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PEDESTRIAN bridges are typically designed to enhance safety, but in some cases, they fail to achieve this objective because they are ignored by pedestrians.

Subsequently, these structures become more of a concern than a solution, raising questions about their true effectiveness and usage.

Notable examples are pedestrian bridges in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, intended to serve the visually impaired community and the elderly in particular.

However, some of these bridges have turned into eyesores littered with rubbish and frequented by vagrants and drug addicts.

This led the local government to demolish one bridge two years ago and remove the lift shafts of another nearby.

The move proved to be an expensive lesson for Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL), as the demolition and removal cost about RM400,000.

Stakeholders had protested the construction of these bridges, as they predicted the structures would become white elephants.

At least three footbridges were built on narrow streets with low traffic or near other viable crossing options.

For instance, bridges on Jalan Sultan Abdul Samad (near Wisma Harapan) and Jalan Rozario (connecting to Sentral Suites) are both located right next to street-level pedestrian crossings.

In Cheras, a Jalan Ikan Emas pedestrian bridge to cross busy Jalan Loke Yew was found to be in poor condition.

The bridge was littered with leaves and rubbish, its lift non-operational and a stall was set up in front of the lift.

Moreover, the passage for pedestrians to access the bridge from Jalan Ikan Emas was blocked.

Road Safety Engineering and Environment Centre (REER) director Dr Rizati Hamidun said

Ensuring pedestrians cross city roads safely

Some prefer bridges while others opt for signalised crossings

that while some older pedestrian bridges in Kuala Lumpur had limitations, demolishing them was not cost-effective.

"Although some bridges may not be fully utilised, with the right improvements, they can still serve their purpose," she said.

Rizati's team conducted a comprehensive study across 16 sites in Kuala Lumpur, examining pedestrian behaviour and bridge usage.

The study categorised bridges by location – school zones, residential areas, amenity hubs and business districts.

It monitored sites near schools (Jalan Raja Abdullah, Jalan Tun Sambanthan and Jalan Ampang), residential areas (Jalan Hang Tuah and Bangsar), transport hubs such as mass rapid transit (MRT) and light rail transit (LRT) stations, and business districts (Jalan Raja Laut).

The study found that bridges are most effective in high-activity zones, such as near schools and residential areas, but less so in business districts unless integrated seamlessly with pedestrian flow.

Key findings highlighted the importance of strategic placement, traffic volume and convenience.

Bridges worked best where traffic was dense and physical barriers helped direct pedestrian movement, said Rizati.

"However, proximity to traffic lights often result in low usage of a bridge as pedestrians prefer street-level crossings.

"Our recommendation is to place pedestrian bridges strategi-



Bridges are most effective in high-activity zones, such as near schools and residential areas. — YAP CHEE HONG/The Star

cally: away from traffic lights, where traffic volume is high and use fencing to guide pedestrians," she said.

The study also addressed reducing jaywalking through strategic placement of pedestrian facilities and railings to guide pedestrian flow to designated crossings.

"Future urban planning must consider these factors to develop more efficient and safer crossing facilities," said Rizati.

She pointed out that crossing carelessly and failure to use designated pedestrian facilities were leading causes of fatalities.

In 2023, over 200 pedestrian deaths were attributed to such behaviour.

Between 2019 and 2023, 1,662 pedestrians lost their lives in Malaysia, with a notable decline in 2020 because there were fewer people on the roads during the Covid-19 pandemic.

To address these safety issues, Rizati advocates for compliance with MS 1184, which is Malaysia's standard for universal design and accessibility in the built environment.

"Adopting universal design principles for pedestrian bridge design is a proactive approach to improving safety, accessibility and usability.

"By ensuring that bridges are inclusive and cater to diverse needs, cities like Kuala Lumpur can significantly reduce jaywalking incidents, minimise road accidents and encourage safer pedestrian behaviour," she elaborated.

These standards offer a sustainable solution that aligns with modern urban planning goals,



Rizati says while older bridges have limitations, demolishing them is not cost-effective.



Ahmad Daniel says as a wheelchair user, he prefers using pedestrian bridges.

fostering a connected and accessible city for all.

"We all want to live in an environment that is accessible, usable and inclusive for everyone, regardless of age or ability.

"The MS 1184 standard promotes features that ensure safety, comfort and accessibility, which are crucial in public infrastructure such as pedestrian bridges," said Rizati.

Implementing these principles could be key to reducing pedestrian deaths, as safer infrastructure encouraged proper usage and reduced risky behaviour, she said.

Echoing her sentiment is Damai Disabled Persons Association Malaysia president Murugeswaran Veerasamy, who said pedestrian bridges must be fully accessible to people with disabilities, including those using wheelchairs or mobility aids.

"Apart from ensuring there are ramps, lifts, handrails and other features that comply with



Underutilised Pedestrian Overhead Bridges in Kuala Lumpur



Jalan Sultan Abdul Samad, Brickfields (Near Wisma Harapan)



Jalan Rozario, Brickfields (Connecting to Sentral Suites)



Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Chow Kit (Near Chow Kit monorail station)



Jalan Ikan Emas, Cheras (Cutting across Jalan Loke Yew)



Jalan Tun Sambanthan, Brickfields (Near Menara Shell)

Popular Pedestrian Overhead Bridges in Kuala Lumpur



Saloma link bridge



KLCC - Bukit Bintang Walkway



MRT Cochrane - Sunway Velocity link bridge



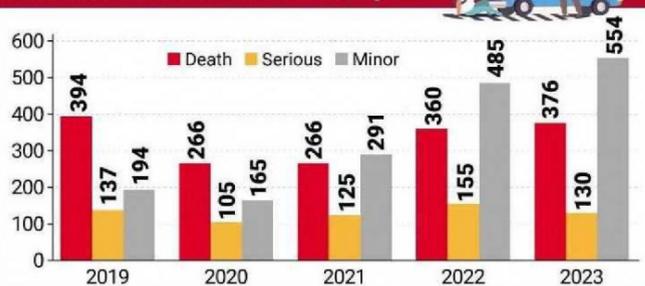
Bandaraya LRT station - SOGO Mall link bridge



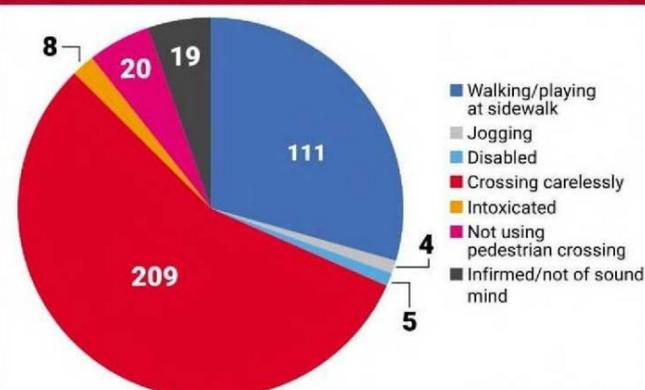
KL Sentral monorail station - NU Sentral link bridge

The Star graphics

Pedestrian casualties in Malaysia



Pedestrian deaths in Malaysia 2023 (by movement behaviour)



Source: The police

The Star graphics

holds a different view, preferring pedestrian bridges over signalised crossings.

"As a wheelchair user, I find pedestrian bridges better for crossing roads, as long as they are equipped with lifts."

He pointed out that pedestrian facilities in Kuala Lumpur were often incoherent, with infrastructure built by different agencies that failed to coordinate.

"For example, train stations might provide sufficient facilities such as tactile indicators and ramps for people with disabilities, but once we leave the station, such facilities are lacking.

"Navigating the roads without an assistant is challenging, and the city's design is still not holistic enough for people with disabilities to feel safe," said Ahmad Daniel.

Social activist Benedict Lopez believes that although lifts and escalators can improve the quality of pedestrian bridges, people of all ages need to be encouraged to use them.

"The authorities need to identify suitable and strategic spots to build user-friendly bridges that everyone will actually use," he said.

For Brickfields resident Ramoo Muthusamy, 79, walking is now a challenge.

"I rely on a walking frame to get around. I can no longer use pedestrian bridges, so I feel DBKL should focus on building more signalised traffic junctions instead of bridges.

"It would make life much easier for people like me who need safer, more accessible ways to cross the street," said Ramoo.

Wheelchair user Hemavathy Muniandy, 25, also finds getting around a constant challenge.

"Many places just aren't built with people like me in mind. Steep ramps, uneven pavements and broken lifts make it difficult to navigate even short distances.

"I often find myself stuck, having to rely on strangers for help or taking long detours to find an accessible route.

"Simple tasks like crossing the road or using pedestrian bridges become daunting, especially when there are no signalised crossings or proper ramps.

"Without the proper facilities, these bridges just end up becoming white elephants," said Hemavathy.