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## COLUMNIST

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# Plan to solve Perak's public transport woes

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### SPOILT FOR CHOICE: Bas Rakyat 1Malaysia a success while RapidPerak is in the pipeline

FOR far too long now, Perakians have put up with lousy public transport service in the state. By lousy, I mean buses which are old, rickety and unreliable, as well as taxi drivers who simply refuse to use meters.

However, these public transport operators cannot be faulted entirely as it is widely known that they are running a loss-making business.

Without proper support, they will slowly go out of business.

It is no wonder that back in 2008, a mere two per cent of the population relied on public transport, particularly buses, as their only way of getting around.

With that in mind, the state government and the Land Public Transport Commission (SPAD) are working together to develop a comprehensive transport plan for this silver state.

The plan, which is expected to be completed next year, will chart out the state's public transport system needs for the next 20 years.

Besides upgrading the current bus and taxi services, the state is also looking into the feasibility of having a light rail transit (LRT) or even a monorail.

This piece of good news could not have come at a much better time for Perakians who have long yearned for much-improved services.

It is also timely as more and more people are opting for public transport.

When tabling the 2013 Budget last September, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who is also finance minister, had announced that Ipoh was one of four major cities which would be getting new public transport services with the expansion of Syarikat Prasarana Negara Berhad's (Prasarana) Rapid bus services; the others being Seremban, Kuching and Kota Kinabalu.

The move follows the successful implementation of RapidKuantan service since last December, RapidPenang service since 2007 and RapidKL, which manages Klang Valley's bus and rail transport system, since 2004.

For Datuk Dr Mah Hang Soon, the man in charge of public transport in

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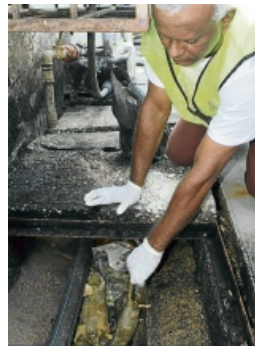
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the state, RapidPerak would solve many of the state's woes. He is probably right.

Take for example, Penang's once ailing public transport system. Despite many approaches implemented to address the problem, the complaints kept coming in -- so much so, critics would be sceptical whenever a new approach was announced.

But since RapidPenang came into the picture in 2007, there has been a marked improvement. While the complaints are still there, they have significantly reduced in numbers. More and more people are opting for RapidPenang services. Perakians must surely be envious of their neighbours.

As mentioned earlier, public transport is not a revenue-generating industry.

As such, support from the government, both Federal and state, is vital to ensure its sustainability.

A pilot project which is being carried out in the Manjung district since August 2011, where the state government is providing some RM4.32 million over a period of five years to revive the defunct bus service in town, has proven to be quite a success.

Known as "Bas Rakyat 1Malaysia", it has managed to attract a sizeable amount of commuters, who before this depended only on their own transport to get from one place to another.

The locals had only praises to sing for the new bus service, being run by Gunung Capital Berhad.

The state government had said when launching the service then that if the venture proved to be successful, the initiative would be carried out in other districts such as Kuala Kangsar, Taiping and Teluk Intan.

With the Bas Rakyat 1Malaysia and RapidPerak plans in the pipeline, Perakians will be spoilt for choice soon when using public transport. The question which begs an answer is, how soon is soon?

The government can continue to encourage the people to use public transport to reduce congestion on the road, but in the absence of an effective public transport system, its efforts will not mean anything.

With a population of over two million in Perak and the number set to grow in years to come, more cars are expected on the road.

If Perakians are not encouraged to use public transport now, just imagine what will happen on our roads in future.



Datuk Dr Mah Hang Soon on one of the new buses plying the Manjung district route in 2011. The pilot project has proven to be quite a success.

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