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Curb urban sprawl with TOD planning

Urban sprawl over large expanses of land is attributed to bad urban planning, hence affecting green areas

by AFIQ AZIZ

DEVELOPMENT based on a transit-oriented model — which allows people to live, work and commute within a city — could curb further urban sprawl within the Klang Valley.

Dean of Faculty Architecture, Planning and Surveying UiTM Prof Dr Jamalunlaili Abdullah said urban sprawl — which is an unrestricted growth in many urban housing and commercial development areas — over large expanses of land is attributed to bad urban planning, hence affecting green areas.

This, he said, is not sustainable. “We saw uncontrolled urban sprawl in the 1990s, where the use of land in Kuala Lumpur (KL) was more than the population growth.

“Basically, for a 10% population

increase, we opened up 100% more land, which is green field.

“People started to move out from the city centre to areas like Hulu Langat and Klang because land is cheaper there, although they were still working in KL.

“This is unsustainable land development and we are losing a lot of resources there,” Jamalunlaili said in his presentation during the International Symposium on Rail and Livelihood (ISO Rail 2021) yesterday.

The symposium was officiated by Deputy Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Ismail Abd Muttalib.

Jamalunlaili’s research found that the population in Hulu Langat was only one-tenth of the size of KL in the 1990s but 20 years later, it grew to almost the size of KL city and became more attractive for residentship.

“But, Hulu Langat is our water catchment area and we could start having issues with water supplies and pollution.

“From an urban planner’s per-

spective, we need to control the urban sprawl happening in the Klang Valley and one of the best ways to do it is through transit-oriented development (TOD), which is to attract people to live around rail stations,” Jamalunlaili explained.

He, however, noted that the challenges to build a TOD with rail stations and rail tracks in uncontrolled and ready-developed cities would not be easy.

Furthermore, people still prefer to live in landed properties instead of high-rise buildings in high-density areas.

Jamalunlaili also noted that millennials’ way of thinking may change such preferences, and this would be the best time for the government to start encouraging the public to adopt the TOD concept.

“The millennials should consider purchasing residential units in TOD areas, so that they would not need to buy cars because the public transport system now offers many choices like train and e-hailing, while everything is within a walking distance,” he said.

Typically, TOD is a planned urban area which is well connected with public transport, mainly rail stations in a dense area — be it a residential or office area with a 400m of walking distance between one point to the nearest public transport.

It is designed to encourage the use of public transport and create a pedestrian-friendly urban environment.

Some of the successful TODs are in Hong Kong, where the usage of public transport rate stands at 95%, and Singapore with about the same rate.

Some notable and potential TODs in the coming years, Jamalunlaili said, are Latitude8 in Dang Wangi, Tun Razak Exchange, Bandar Malaysia, KL118 and KL Metropolis, which are all in the heart of KL.

To ensure the success rate of TOD projects, a higher plot ratio should be given by the local councils to property players so that they can build higher buildings within the small area.

Then, there is also the concern of lower rail accessibility compared to auto accessibility. “It is easier for people to enter the city with a car because the tolls are cheap and there is no charge for them to enter the city, unlike in Singapore,” he added.

Meanwhile, in his ISO Rail 2021 opening speech, Ismail said the collaboration between the industry and academia can further enhance the future development and planning of urbanisation in this country, which cover the area of industrial collaboration, research and study, as well as into the aspect of railway operability and sustainability.

“Railway, being the backbone of the land public transportation, looks forward for the new incentives for sustainable operations and maintenance, propelled by non-fare revenue schemes that may come from a TOD.

“The government, state and private developers may increase their value of property, and make the township attractive for clients and the community,” he said.