

KERATAN AKHBAR

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Workers gathering used plastic bottles collected from passengers as payment for bus fare at a terminal in Surabaya, Indonesia recently. AFP PIC

SMART SCHEME

SWAP TRASH FOR FREE TICKETS

16,000 passengers in Surabaya trade plastic waste for free travel every week

JAKARTA

DOZENS of people clutching bags full of plastic bottles and disposable cups queue at a busy bus terminal in the Indonesian city of Surabaya, where passengers can swap trash for travel tickets.

The nation is the world's second biggest marine polluter behind China and has pledged to reduce 70 per cent of plastic waste in its waters by 2025 by boosting recycling, raising public awareness, and curbing usage.

The Surabaya scheme has been a hit in the city of 2.9 million, with

nearly 16,000 passengers trading trash for free travel each week, according to authorities.

"This is a smart solution. It's free and instead of throwing away bottles, people now collect them and bring them here," said 48-year-old resident Fransiska Nugrahepi.

An hour-long bus ride with unlimited stops costs three large bottles, five medium bottles or 10 plastic cups. But they must be cleaned and cannot be squashed.

There is a steady stream of people squeezing past sacks full of recyclables to deposit plastic in four bins behind the small office and claim their tickets.

Franki Yuanus, a transport of-

ficial, said the programme aimed not only to cut waste but also to tackle traffic congestion by encouraging people to switch to public transport.

"There has been good response from the public. Paying with plastic is one of the things that has made people enthusiastic because up until now plastic waste was just seen as useless," added Yuanus.

Currently, the fleet consists of 20 near-new buses, each with recycling bins and ticket officers who roam the aisles to collect any leftover bottles.

Authorities said six tonnes of plastic rubbish are collected from passengers each month before being auctioned to recycling companies.

Nurhayati Anwar, who used the bus once a week with her 3-year-old son, said the trash swap pro-

gramme was changing how people saw their throwaway cups and bottles.

"Now people in the office or at home are trying to collect (rubbish) instead of just throwing it away," the 44-year-old accountant said after trading in several bottles for a free ride.

"We now know that plastic is not good for the environment — people in Surabaya are starting to learn."

Other parts of Indonesia, an archipelago of some 17,000 islands, are also trying to tackle the issue.

Bali is phasing in a ban on single-use plastic straws and bags to rid the popular holiday island of waste-choking its waterways, while authorities in the capital Jakarta are considering a similar by-laws to rid the city of plastic shopping bags. **AFP**