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# KL's car-free challenge

Pedestrianising city centre roads yields mixed outcomes — Jalan Alor succeeds, Jalan TAR struggles. Close collaboration between City Hall and police is needed before expanding the initiative elsewhere, says the Federal Territories Minister. >2&3

**Good for business:** With Jalan Alor closed to traffic in the evenings, food operators can set up tables and chairs for dining on the street. — SHAARI CHEMAT/The Star

Business has improved since Jalan Alor was closed to vehicular traffic at night. — Photos: LOW LAY PHON and SHAARI CHEMAT/The Star

# Diverging paths of two car-free roads in KL

## Jalan TAR and Jalan Alor stakeholders have different takes on implementation of pedestrian-only streets

By SHALINI RAVINDRAN
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A PROPOSAL to restrict vehicles from Jalan Bukit Bintang is not a new concept for the capital.

Over the years, several areas in Kuala Lumpur have been transformed into pedestrian-friendly zones, including Jalan Alor and Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman (Jalan TAR).

Jalan Alor, a renowned food haven, is closed to vehicular traffic every evening, while Jalan TAR becomes a car-free zone every Sunday.

There was a suggestion last month to close Jalan Bukit Bintang, stretching from Pavilion Kuala Lumpur to Jalan Pudu, as part of efforts to alleviate traffic congestion in the area.

Kuala Lumpur police chief Comm Datuk Rusdi Mohd Isa said this was to improve the traffic situation in Bukit Bintang.

He said that discussions with stakeholders were ongoing to evaluate the feasibility of rerouting vehicles and creating a pedestrian-friendly zone.

*StarMetro* spoke to business operators and visitors at Jalan Alor and Jalan TAR to gain an insight into how vehicle-free initiatives have impacted the areas.

### Lively scene at night

The closure of the 300m-long Jalan Alor to vehicular traffic from 6pm to 3am daily took effect on July 1, 2023.

At the time, Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) said the closure would transform Jalan Alor into a pedestrian mall to enhance safety and create a better experience for both diners and pedestrians.

Jalan Alor Hawkers and Traders Association secretary Simon Ang said the closure had brought both positive and negative outcomes.

"The good thing is visitors can safely walk and dine in the street without worrying about vehicular traffic.

"Food traders can also place tables and chairs on the road, for those who like to dine outdoors."

However, Ang said that business owners had noticed a rise in pickpocketing since the nightly closure was introduced.

"This may be due to the easy access and increased crowds, as the street closure creates a more congested environment," he said, adding that business owners and visitors had expressed concerns about safety.

"We are working with the police and DBKL to address this issue, including through patrols," he said.

According to Ang, most traders are supportive of the street closure.

"An average of 10,000 people visit Jalan Alor every day, with over 150 businesses operating here.

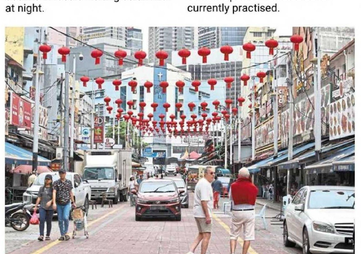
"It has created a more vibrant and pedestrian-friendly environment," he added.

Restaurant manager Kong Soon Hock agreed, saying, "It is a good move (to close) as visitors can safely walk along the street without worrying about vehicles.

Kong says there has been a decline in locals visiting Jalan Alor at night.

Bhavesh hopes Jalan TAR will remain open to vehicles as is currently practised.

Faiz says other ways to prioritise pedestrian safety at Jalan TAR should be explored.



A view of Jalan Alor during the day when vehicles are allowed.

The previous closure of Jalan TAR on Sundays was to encourage visitors to explore the street on foot.

"Prior to this, there were some minor accidents and near-misses."

Kong, however, had noticed a slight decline in local visitors since the closure.

He said this was evident during the closure of Changkat Bukit Bintang several years ago, and it was more noticeable in Jalan Alor.

"The locals do not seem willing to come here as most prefer to drive.

"The road closure has resulted in a lack of roadside parking spaces and an increase in traffic jams too," he said, adding that he had noticed a 15% drop in local visitors.

A budget hotel operator, who declined to be named, shared that some guests occasionally faced difficulties accessing the area during the nightly road closure.

"There are guests who expressed frustration because they cannot call for a taxi to come to the hotel, especially those with heavy luggage and who arrive late at night.

"Where possible, we will try to inform them earlier about the closure and advise them to take public transport and walk here," he said.

### Business down on Sunday

In contrast, Jalan TAR business operators largely opposed the Sunday road closure ever since it was implemented three years ago.

The closure, from 6am to midnight, started on Aug 28, 2022.

It stretched over 500m, from Sogo shopping centre at the Jalan Esfahan junction until the Jalan Melayu intersection.

On April 15 last year, *StarMetro* reported on Jalan TAR traders' continued opposition to the move.

Retailers said the closure had affected business on what was their most lucrative day of the week.

Shoppers, however, said they appreciated the reduced traffic congestion.

In September last year, DBKL reopened Jalan TAR to vehicular traffic.

According to a DBKL spokesperson, the decision was made to facilitate rescue and repair works around Jalan Masjid India, where a sinkhole had appeared.

Jalan TAR was temporarily used as an alternative route during that period.

Vehicles are able to drive through Jalan TAR since the Sunday closure was lifted last year.

Flashback to *StarMetro* report on April 15.

A *StarMetro* visit revealed that Jalan TAR is still fully open to traffic, with no enforcement officers stationed at the Jalan Esfahan intersection, as was the case previously.

The Batu Road Retailers Association (Barra), which represents some 300 businesses operating along Jalan TAR, said that it had requested its reopening to vehicular traffic.

"We once again made the request following the sinkhole incident.

"The closure was causing significant traffic congestion in the area, especially with Jalan Masjid India being closed as well," committee member M Bhavesh said.

He added that the reopening was necessary as having another access road was essential in case of emergencies.

"Since the road was reopened, business has improved, and we hope it remains open."

A watch repair shopowner, who wanted to be identified only as Ng, said that customers preferred to drive to the area.

"I have regulars who prefer to park their cars by the roadside.

"The road closure forces them to park further away, which discourages many from stopping by.

"Walk-ins have declined since the closure began as Sundays are typically my busiest day," he said.

Visitor Faiz Fahmi Hashim said the road should be kept open to vehicles.

"There's no denying that a pedestrianised street enhances safety.

"But the partial closure has a ripple effect, and causes congestion and inconvenience in surrounding areas.

"There are alternative ways to prioritise pedestrian safety without resorting to a full road closure."

He suggested that DBKL explore other solutions, such as replacing asphalt with paving blocks, which would slow down vehicles while maintaining access for motorists.