

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

# **Greater Kuala Lumpur Mobilities Phase 1: Public Transport in Greater KL often works well enough to use, but fragile enough to be set aside**

**31 December 2025, Kuala Lumpur** – Public transport in Greater Kuala Lumpur is not failing outright. In fact, many commuters describe it as usable, functional, and sometimes even preferable to driving. Yet small, everyday breakdowns in reliability, access, and provision of information mean that it is also fragile. When things go wrong, even briefly, commuters are pressured to default back to private vehicles. Greater KL’s public transport problem is not failure, but fragility.

These insights emerge from Phase 1 of the Greater Kuala Lumpur Mobilities (GKLMOB) study, a multi-method research programme examining how people experience public transport in their daily lives. Phase 1 brings together qualitative interviews, operational performance analysis, and spatial assessment to understand why ridership growth remains uneven despite significant public investment in transport infrastructure.

Rather than focusing on attitudes or preferences, the study examines how the public transport system performs in practice, and how commuters respond to that performance.

### **Public transport that works, until it doesn’t**

Findings from in-depth interviews with commuters show a consistent pattern. Public transport is often “good enough” to use under normal conditions, but small disruptions can quickly undermine commuter confidence. Unreliable arrival times, early or missing buses, poor information during service disruptions, uncomfortable or unsafe access to stations, and uneven waiting conditions all add friction to daily journeys.

Individually, these issues may seem minor. Together, they raise the effort, risk, and uncertainty associated with using public transport. Over time, commuters learn to plan for worst-case scenarios. When reliability cannot be taken for granted, the rational response is often to set public transport aside and use a car instead, even when the train or bus would otherwise be competitive.

### **Three lenses on the same problem**

Phase 1 of GKLMOB is anchored by three discussion papers, each examining a different layer of the public transport experience.

One paper draws on qualitative interviews with commuters to show how public transport is perceived as “functional enough to use, but fragile enough to be set aside.” The findings highlight how reliability, comfort, safety, and access shape daily decisions, particularly for commuters who have access to both cars and public transport.

A second paper introduces a Bus Performance Index (BPI) to examine how buses actually perform on the road. While rail services form the backbone of the network, buses act as critical connectors. The analysis shows that variability in bus performance, especially early departures and inconsistent headways, plays a major role in affecting commuter trust. When bus services are unpredictable, the entire public transport journey becomes harder to plan around.

A third paper examines the anatomy of bus stops, focusing on the physical conditions under which commuters wait. In a low-frequency environment, waiting infrastructure matters. The study finds wide variation in bus stop quality across Greater KL, ranging from well-designed shelters to little more than a pole by the roadside. These differences affect perceived safety, comfort, and willingness to wait.

Together, these papers point to a common conclusion: public transport use is shaped not only by travel time, but by how predictable, legible, and manageable the system feels in everyday conditions.

### **From findings to action**

Alongside the discussion papers, a series of policy briefs has been released to translate Phase 1 findings into actionable recommendations. The briefs focus on practical levers that can strengthen public transport use in the near term, while complementing longer-term infrastructure planning.

Key themes include improving the delivery of real-time information so that commuters receive meaningful updates when they need them; strengthening bus control and operational practices to improve reliability; upgrading waiting and pedestrian infrastructure at transit hubs; and addressing first- and last-mile access through context-specific solutions rather than one-size-fits-all approaches.

The findings are presented across three discussion papers, supported by policy briefs that set out practical, near-term recommendations to reduce the effort, risk, and uncertainty faced by commuters. In keeping with principles of open data and reproducible research, the project is complemented by a data-driven scrollytelling piece, alongside publicly usable datasets and dashboards for both internal and external use.

Across all recommendations, a common principle emerges: improving public transport use requires reducing the effort, risk, and uncertainty commuters face throughout their journeys.

## What comes next

Phase 1 of GKL Mobilities establishes an evidence base for understanding how public transport works in practice and why it is sometimes set aside. Future phases of the programme will deepen this analysis through expanded data work, further operational assessment, and continued engagement with policymakers and practitioners.

As the findings show, improving public transport use is not only about building more infrastructure. It is about fixing the small, everyday failures that determine whether the system can be relied upon — not just in theory, but in daily life.

The Greater Kuala Lumpur Mobilities research project is led by Gregory Ho, Senior Research Associate, with research assistance from Kelvin Ling Shyan Seng and Shukri Mohamed Khairi at the Khazanah Research Institute (KRI), and advised by Dr. Suraya Ismail, Director of Research at KRI. All Phase 1 research outputs, including the discussion papers and policy briefs, are available for download at: [www.KRIInstitute.org](http://www.KRIInstitute.org).

END

---

For further inquiries, please contact:

**Syafa Mustaffa**

Senior Manager ,Strategic Communications

Khazanah Research Institute (KRI)

03-2705 6109

[syafasakinah.mustaffa@krinstitute.org](mailto:syafasakinah.mustaffa@krinstitute.org)

## ABOUT KHAZANAH RESEARCH INSTITUTE (KRI)

The Khazanah Research Institute, sponsored by Khazanah Nasional Berhad, is a not-for-profit organisation and is incorporated as a company limited by guarantee. The objective of the Institute is to undertake analysis and research on the pressing issues of the nation and, based on that research, provide actionable policy recommendations. For more information on KRI, visit [new.krinstitute.org](http://new.krinstitute.org).

Among the Institute's roles are

- carrying out rigorous impartial research and analysis that is founded on facts and data
- convening workshops, round tables, conferences and talks for subject matter experts, policy makers, thought leaders and interested members of the public, as appropriate
- being an advocate of its research findings and policy recommendations.

Follow KRI on social media to keep up-to-date with our research:

 @KRInstitute

 @KRInstitute or [www.facebook.com/KRInstitute/](https://www.facebook.com/KRInstitute/)

 @Khazanah Research Institute

 @krinstitute

 @krinstitute

 Khazanah Research Institute