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Commuters will spend more with KL MRT, says research group

By Clara Chooi
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Najib (second left) and Cabinet ministers look at a model of the Greater KL redevelopment. — file pic

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 13 — The RM36.6 billion Kuala Lumpur Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) project is based on outdated transport data and could cost commuters an extra RM403.5 million in fuel expenses within the first five years of operations, claims a local research group.

Association of Water and Energy Research (Awer) president S. Piarapakaran said the extra burden on commuters is due to a lack of good supporting infrastructure to ferry commuters from their homes to the stations.

“It is about access to the station, not just about the MRT system per se. While the MRT may serve the people well, we are still way behind in terms of transporting these commuters to the stations so that they can actually use the system,” he told *The Malaysian Insider*.

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. Groundworks for the MRT is due to start this July 16 and will be completed in 2016.

Piarapakaran said Awer had conducted a financial modelling study two weeks ago to ascertain the likely losses to commuters once the MRT is operational.

The additional losses, he explained, was based on fuel usage by those travelling to the MRT stations.

“We took into consideration the government’s estimation that over 20 per cent of road users utilise public transport like taxis and buses and the remaining 80 per cent use their own individual vehicles.

“So based on that, we are projecting the kind of traffic congestion that will likely occur when these commuters move from their homes to the stations,” he said.

According to Awer’s projections, additional fuel costs to road users for the first five years of the MRT’s operations from 2016 to 2020 would likely total RM403.5 million.

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The study includes 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).

"But these are just cautious estimates because we are just considering 30 minutes of peak congestion. The total amount could be even higher," he said.

Piarapakaran also claimed the multibillion ringgit project had yet to obtain approval from the Department of Environment (DOE) or complete its Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report.

"So I am wondering, why are they jumping the gun and announcing the project when it may not even be given the green light to go ahead.

"The EIA process has not even been done yet and this takes time," he said.

Piarapakaran claimed that according to his sources, the DOE was scheduled to receive the EIA report from the project's consultants by month-end.

"But that does not end the process. You need to put it up for public review, then the EIA consultants need to re-submit the report. The process takes between one to two months," he said.

He added that consultants would also need to conduct a social impact study in their EIA report, which includes obtaining feedback and interviewing the local communities affected by the project.

"As far as I know, most resident associations are against the project. So it looks like their views have not yet been taken into consideration," he said.

Piarapakaran said the local communities were worried the project would worsen congestion on the roads should more people opt to use the MRT system.

"As it stands, we already have bad traffic jams. But now, these commuters will clog the roads in their journey to the stations... they will park and wait there to pick up or drop off passengers," he said.

He suggested that before the government proceeded with its plans to kick off work on the project, it needed to consider formulating a good feeder system to better connect passengers from their homes to the stations.

"If you look abroad in railway systems in UK or Japan, for example, commuters often walk or use the feeder system provided to move from their homes to the stations. They do not even need to travel on the roads.

"Here, the system is not conducive for commuters to walk to the stations," he said.

In a statement, Piarapakaran noted the Japanese International Co-operation Agency (JICA) had supported a transport study from February 1997 to March 1999 for the proposed MRT system.

"But, this study was carried out during economic downturn and it was also based on previous statistics. Effectively data before 1996 will be used for estimations. This shows that, we will be constructing and operating the MRT after year 2016 with a 20 years gap in planning. Can we take such study as a valid study for implementation?" he asked.

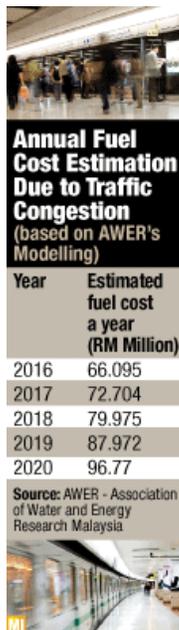
The MRT is an entry-point project identified for the Greater Kuala Lumpur/Klang Valley National Key Economic Area under the Economic Transformation Programme.

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.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Idris Jala said last month that physical work for the RM36.6 billion project will start on July 16.

Land Public Transport Commission (SPAD) announced yesterday that the proposed alignment for the MRT would be displayed to the public beginning next Monday.



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The Sungai Buloh-Kajang line is expected to carry 400,000 passengers daily when it begins and snowball to some 2.5 million in 2020, according to SPAD.

Malaysia's biggest infrastructure project will be integrated with the light rapid transit (LRT) system, the Monorail system, and the KTM Komuter system, said SPAD.

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