay.

"Today, the situation has reversed; each unit now has four cars, some even more. That was never the plan."

He added that people were expected to improve their circumstances and move on once their livelihoods stabilised.

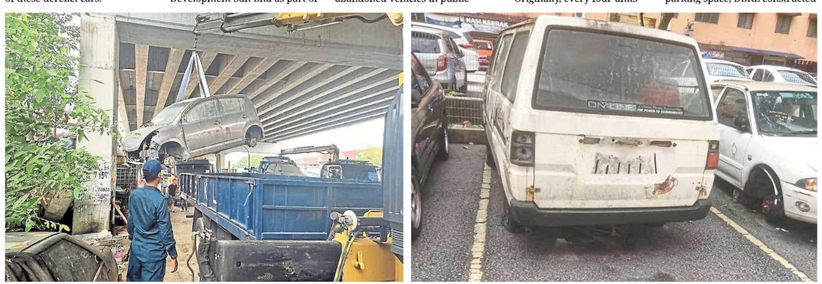
"However, these units have become home to extended families, with some housing as many as eight to 10 members, including children, spouses and grandchildren," explained Ismadi.

"As a result, each family now owns multiple cars and motorcycles, leading to a severe lack of parking space."

To address the issue of limited parking space, DBKL constructed 10 multi-storey carparks at various PPR and PA areas across the city, at an average cost of RM30 million each.

However, in some locations, only 50% of the parking bays were being utilised, while at others, the usage dropped to below 40%, with entire floors remaining vacant as residents refuse to pay the RM60 monthly parking fee, according to Ismadi's predecessor, Datuk Anwar Zain.

Despite the severe shortage of parking spaces in PPRs and PAs throughout Kuala Lumpur, residents still preferred to double- and triple-park their vehicles rather than use DBKL's multi-storey carparks, he had said.



A crane being used to hoist a car from a tight space. (Right) Abandoned vehicles spotted at the carpark in PPR Sri Aman. — Courtesy photos

Eyesores on the rise

According to Ismadi, a range of factors had contributed to the growing number of abandoned vehicles in the city.

"The rise of affordable cars has made vehicle ownership more accessible, but it has also contributed to the oversupply of cars in urban areas," he said.

"When these cars reach the end of their lifespan, many owners find it easier and cheaper to abandon them rather than pay for repairs or proper disposal."

Ismadi also pointed out that the booming ehailing industry played a significant role.

"To become an ehailing driver, regulations require the use of newer cars.

"This has led to many upgrading their vehicles and leaving their old ones behind.

"The financial strain of maintaining two vehicles or the low resale value of older models often results in the latter being abandoned," he added.

He said space limitations in densely populated areas, particularly in low-cost government housing projects, worsened the problem.

Economic factors and a lack of awareness also play a role.

"For some, the cost of disposing of a vehicle properly is a hassle, while others simply aren't aware of the procedures for de-registering and scrapping their cars," said Ismadi.

Legal barriers

Legal barriers added complexity to the abandoned vehicles issue, said Ismaidi, while land constraints and lack of space were significant challenges in Kuala Lumpur.

"We have limited land available to build new depots for storing these vehicles before they are disposed of," he added.

He emphasised that this shortage of space not only affected where the abandoned vehicles could be stored but also hindered efforts to clear them from public areas.

"The limited availability of land for new depots makes it harder to scale up our operations to keep up with the rising number of abandoned cars."

StarMetro spoke to community leaders living in government schemes in the city and the consensus was that the situation was getting serious.

PPR Sri Aman Rukun Tetangga chairman and Residents Association adviser Mohamed Nawaz Koya said over 100 vehicles, including motorcycles, had been abandoned in the area.

"DBKL needs to remove these eyesores as they pose health risks by becoming breeding grounds for mosquitoes and other diseases," he said.

"We have lived here since 2017 and the number of abandoned vehicles has made it nearly impossible to find parking during peak hours.

"These vehicles aren't just taking up space; they have become a safety hazard."

Echoing similar concerns, PPR Kampung Muhibbah Residents Association chairman Attar Bacha Haja said, "These abandoned cars are making our lives difficult.

"It's a struggle to find parking and it's frustrating to see spaces occupied by derelict vehicles.

"The congestion is getting worse, forcing us to park far from our homes or resort to illegal parking."

Both want DBKL to remove these abandoned vehicles.

City Hall's costly battle with abandoned vehicles

DESPITE spending millions of ringgit each year to remove abandoned vehicles from the streets, Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) recoups only a fraction of this cost through annual vehicle auctions, generating an average of RM300,000.

"This is a problem-solving mission," said DBKL executive director (Socio-Economic Development) Ismadi Sakirin.

"We spend millions just to clear the vehicles every year and a significant portion of that cost goes towards logistics – using lorries, cranes, tow trucks and sky cranes – and paying staff overtime for working beyond regular hours.

"We have only 14 tow trucks available.

"In some cases, we have to use a crane to lift vehicles out of tight spaces, where manoeuvring in and out is difficult and time-consuming.

"If the vehicle is too large to access the area, we have to wait for the next available, appropriately sized lorry," he said.

The lengthy procedure to remove and dispose of abandoned vehicles can take up to six months or more, starting with a 14-day notice.

This is often delayed further as some owners try to evade responsibility by relocating their vehicles.

"The notice is placed on the vehicle, giving the owner 14 days to remove it.

"However, some owners try to avoid the process by simply moving the vehicle elsewhere.

"This forces us to restart the process by issuing another notice," he said.

After the 14-day period, the vehicle is towed to a depot, where DBKL verifies its status with agencies such as Road Transport Department (JPJ) and the police.

"When we take these vehicles, we must file a police report.

"There is always a possibility that the vehicle has been stolen or used in a crime," he said.

Owners are then given three to six months to come forward and claim the vehicle.

If they fail to do so, the vehicle is sold at auction to scrap metal dealers.

"The auction process is carried out through an open tender and components are sold to the highest bidder," said Ismadi, adding that these auctions were typically held once a year, involving the disposal of between 500 and 1,000 vehicles.

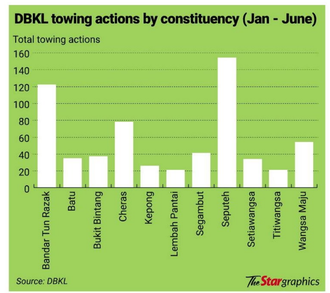
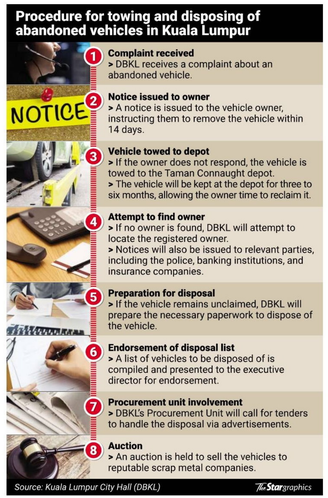
Ismadi urged vehicle owners to take responsibility for their old vehicles, emphasising the potential savings.

"If people could just do the needful and dispose of their old vehicles themselves, it would save the city a lot of money and resources," he said.

Ismadi said old housing estates usually had many abandoned vehicles too.

For gated and guarded properties with strata titles, joint management bodies (JMBs) and management corporations (MCs) have the authority to address this issue.

"They can handle abandoned vehicles through their house rules, following a process similar to ours, which involves filing a police report and liaising with JPJ," Ismadi explained. — **By BAVANI M**

DBKL officers at the depot in Cheras which holds numerous vehicles needing to be disposed of. — SHAARI CHEMAT/The Star

Ismadi says almost 2,000 notices have been served in just the first half of this year.