

## Will The Upcoming Budget 2025 Finally Pave the Way for Better Road Infrastructure?

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As Malaysia gears up for its highly anticipated 2025 Budget announcement on October 18, one key area that warrants significant attention is the quality of the nation's roads. Despite ongoing infrastructure development projects and ambitious plans to modernize public transportation, Malaysia's road network remains an essential component of its transport system. However, concerns about road quality, congestion, and connectivity are mounting, with Malaysia being ranked 48th out of 59 countries in terms of road quality in 2022. This puts Malaysia among the worst globally and there is a need for immediate reforms to improve the state of the nation's road infrastructure.

### ***The Backbone of the Economy***

Malaysia's economic prosperity hinges on the efficiency of its transport networks. Roads, which form the backbone of Malaysia's supply chain infrastructure, are critical in connecting businesses, facilitating commerce, and allowing people to move across the country. However, the subpar state of these roads poses a serious threat to the country's economic performance. Congested highways, poorly maintained road surfaces, and deteriorating rural roads are not only frustrating for everyday commuters but also hinder the movement of goods and services across the country.

Figure 1: Worst and Best Roads – International Ranking 2022

48	Malaysia	5.3	-5.19%	22.76	43,713	3.32
49	Barbados	3.2	-36.76%	7.96	395,349	3.28
50	Colombia	3.4	27.34%	14.72	18,086	3.24
51	UA Emirates	6.0	-9.23%	11.25	4,880	3.23
52	Saudi Arabia	5.2	-1.33%	36.13	10,298	3.11
53	Kazakhstan	3.6	20.81%	12.85	3,501	3.10
54	Argentina	3.6	18.42%	13.91	10,117	3.06
55	New Zealand	4.5	-9.09%	8.83	35,113	2.93
56	Panama	4.5	-5.06%	13.99	20,070	2.54
57	Georgia	3.8	-5.71%	11.30	29,118	2.33
58	Costa Rica	3.0	6.01%	14.00	9,853	2.24
59	Kuwait	3.7	-20.09%	18.99	32,262	1.33

Source: Zutobi, Worst and Best Roads – International Ranking 2022

Malaysia's depend heavily on a reliable and efficient road network and the quality of the roads directly impacts the timeliness of deliveries, the cost of transportation, and the competitiveness of businesses. Delays caused by potholes, traffic jams, or insufficient connectivity can ripple through the entire supply chain, leading to increased operational costs for businesses, higher prices for consumers, and reduced economic efficiency. As such, investing in road infrastructure is not just a matter of convenience but also an economic imperative.

### ***Public Transportation Paradox***

Although the Malaysian government has made considerable investments in public transportation over the years, with the aim of reducing road congestion and offering

commuters a more sustainable alternative. However, public transportation usage remains low, particularly in urban areas like the Klang Valley, where private vehicles still dominate the roads. The fundamental problem lies in the first-mile and last-mile connectivity, which is an issue that has persisted despite billions being poured into modern rail systems and bus services.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most glaring issues is the poor condition of bus stops, which are often nothing more than a signboard on a metal pole. Many commuters are left confused as to whether buses even serve these stops, and with a lack of shelters and benches, passengers are left exposed to Malaysia's harsh tropical weather.<sup>2</sup> In addition, feeder buses that are meant to provide connections to major public transport hubs are often unreliable, making the entire system unattractive for potential users.

For Malaysia to reduce its over-reliance on private vehicles, public transportation must be both convenient and comfortable. This cannot be achieved without proper investment in road infrastructure that supports bus routes and creates better linkages between public transport modes. Improved road quality and enhanced bus stop facilities, such as clearly marked stops with real-time information and weather-protected shelters, would encourage more people to switch from private vehicles to public transport, alleviating road congestion and reducing carbon emissions.

### ***Reduce Car-Centric Approach***

Another key aspect of Malaysia's road infrastructure issue is the car-centric design of urban areas, particularly in the Klang Valley. Malaysia's roads and highways are predominantly designed for private vehicle use, resulting in severe congestion, especially during peak hours. While initiatives to promote public transport are admirable, the underlying infrastructure continues to favour cars over buses, bicycles, or pedestrians. In short, Malaysia's current road network incentivizes car ownership while penalizing those who opt for more sustainable means of travel.

To change this, the government needs to prioritize the development of road systems that cater to all forms of transport. Roads must be designed to accommodate public buses, pedestrians, and cyclists, alongside private vehicles. Introducing dedicated bus lanes, expanding bicycle paths, and ensuring safe pedestrian walkways would significantly ease congestion while promoting a shift towards more environmentally friendly modes of transportation. Encouraging alternative forms of transport through better road design is a long-term strategy that will lead to more efficient road use, reduced traffic jams, and better environmental outcomes.

The 2025 Budget offers the Malaysian government a crucial opportunity to address the pressing challenges related to road quality, congestion, and connectivity. Improving the nation's road infrastructure is not only essential for boosting economic productivity but also for ensuring the safety and well-being of millions of commuters. With thoughtful planning, strategic investments, and a commitment to long-term sustainability, Malaysia can build a road network that supports its vision of becoming a developed nation.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://focusmalaysia.my/govt-should-beef-up-first-and-last-mile-transportation-woes/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://medium.com/tlmun-herald/public-transport-in-malaysia-the-good-the-bad-and-what-could-be-better-2d18fec734db>