

Malaysia

MRT a rush job, needs more study, says group

By Clara Chooi



Mohd Nur conceded that SPAD had not considered possible added congestion costs for commuters. — file pic

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 14 — Putrajaya may have rushed through the RM36.6 billion mass rapid transit (MRT) for the Klang Valley without considering issues such as the traffic congestion it hopes to reduce or the increased congestion at the stations, a research group said today.

S. Piarapakaran, of the Association of Water and Energy Research Malaysia (AWER), told *The Malaysian Insider* that responses from MRT regulators yesterday showed they had not considered all aspects of the multibillion ringgit project before announcing it to the public.

He said regulators should be aware that by creating such a facility, they were likely to attract more crowds to the MRT access points which could in turn increase congestion on the roads instead of reducing it.

Land Public Transport Commission (SPAD) chief executive officer Mohd Nur Ismail Mohamed Kamal conceded at a press conference yesterday that the government had not researched the possibility of commuters having to fork out extra money for fuel usage in their travel to and from their homes and the MRT stations.

AWER had earlier claimed that a cautious estimate from its financial modelling study on the MRT showed that commuters would likely spend an additional RM403.5 million in fuel cost within the first five years of using the facility.

"We have not done a specific research on that, but to be honest, I cannot see how driving to the station would be more expensive than going to Bukit Bintang (for example) in my car," Mohd Nur Ismail said.

Piarapakaran said Mohd Nur Ismail's statement showed that SPAD had not taken all factors into consideration before embarking on the MRT project.

"Based on his answer, it creates more doubt. Question — Why are you putting an MRT? Answer — I want to reduce traffic congestion.

"Question — How much are you planning to reduce? Answer — I have not studied that.

"That sort of answer should not come from a regulator," he pointed out.

Piarapakaran said SPAD could easily formulate a study to ascertain the likely reduction in traffic congestion with the MRT, which would then determine if commuters would have to fork out extra in fuel cost or save money.

The parameters that SPAD could use for its study, he suggested, were passenger flow rate, parking spaces, inter-connectivity of access roads to the station and a supporting public transport system like feeder buses.

"From these parameters, they should be able to come up with targets that they want to project. You must be able to project flow of passengers in each station and its impact in the locality," he said.

Piarapakaran also defended AWER's study on the project, denying that it had never assumed that nothing would be done to improve the MRT's supporting infrastructure.

"We did put the possibility of feeder buses and so on. We assumed a number of people will take public transport to the station and the others will drive to it.

Annual Fuel Cost Estimation Due to Traffic Congestion
(based on AWER's Modelling)

Year	Estimated fuel cost a year (RM Million)
2016	66.095
2017	72.704
2018	79.975
2019	87.972
2020	96.77

Source: AWER - Association of Water and Energy Research Malaysia

"From that number, you have to project those who do not use the MRT services at all as well. All of them are on the same road, that is a fact," he said.

In AWER's study, Piarapakaran had earlier explained that it had considered the government's estimate that about 20 per cent of commuters use public transport while 80 per cent use their own vehicles.

The study had also included parameters like an estimated twice-daily traffic congestion (morning and evening) with 30 minutes of peak traffic, rate of passenger flow in an hour, 40 weeks of five working days for a year, RON 95 fuel cost (RM1.90 now and 10 per cent increase per year) and statistics of public transportation usage (20 per cent use public transport).

Piarapakaran said the likelihood that the project estimate of RM36.6 billion was for the MRT system alone and not its supporting infrastructure.

He added that it was also probable that the government had no plans to expand roads in order to reduce congestion at MRT access points or build multi-level overhead bridges.

"Structurally, we have road systems that have design flaws, it simply promotes congestion. More often than not, our systems just pluck traffic from one location and dump it in another.

"If you are used to taking the LDP and the Federal Highway, you will know what I am talking about. So how are they going to put more than 50 per cent of MRT users in feeder buses? What is the plan?" he said.

Klang Valley Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) Project Sungai Buloh - Kajang Line

Facts and figures

- ▶ Length: 51km
- ▶ Length of underground portion: 9.5km
- ▶ Number of stations: 35
- ▶ Number of interchange stations: 4
- ▶ Number of park and ride stations: 13
- ▶ Construction period: 2011-2016

The above are estimates

Park & Ride
 Station
 KTM Kajang / Sg. Buloh
 KJ Line - Pasar Seni
 AG Line - Maluri

Proposed station names are temporary and subject to approval by SPAD and related government agencies.

Mohd Nur Ismail said yesterday that the MRT aims to have 50 per cent of an estimated 18 million trips by about 10 million commuters in the Klang Valley to be via public transport.

He also revealed that one MRT carriage could carry 300 people, which is the equivalent to the average passenger load of three buses or 177 cars.

Piarapakaran told SPAD to study human behaviour before assuming that commuters would opt for its feeder system as if this was inconvenient to access, this was not likely to happen.

"SPAD needs to know more about how people behave... we are not equipment that runs on assembly lines. We think, we decide and then we make changes," he said.

He urged the public to study the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report on the MRT project, which is said to be ready today and will be up for public viewing at all Department of Environment office as well as several public libraries.

On AWER's part, he said a review session on the EIA would be held on Wednesday.

"If the SPAD CEO is very confident in what they are doing, we should congratulate SPAD for their utmost dedication to their duty. Therefore, he should also take full responsibility over the outcome of the MRT project as well," he said.

According to the Klang Valley MRT website, the ambitious project will have 35 stations along its 51km line that stretches from Sungai Buloh to Kajang, with 13 proposed park-and-ride stations and four interchanges.

Eight of the stations will be underground as 9.5km of the line will be built under the capital city. Groundwork for the MRT is due to start this July 16 and will be completed in 2016.

The MRT is an entry-point project identified for the Greater Kuala Lumpur/Klang Valley National Key Economic Area under the

Economic Transformation Programme.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said last December that the implementation of the project is expected to generate a gross national income (GNI) of between RM3 billion and RM4 billion beginning in 2011 until 2020.

He had said that between RM8 billion and RM12 billion was expected to be generated in terms of spin-offs from the construction of the MRT project.

The proposed alignment map for the Kajang-Sungai Buloh line, the first of three proposed lines under the MRT, is up for public viewing from today until May 14 at seven locations across the city.

They are Kuala Lumpur City Hall, Petaling Jaya City Council, Shah Alam City Council, Selayang Municipal Council, Kajang Municipal Council as well as the Bangsar LRT station and the SPAD office in Menara Dayabumi.

The public can provide their feedback on the project via email to feedback@kvmrt.com.my or through the SPAD toll free line at 1-800-82-6868.