

Exploring the Relationship Between Last-Mile Connectivity and Visit Intention Among Rail Tourists

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Abstract– This study examines the relationship between last-mile connectivity and visit intention among rail tourists by investigating the significance of transport accessibility in influencing tourists' awareness and intention to visit nearby attractions around Electric Train Service (ETS) railway stations in Malaysia. A quantitative research design was employed using a structured questionnaire distributed through Google Forms to ETS passengers aged 18 years and above. The questionnaire consisted of six-point Likert-scale items and open-ended questions to capture respondents' perceptions and experiences regarding transport accessibility and attraction visibility. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics in IBM SPSS Statistics version 27, while content analysis was applied to the open-ended responses to identify common themes. The findings indicate that respondents generally agree that convenient and clearly available transport options, including feeder services, e-hailing availability, and clear route information, contribute to greater awareness of nearby attractions and increase tourists' intention to explore areas beyond the railway station. However, the study is limited to selected ETS stations in Peninsular Malaysia and relies on self-reported perceptions, which may not fully represent actual visitation behaviour. Despite these limitations, the study provides useful insights for railway operators and tourism stakeholders by highlighting the importance of improving last-mile connectivity and transport information visibility to strengthen the role of ETS stations as effective tourism gateways in Malaysia.

Keywords: Intention to visit; Railway tourism; Transport accessibility; Tourist awareness; Intention to visit; Electric Train Services

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Railway tourism has emerged as one of the most rapidly expanding segments of transport-based tourism, largely influenced by travellers' growing interest in scenic journeys, travel convenience, and environmentally sustainable transport modes. In Malaysia, the development of railway transportation dates back to the late nineteenth century, beginning with the construction of the first railway line in 1885, linking Taiping and Port Weld to support the tin mining industry.

Since then, the railway system has progressively expanded throughout Peninsular Malaysia, connecting major towns and playing a significant role in facilitating trade, mobility, and socio-economic development (Masirin et al., 2017). Ongoing improvements to the rail network culminated in the introduction of the Electric Train Service (ETS) in 2010, a major advancement in domestic rail transport. The ETS reflects increasing demand for faster, safer, and more reliable intercity travel, linking key tourism destinations such as Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Butterworth, and Padang Besar. The steady growth in passenger numbers further indicates a strong preference for modern railway travel.

However, the arrival of a passenger at an ETS station does not automatically translate into a visit to local attractions. While the ETS successfully bridges the distance between major hubs, the "last-mile" connectivity, the final journey from the station to a specific tourist site, remains a critical factor. Research suggests that, even when a destination is close, its perceived accessibility depends heavily on the availability of secondary transport options upon arrival. According to Jamei et al. (2022), perceived accessibility is

fundamentally driven by 'trip coordination,' which refers to how seamlessly different segments of a journey, such as the transition from an ETS train to a local shuttle are integrated. When these segments are well coordinated, they reduce travel uncertainty, thereby making attractions feel more reachable to tourists.

Moreover, the visibility of transport services at railway stations functions beyond basic mobility, acting as an important informational signal for tourists. Public transport is an essential element of the tourism industry, as it enables tourists to move easily within a destination and access attractions and tourism facilities (Truong & Shimizu, 2017, cited in Akhuan et al., 2024). For many rail tourists, the sight of dedicated shuttles, prominent e-hailing pick-up points, or local transit maps serves as on-site promotion. When these options are absent or unclear, a "knowledge gap" is created. Tourists may be aware of the city they have arrived in, but remain largely unaware of specific nearby attractions simply because they cannot visualise a seamless way to reach them. Consequently, there is a need to explore how the immediate environment of the ETS station, specifically the availability and visibility of transport, shapes a tourist's awareness of local attraction spots and ultimately influences their intention to step off the platform and into the local tourism economy.

The objective of this study is to explore the relationship among transport accessibility, tourist awareness and intention to visit nearby attractions around ETS stations. This study aims to determine whether transport accessibility to attractions increases tourists' awareness and intention to visit when clear transportation options are provided. The findings have suggested ways to improve the current transportation options.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent studies indicate that the availability of transport options upon arrival at a destination, whether by train or other modes, helps tourists visualise nearby attractions and enhances their awareness of them. Samková and Navrátil (2023) emphasise that public transport systems are essential to tourism development, as they facilitate visitor mobility and improve access to attractions within a destination. In this context, the presence of clear, visible transportation options implicitly signals to visitors that attractions are nearby and provides practical guidance on how to reach them using available transport services. Furthermore, the

availability of multiple, easily accessible transport modes helps tourists navigate unfamiliar urban environments and increases their confidence when exploring new destinations (Vovk et al., 2024). From this, it can be seen that the availability of existing and planned transport services is essential in enhancing the visibility of attractions and increasing tourists' awareness.

2.1 Tourist Awareness

Recent tourism studies highlight the importance of transport accessibility in shaping tourists' awareness of a destination and influencing their behavioural intentions. Transport accessibility allows them to travel conveniently between transportation hubs and nearby attractions, which can significantly affect their willingness to explore a destination. According to Milman and Pizam (1995, as cited in Ervina & Octaviany, 2022), destination awareness refers to whether individuals have heard about a tourist destination or which destination first comes to mind when planning a trip. Therefore, when tourists perceive that attraction are easily accessible from transport nodes, they are more likely to include these places in their travel plans.

2.2 Visit Intention

Transport accessibility is an important factor in tourism because tourists rely on available transportation to reach their destinations. When transportation options are readily available, tourists are more likely to develop a stronger intention to visit a destination due to the perceived convenience of travel. So, accessibility that affects tourists is not only destination accessibility but real accessibility which also really needs to be analysed because it can affect the intention to visit tourists if the accessibility standards are met (Apollo, 2017, as cited in Napitupulu et al., 2021). Accessible transportation options such as shuttle services, buses, and ride-hailing services improve tourists' mobility and reduce uncertainty when travelling in unfamiliar environments. As a result, tourists tend to show stronger intention to visit nearby attractions when reliable transport connections are available. In the context of railway tourism, effective last-mile connectivity plays a crucial role in linking railway stations to surrounding attractions, thereby enhancing tourists' awareness and encouraging visitation.

2.3 Destination Image Theory

Destination Image Theory suggests that tourists' perceptions of a destination are shaped by

information encountered before and during travel. Tourists' decision-making processes and behavioural intentions are directly influenced by destination image (Castro et al., 2007, as cited in Khasawneh & Alfandi, 2019). Elements such as transport accessibility and mobility services contribute to the formation of tourists' cognitive image, particularly their awareness of nearby attractions. In railway tourism settings, visible and accessible transport options at stations act as informational cues that help tourists recognise surrounding attractions and understand how to reach them. According to Khasawneh and Alfandi (2019), the conditional dimension of destination image includes factors such as affordable travel and accessibility to the destination and neighbouring countries. This suggests that accessibility plays an important role in shaping a positive destination image. Improved transport accessibility can therefore enhance tourists' awareness of attractions and support their intention to visit these locations, highlighting its significance in shaping destination image formation and tourist engagement.

2.4 Gaps in Existing Research

Although transport accessibility has long been recognised as a critical component of tourism development, much of the existing research has focused on infrastructure provision, spatial connectivity, and technical measurements of accessibility rather than tourists' perceptions and experiences. Coppola et al. (2020) note that accessibility studies often emphasise planning tools and the performance of transport systems, while paying limited attention to how accessibility is perceived and utilised by tourists on the ground. As a result, there remains a gap between accessibility theory and an understanding of how transport availability influences tourists' behavioural engagement with destinations.

Furthermore, the tourism accessibility literature indicates that although accessibility and sustainable tourism have gained increasing scholarly attention, the direct relationship between transport availability and specific tourist outcomes, such as awareness of attractions and intention to visit, remains underexplored. Korbiel et al. (2025) argue that more empirical research is needed to understand how accessibility influences tourists' behaviour and decision-making processes. In particular, limited studies have examined whether tourists value the availability of transport options to nearby attractions and how such availability shapes their awareness and willingness to explore

destinations, especially within railway tourism contexts.

This gap highlights the need for studies investigating tourists' perceptions of transport options at arrival points and their role in enhancing awareness and the intention to visit nearby attractions.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

This study aims to explore how transport accessibility to attractions, particularly when transportation options are clearly provided, relates to tourists' awareness and intention to visit. To achieve this objective, a quantitative research design is adopted using survey data that include both structured and open-ended questions. Descriptive analysis is applied to the survey items, while content analysis is used to analyse open-ended responses to explore suggestions related to transport options.

3.2 Population

The study population consists of ETS passengers aged 18 years and above, including both Malaysian and non-Malaysian tourists who have used ETS services at least once. This population is selected because individuals with first-hand experience of the ETS journey and station environment are best positioned to evaluate transport accessibility and its influence on their awareness and intention to visit nearby attractions. Previous research highlights that transport services are experienced directly within the physical environment and that understanding user perception requires capturing customers' actual journey experiences rather than hypothetical evaluations (Van Hagen & Bron, 2014). As ETS passengers interact with station facilities, signage, and available transport options during their journey, their responses provide more accurate and meaningful insights into how transport accessibility at ETS stations shapes tourist awareness and behavioural intention.

3.3 Sampling

This study employs convenience sampling to select respondents who are easily accessible and willing to participate in the study. The target respondents are ETS passengers aged 18 or older who have experience using ETS services. Convenience sampling is appropriate because it allows the researcher to collect data efficiently from passengers who are available at the time of the survey distribution. These respondents are able to

Table 1 Research Instrument Items

Aspects/Item	Item Wording	Source (Adopted/Adapted)
Transport Accessibility Factors	Easy access to transportation increases my intention to visit nearby attractions.	Zolotarev et al. (2023) Samková and Navrátil (2023) Iamtrakul et al. (2025a)
	Convenient transport options at the station increase my awareness of nearby attractions.	
	When transport options are easily available, I am more likely to notice attractions around the station.	
	Knowing that transport is accessible makes me more interested in visiting nearby attractions.	
	Open-ended: 27. What could be improved about the transport options to make it easier for you to get to nearby attractions?	

Responses to the Likert-scale items were measured using a six-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). The six-point scale was deliberately selected to avoid a neutral response option and to encourage respondents to express a clear level of agreement or disagreement. This approach helps improve response clarity and enhance measurement precision, as removing a neutral midpoint promotes more decisive responses (Nattapong, 2023).

In addition to the Likert-scale items, the questionnaire included open-ended questions to gather tourists' views and perceptions of the visibility of attractions around ETS stations. The use of open-ended questions enables respondents to tell their opinions in their own words, offering more detail and insights through closed-ended questions. This approach is supported by Hansen and Świdarska (2023), who highlight that open-ended question enhance the richness of survey data by uncovering the perceptions and lived experiences. Furthermore, several questionnaire items were adapted and refined from previous studies to ensure alignment with the research objectives and the study's overall focus.

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected survey data were processed and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, were conducted to describe the data and to identify key patterns

aligned with the research objectives. Furthermore, content analysis was employed to interpret the open-ended responses and to capture respondents' perspectives on transportation options.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability analysis

For the descriptive analysis, the research instrument's internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. This measure assesses the extent to which the questionnaire items reliably measure the same underlying construct. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.70 or above is widely accepted as indicating satisfactory internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Therefore, values exceeding this number suggest that the instrument demonstrates reliability. All items have shown achieved scores above 0.70, with a mean of 0.889 for the questionnaire items. Table 2 summarises the reliability results.

Table 2 Alpha Cronbach Value

Aspects	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha
Section E- Transport Accessibility Factors	4	0.889

According to the table, the aspect consists of four items. However, it should be noted that the original questionnaire contained five items. The final item in most sections was designed as an open-

ended question and was therefore excluded from the reliability analysis, as Cronbach's Alpha is applicable only to Likert-scale items. The open-ended responses are discussed separately in a later section of this chapter.

4.2 Demographic Profile

As shown in Table 4.1 and supported by the SPSS output, the majority of respondents are female

(71.6%), while male respondents account for 28.4%. Most respondents fall within the 18–28 age group (62.7%), followed by those aged 29–44 (24.5%), indicating that ETS services are particularly popular among students and young professionals. The sample is predominantly Malaysian (96.1%), with most respondents being occasional travellers (58.3%) or first-time users (35.3%).

Table 3 Demographic Profile

Demographic	Questions Items	Frequency (n)	Percentage %
Age	18 – 28	128	62.7
	29 – 44	50	24.5
	45-60	24	11.8
	61-79	2	1.0
	Total	204	100
Gender	Male	58	28.4
	Female	146	71.6
	Total	204	100
Nationality	Malaysian	196	96.1
	Non-Malaysian	8	3.9
	Total	204	100
How often do you travel using the ETS?	First Time	72	35.3
	Occasionally	119	58.3
	Weekly	0	0.0
	Monthly	13	6.4
	Total	204	100
What is the main purpose of your travel using ETS?	Travelling	108	52.9
	Business (work)	13	6.4
	Visiting Family or Friends	40	19.6
	Study (Education)	43	21.1
	Total	204	100
Which ETS station is your usual drop-off point?	Kuala Lumpur (KL Sentral)	66	32.4
	Gemas	20	9.8
	Ipoh	42	20.6
	Butterworth	41	20.1
	Padang Besar	35	17.2
	Total	204	100

Why did you choose ETS as your mode of transportation?	It is comfortable and convenient to travel by train.	154	75.5
	Travel time is faster than with other transport modes.	160	78.4
	The ticket price is affordable.	63	30.9
	ETS stations are easily accessible from my location.	92	45.1
	It offers safety and reliability.	110	90
	I prefer ETS because of its clean and modern facilities.	90	44.1
	It is an environmentally friendly way to travel.	115	56.4
	Recommended by family or friends.	64	31.4

Leisure travel is the most common purpose of travel (52.9%), followed by study or education (21.1%) and visiting family or friends (19.6%). Major destinations reported include Kuala Lumpur/KL Sentral, Ipoh, and Butterworth, reflecting the ETS's role in connecting key urban centres. When selecting ETS, respondents most frequently cited time efficiency (78.4%), comfort and convenience (75.5%), and safety and reliability (53.9%). In contrast, ticket affordability was the least influential factor (30.9%), suggesting that passengers prioritise speed and comfort over cost when choosing ETS services.

4.3 Analysis of Transport Accessibility

The descriptive analysis in this study examines respondents' perceptions of the availability, convenience, and ease of access to transport options from ETS stations to nearby tourism attractions. It also explores how transport accessibility aligns with tourists' awareness of surrounding attractions and their intention to visit these attractions. The results for this aspect are presented using descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations, as summarised in Table 4.

Table 4 Mean and Standard Deviation

Items	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Easy access to transportation increases my intention to visit nearby attractions.	4.96	0.853
Convenient transport options at the station increase my awareness of nearby attractions.	5.16	0.811
When transport options are easily available, I am more likely to notice attractions around the station.	4.81	0.923
Knowing that transport is accessible makes me more interested in visiting nearby attractions.	5.06	0.921

Note: 6 points Likert's scale, ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Slightly Disagree, 4=Slightly Agree, 5=Agree, 6=Strongly Agree

The findings for transport accessibility factors indicate a very high level of agreement among respondents across all four items, reflecting strong positive perceptions toward the role of transport accessibility in supporting tourist awareness and intention to visit nearby attractions

around ETS stations. All mean scores are above 5.30 on a six-point Likert scale, indicating that respondents generally agree or strongly agree with the statements about transport accessibility. The statement "Easy transport access increases my intention to travel to nearby attractions" recorded

the highest mean score ($M = 5.46$, $SD = 0.796$). This result indicates that respondents strongly perceive ease of transport access as an important consideration that encourages them to visit attractions located near ETS stations. The relatively low standard deviation suggests a high level of consistency in respondents' views.

Similarly, the item related to convenient transport options at the station, increasing awareness of nearby attractions, recorded a high mean score ($M = 5.34$, $SD = 0.817$). This suggests that respondents agree that convenient transport services increase their awareness of attractions around the station. The moderate standard deviation indicates that while most respondents share this perception, there is a slight variation in individual responses.

4.4 Open-Ended Responses

The open-ended questions were analysed using a content analysis approach to identify recurring patterns in respondents' suggestions and perceptions regarding the visibility of tourism attractions near ETS railway stations. The analysis revealed themes related to transport accessibility, which together influence tourist awareness and intention to visit the attractions.

4.4.1 Transport Accessibility and Ease of Movement

Transport accessibility emerged as a key theme shaping visitors' awareness of and interest in nearby attractions. A total of 58 respondents (28.4%) proposed improvements to feeder transport services, e-hailing availability, clearer route information, and increased public transport frequency. This finding suggests that more than one-quarter of respondents view transport accessibility as an important factor in accessing nearby attractions. The responses further indicate that when transport options are perceived as convenient and easily accessible, nearby attractions are seen as more attainable, thereby enhancing visitors' awareness and their inclination to explore areas beyond the station vicinity.

Several respondents provided specific suggestions to "improve transport accessibility, such as offering clearer wayfinding to buses and taxis, more frequent and reliable feeder services, safer and better-lit walking routes, smoother integration with e-hailing services, and affordable last-mile options such as shuttle vans or bicycle rentals." Others also emphasised the need for more frequent public transport options, clearer routes,

and easily accessible e-hailing services to facilitate travel to nearby attractions. In addition, respondents highlighted the importance of "improving bus services and strengthening collaboration with e-hailing companies to promote attractions near ETS stations." Overall, these responses indicate that visitors agree that transport accessibility is an important factor influencing both their awareness of nearby attractions and their decision to visit them.

5.0 DISCUSSIONS

Transport accessibility emerged as one of the most influential factors shaping tourists' awareness of and intention to visit attractions located near ETS railway stations. The findings suggest that when transport connections are perceived as easy, clear, and convenient, nearby attractions are viewed as more reachable, reducing psychological and physical barriers to exploration. This reinforces the idea that accessibility does not merely function as a logistical component of travel, but also as an informational and perceptual cue that shapes how tourists interpret the surrounding destination environment.

From a cognitive perspective, accessible transport options such as feeder buses, e-hailing services, and clearly marked routes help tourists visualise how to reach nearby attractions from the station. This visualisation process is important, as tourists are more likely to consider visiting attractions when they can clearly imagine the journey involved. In this sense, transport accessibility supports the cognitive dimension of destination image formation by translating abstract attraction awareness into a practical and achievable travel plan. When such transport options are absent or unclear, attractions may be perceived as distant or difficult to access, even if they are geographically close.

The findings also indicate that transport accessibility influences tourists' intention to visit by reducing perceived travel effort and uncertainty. Easy access to transport services increases tourists' confidence, particularly for first-time visitors or those unfamiliar with the area, encouraging them to explore beyond the station area. This suggests that perceived ease of movement and control over travel choices strengthen behavioural intention. In the context of ETS stations, transport accessibility therefore acts as a facilitator that bridges awareness and actual visitation intention.

However, the open-ended responses reveal that despite generally positive perceptions,

shortcomings in transport accessibility remain. Some respondents highlighted limited feeder transport services, unclear route information, and insufficient integration between ETS stations and local transport systems. These issues suggest that while transport accessibility plays a supportive role, its effectiveness depends heavily on coordination, visibility, and clarity. Poorly communicated or infrequent transport options may weaken tourists' confidence and reduce the likelihood of visiting nearby attractions, reinforcing the perception of ETS stations as transit points rather than tourism gateways.

Overall, the discussion highlights that transport accessibility is not only a physical infrastructure issue but also a critical component of tourism communication and experience design. Enhancing last-mile connectivity, improving the visibility of transport options within station environments, and integrating transport information with digital platforms could significantly strengthen tourists' awareness and intention to explore surrounding attractions. By addressing these aspects, ETS stations can better function as gateways that encourage tourism dispersion and engagement with nearby destinations, rather than serving solely as nodes for intercity travel.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Overall, the findings indicate that transport accessibility plays a crucial role in enhancing tourists' awareness of and intention to visit nearby attractions around ETS stations. Easy and convenient access to feeder transport services, effective last-mile connectivity, and clear transport information at stations encourage tourists to explore surrounding destinations beyond the station area, underscoring the importance of transport

accessibility as a supporting element in railway-based tourism planning.

However, this study is subject to several limitations, including its focus on selected ETS stations along major intercity routes in Peninsular Malaysia and its reliance on questionnaire-based, self-reported perceptions, which may not fully capture actual visitation behaviour or deeper motivational factors. In addition, the predominance of Malaysian respondents may limit the generalisability of the findings to international tourists who may face different awareness and wayfinding challenges.

Future research could address these limitations by incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews, conducting comparative studies across different rail systems (e.g., ETS, MRT, and LRT), applying longitudinal designs to assess changes following transport or any improvements, and including a larger proportion of international tourists. Despite these limitations, this study contributes valuable insights into how transport accessibility shapes tourists' awareness and intention to visit nearby attractions, offering practical implications for KTMB, tourism stakeholders, and station planners seeking to enhance the overall travel and tourism experience at ETS stations.

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