Boosting city cycling

As Kuala Lumpur expands its bike lane network, cyclists call for better connectivity, safety and stronger community engagement to truly make it work. >2&3

Staying on track: A cyclist using the bicycle lane, painted blue, in Jalan Raja Laut, Kuala Lumpur. — LEW GUAN XI/The Star

KL rolling out bike lanes but cyclists yet to catch up

Expansion to suburban areas continues under masterplan, despite existing paths in city centre being underused due to various concerns

By LEW GUAN XI
lewguanxi@thestar.com.my

DESPITE their availability, bicycle lanes are underused in many parts of Kuala Lumpur's city centre.

These include downtown areas such as Jalan Raja Laut, Jalan Tun HS Lee, Jalan Gereja and Jalan Sultan Ismail.

Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) had in 2019 introduced the Kuala Lumpur Pedestrian and Cycling Masterplan (KLPCM) for developing networks of efficient and user-friendly walking and cycling paths.

Under the masterplan, DBKL planned to expand the bicycle lanes in the city from 32.9km in 2019 to 96.3km in 2028.

This includes an additional 11km of bicycle lanes in the city centre and downtown areas, making the total length 26km. *(see graphic)*

Beyond the city centre

While it is commendable to have bicycle lanes in the city centre, Bike Commute Malaysia director Justin Lee told *StarMetro* that cycling was still not the first choice of transport for those living there.

He said DBKL should instead look at housing areas which had a cycling population and prioritise having bicycle lanes there.

"Bicycle lanes will be more beneficial and useful if they can connect these residential areas to destinations like transit hubs," he pointed out.

There is already an existing community who cycles regularly in suburbs like Danau Kota, said Lee.

"Another example is Chow Kit, as it contains both the monorail and MRT services and has a big pedestrian population. These people can be encouraged to cycle if the facilities are available there," he said.

Meanwhile DBKL also has plans under KLPCM to connect suburban areas like Titiwangsa, Ampang, Sentul, Pandan and Bandar Permaisuri to the city centre with bicycle lanes. (*See graphic)*

Lee, however, said Kuala Lumpur city centre was still quite "disconnected" from these areas, making it too far for the people there to cycle to the city centre.

"One can also cycle to the train station, take the train to the city centre, then continue cycling there. However, it is quite difficult to bring bicycles onto the trains especially during peak hours.

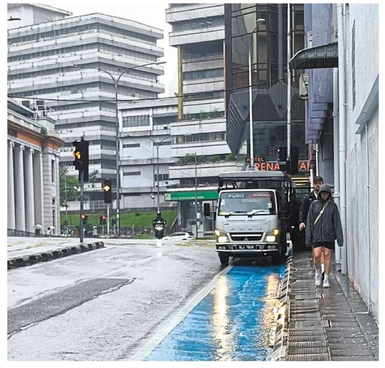
"Another issue is those living in the city centre will still need to cross dangerous roads to reach the bicycle lanes from their homes," he added.

Promoting bicycle lanes

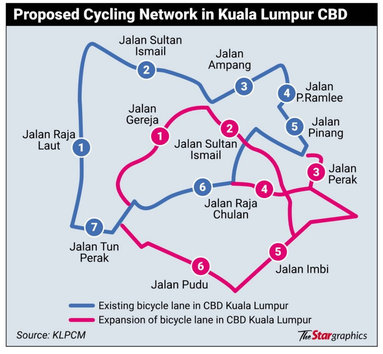
Lee said DBKL should conduct campaigns to encourage people to use the existing bicycle lanes, besides considering other strategies that could make cycling in the city safer and more convenient.

"This includes placing bicycles (for rent) beside bicycle lanes for the cyclists' usage, as not all cyclists come to the city centre with a bicycle.

Underused bicycle lane in Kuala Lumpur. — LOW BOON TAT and LEW GUAN XI/The Star



A lorry parked on the bicycle lane in Jalan Gereja, Kuala Lumpur.



Misused lanes

StarMetro found parked motor vehicles obstructing bicycle lanes and posing a safety hazards for cyclists.

One of the streets with this problem is Jalan Tun HS Lee. Besides cars, vehicles like lorries and vans are also seen loading or unloading goods while parked on the bicycle lanes.

There are no dedicated parking lots or loading bays on that street.

Lee said street reconfiguration could address the issue by creating extra space for different types of vehicles.

"The width of the road lanes there are quite big.

"By reconfiguring the street, the freight vehicles would have extra space to load their goods without encroaching into the bicycle lane," he suggested.

Physical safety dividers

Lee said although completely separating the bicycle lanes from the road would be ideal, he acknowledged space constraints in the city centre could hinder this.

However, he said some forms of separation was still needed to ensure cyclists, especially inexperienced ones, would feel safe using the bicycle lanes.

He said the space could be created by adopting the parking-protected lanes concept used in New York, US.

This is where parking space or other raised structures are placed to prevent motorised vehicles from entering the bicycle lane.

"However, this concept would work better in low-density areas with ground-level buildings and slow car speed, like in Brickfields, Chow Kit and Kampung Baru.

"Areas with tall buildings or skyscrapers would require more thorough study," he said.

He also urged DBKL to regularly update the progress of KLPCM's implementation.

"Active community engagement for feedback is also essential for DBKL to better understand the overall context of the issue," he added.

Reducing city driving speed

Meanwhile, Global Designing Cities Initiative (GDCI) programme manager Jashwanth Tej Kasala cited high vehicle speed as one of the reasons why people were still reluctant to cycle in the city.

"The current cycling network in Kuala Lumpur is still unable to make cyclists feel safe and comfortable, as vehicles are often speeding on the streets.

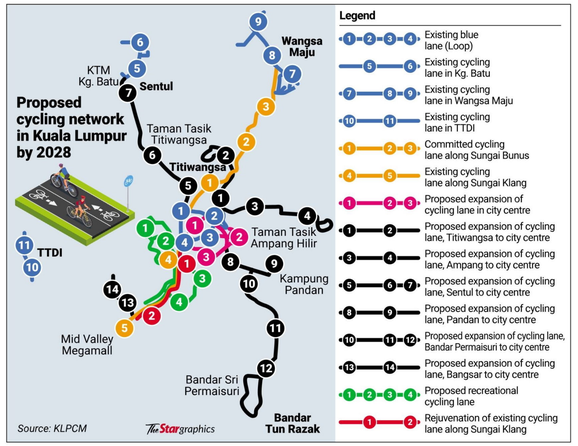
"This cause them to only cycle during the weekends, where traffic volume and speed are lower.

"To encourage cycling, we need to first reduce the speed of other vehicles, then build dedicated infrastructure to protect the cyclists," he said.

Progress so far

In a media statement, DBKL said a total of 68km of bicycle lanes, or around 71% of the targeted 96.3km by 2028, had been built in the city as of December last year.

"DBKL is committed to completing the remaining lanes within the stipulated period, so that the people can enjoy comprehensive cycling infrastructure," the local authority said.



Lee: DBKL should consider strategies that could make cycling in the city safer and more convenient.

A van loading goods while parked on the bicycle lanes in Jalan Tun HS Lee, Kuala Lumpur.

Some bicycle lanes are not maintained and are used by motorcyclists.