



[Login](#) | [Create Account](#) | [Search](#)

Vicious Cycle: Lack of budget, planning leaves Phuket trapped in crisis

Phuket’s chronic lack of budget allocation and utilisation for infrastructure is trapping the island in a ‘vicious cycle’ that threatens both its residents’ quality of life and its standing as a world-class tourist destination, warns Associate Professor Dr Chayanon Phucharoen of Prince of Songkla University Phuket campus.

[transport](#)[Traffic](#)[tourism](#)[economics](#)[construction](#)[environment](#)

[By Natnaree Likidwatanasakun](#)

Sunday 7 September 2025 09:00 AM

←

Ads by Google

Send feedback

Why this ad? ▶

By continuing to use our site you consent to the use of cookies as described in our privacy policy. Accept and close

820
Shares



Traffic at Koh Kaew Intersection. Photo: Natnaree Likidwatanasakun

Dr Chayanon, Deputy Dean for Research and Graduate Studies at the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism, told *The Phuket News* that inadequate transport systems force both locals and tourists to take to the roads, fuelling congestion, accidents and dissatisfaction.

“If you take this matter seriously, you will see this is a vicious cycle. That’s the technical term,” he said. “Once you don’t have a good transportation system, tourists have to arrange their own transportation, which usually means renting motorbikes or cars.

“So that creates congestion in peak areas. In some parts of Phuket there are more than 40,000 people living in just 2.4 square kilometres – similar to parts of Bangkok. But in Bangkok you have the Skytrain and the MRT. We don’t. So think about those 40,000-45,000 people going to work in the morning. That congestion links directly to the lack of proper public transport here.

“When people cannot hop on a train, cannot hop on a bus, or even if the bus is there it may not fit them, they have to drive by motorbike. That creates another social problem: accidents. The road fatalities in Phuket are brutal,” Dr Chayanon said.

The impact extends to foreigners unfamiliar with Thai roads. “When tourists rent motorbikes or cars on unfamiliar roads, the probability of accidents increases,” he added.

“This also affects the ‘experiential quality’ of Phuket as a tourist destination. Imagine: tourists arrive at the airport, immigration officers facilitate them, the wait is not so long compared to our neighbours. But once they leave the airport, they’re stuck in traffic... They don’t expect traffic on their holiday. This is the last thing they want to see.”

TOP PRIORITY

Phuket’s survival as a competitive tourist destination depends squarely on infrastructure upgrades, Dr Chayanon stressed.

“The first and most important thing for Phuket is to sustain our competitive advantage in tourism. That means upgrading infrastructure,” he said.

He pointed to the growing emphasis in global travel on what he called ‘experiential quality’. “It means that when you go to a place, you have a good experience – from the moment you land until the moment you depart. Every minute counts,” he explained.

“But Phuket lacks sufficient budget, and resources are not allocated to enhance infrastructure to support that experiential quality. This is the most important thing we must look at.”

He emphasised that Phuket already has the human capital and problem-solving ability. “Business leaders here are well educated. They know the problems, they know the solutions. During COVID, we all learned what we had to do. The system is not perfect, but the main problem is budget allocation.

“To move Phuket forward, to compete with other rising destinations, we must sing the same song: budget allocation and budget utilisation. This is different from Phuket autonomy. Don’t confuse the two. The urgent issue right now is budget – the right allocation,

By continuing to use our site you consent to the use of cookies as described in our privacy policy. Accept and close

Public complaints about “free visa tourists” are misplaced, Dr Chayanon said. “This matter is not something you can conclude easily. Most of the nations granted free visas already had easy access before. The free visa affects mainly the length of stay – not the number of arrivals,” he explained.

←

Ads by Google

Send feedback

Why this ad? ▶

Comparisons before and after the policy show little change in arrivals. “But what we see is: they stay longer. And when people stay longer, they adapt,” he noted.

Business operators who complain of falling revenue should consider the timing and wider context, he added. “If they mean June, July and August, the numbers show arrivals increased. But focusing only on arrivals is like looking at the tip of the iceberg. We must look at income: arrivals × spending per head × number of days stayed.”

Other forces are at play. “The number of hotels and operators has increased. Our GDP grew at double digits during [post-COVID] recovery – 40% in the first year, then 20% last year. That means more operators entered the market, so supply also increased,” Dr Chayanon said.

“What we face now is stagnation. Not in arrivals – those are still increasing – but stagnation in financial returns for businesses. That’s when they start to feel the impact.”

He posed the key question: “Why can’t we sustain our growth? Can we maintain double-digit growth with the current infrastructure in Phuket?”

BALANCING THE FUTURE

With more than 16,000 new housing units already approved for next year, the island is expanding fast – but expansion without infrastructure is a recipe for collapse, Dr Chayanon cautioned.

“Why do they build more? Because there is demand. And demand comes in three forms: speculation, real demand, and rental demand. All three rely on confidence in Phuket’s economy, which depends on tourism.

“If people perceive tourism is in decline, speculation collapses, rentals collapse, and even those buying to live may move elsewhere. So it all depends on whether Phuket can sustain growth. Can our roads support the increasing number of tourists? Can our infrastructure handle it? That’s the big question,” he said.

Safety and quality of life are inseparable from Phuket’s future. “This involves many dimensions, including safety,” he stressed.

STUCK AT THE CROSSROADS

For Dr Chayanon, Phuket now stands at a crossroads. The island has the resources, knowledge and determination to thrive, but remains hobbled by poor planning and limited funding.

“Phuket has strong human capital, but many problems need more than brainpower to solve. The issue is not vision, it’s not ability. It’s budget,” he repeated.

Without decisive action, the cycle will continue: weak public transport forcing more vehicles onto the roads, creating congestion, fuelling accidents, undermining tourist satisfaction and weakening confidence in Phuket’s future.

With the island’s economy still heavily reliant on tourism, the stakes could not be higher. “Phuket has to think long-term,” Dr Chayanon said. “Infrastructure is not a cost. It’s an investment. And unless we break this vicious cycle, it will break us.”

By continuing to use our site you consent to the use of cookies as described in our privacy policy. Accept and close