

Do we need emergency lanes?

**QUESTION:
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THE emergency lanes on our highways are suffering the same fate as parking bays meant for the handicapped. Their continued existence almost never serves the actual purpose intended. Increasing number of motorists and drivers of heavy vehicles, including express buses and lorries, are becoming more and more brazen and hasty besides indiscriminately using the emergency lanes as a way to circumvent even the slightest congestion.

They do this in total defiance of the law and without any regard for the safety of other road-users, particularly motorcyclists. And they don't care two hoots about the feelings of other law abiding motorists who snail along patiently, following the orderly flow of traffic.

I believe more drivers will jump on the bandwagon if the law is deemed impotent and is unable to take punitive action against the offenders. Consequently, our highways may in future turn chaotic and unruly with tempers flaring everywhere, especially during festive seasons. However, to expect enforcement along all the highways at all time is understandably too much to ask.

I, therefore, wonder whether the authorities would consider doing away with the emergency lanes and convert some sections of them, say every 150 metres, into emergency bays similar to those found on the Penang Bridge, to cater for stalled vehicles (while waiting for assistance to arrive) or for other bona fide emergency use. With the exception of motorcyclists, the lanes in between the emergency bays are to be sealed to all traffic, perhaps with the placement of bollards as the cost would be minimal.

On the need for ambulances and police vehicles to use the emergency lanes whenever an accident occurs, experience has taught us that in such a situation, the emergency lanes would be of little or no use as they would be blocked by vehicles driven by inconsiderate people who believe that they would not be caught.

In any case, it would be much faster for the ambulances and police vehicles to reach the location of the accident from the opposite direction.

SYED HAMID RAHMAN,
Shah Alam.

ANSWER:

Emergency lanes vital.

WE REFER to the letter "Do we need emergency lanes?" (The Star, Feb 24). The emergency lanes are meant for the use of emergency service vehicles only.

In the event of a major accident there is a high possibility of traffic congestion. Therefore, the emergency lane serves as a means for emergency service vehicles to reach the accident scene to provide assistance to accident victims quickly.

Road users need to remember that early assistance and medical attention re critical in ensuring the survival of victims.

Every minute lost increases the risk to those injured in accidents. As such, availability of uncongested emergency lanes are vital in ensuring that accident victims receive medical assistance in the shortest possible time frame.

Currently, the average arrival time for emergency assistance in Malaysia is 30¿40 minutes and this needs to be reduced to 10¿15 minutes arrival in compliance with global best practice.

The issue here is not whether or not we need emergency lanes, we clearly do, but ensuring that emergency lanes serve the purpose they are designed and built for.

We need to ensure that motorists do not encroach into the emergency lane at the first sign of traffic congestion.

With this in mind we need to continuously educate our motorists that illegal use of emergency lanes may result in death of accident victims who may have otherwise survived.

Motorists who are caught abusing the emergency lanes should be fined and severely dealt with.

The Transport Ministry wishes to remind road users that offences regarding the abuse of emergency lanes are classified under the Category 1 critical offences list under the new standardised compound fines jointly agreed to by police (PDRM), Road Transport Department (JPJ) and Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL).

DATUK SURET SINGH,
Director-General,
Road Safety Department.