

Malaysia

MRT station spots not justified, claims research group

By Clara Chooi



A man inspects a map of the proposed MRT line displayed at the Bangsar LRT station. — Picture by Choo Choy May



KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 23 — The sites of the 35 stations proposed for the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) have been called into question by a local research group, which claims regulators had not conducted the necessary traffic studies to justify their locations along the 51km line.

Association of Water and Energy Research Malaysia (Awer) president S. Piarapakaran told The Malaysian Insider that when preparing the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the MRT, the project consultants had failed to conduct a traffic modelling study, which he claimed was crucial to ensure the optimality of the project.

This includes measuring the present traffic flow at areas surrounding the proposed stations, an estimate of the likely increase in commuters flocking to the area to use the MRT, and a cautious estimate of how much congestion the system was likely to reduce, he added.

“They need to study the reason why the project regulators had decided to place the stations in those locations. Impact studies must be done on those in the surrounding areas affected by the MRT stations. This was not done.

“With the traffic analysis or modelling, they also have to determine the number of cars in the area at present and estimate the number of people who would come from outside the area to gain access to the station,” the Awer chief said.

Piarapakaran cited the example of the proposed park-and-ride station at Sungai Buloh where it was stated in the EIA that the station would have an estimated ridership of 2,400 people.

“But what they missed out is that there will likely be others from outside the area, perhaps from Rawang, who would want to use the station and will therefore clog the roads and increase the ridership. So their 2,400 estimate is likely inaccurate,” he said.

At the proposed elevated station along Jalan Damansara at Taman Tun Dr Ismail (TTDI), Piarapakaran predicted that without park-and-ride facilities, the station would likely increase congestion in the area.

“Sure, you may reduce the present traffic by taking people off the roads with the MRT but then they still need to get to the station.

“Also, you will attract more people to flock into the vicinity, even those who usually do not need to pass through the area. Then you have to take into consideration the feeder buses coming in. Already, the place is so badly jammed during peak hours,” he said.

He pointed out that even if commuters opt for the public bus feeder system to travel to the station, this would later result in the increased presence buses on the already choked Jalan Damansara during peak hours.

Piarapakaran then pointed out that in the LRT project, many stations became under-utilised due to poor planning and a lack of proper study on the purpose of the stations’ locations.

“Look at the Abdullah Hukum LRT station. From what I know, only TNB staff members use that station. Other than that, it is under-utilised,” he said.

In the first phase of its three-line proposal, the Klang Valley MRT 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.

Piarapakaran said that according to the declaration forms attached to the EIA report, a consultant registered in the area of traffic studies had been specifically tasked to carry out the traffic modelling but had not done so.

"I understand that the project proponent is now going to do the study but this does not make sense as the traffic modelling study must be included in the EIA in the first place," he said.

Without the study, Piarapakaran said the EIA was merely a "literature review" of the MRT, an initiative touted as the most expensive construction project ever undertaken by the Malaysian government.

Estimated to cost over RM36 billion, the MRT is an entry point project identified for the Greater Kuala Lumpur/Klang Valley National Key Economic Area (NKEA) and aims to increase public transport usage from 18 per cent to 40 per cent by 2020.

The EIA is meant to look into all aspects of the project in order to determine its impact on the environment and the public.

Piarapakaran said that a traffic modelling study would also offer better accuracy to the EIA's findings on the likely reduction of carbon emissions with the MRT through the reduced number of cars on the roads.

The EIA, he claimed, had only based its estimate on the reduction according to the number of vehicles the MRT system could remove from the roads.

"But again, without the traffic modelling study, the estimate may not even be accurate. They do not even know how many cars presently throng the streets in the areas, especially surrounding the stations, and how many more will use private vehicles to get to the stations.

"And if there is an increase in feeder buses to facilitate passenger movement, then this will add to the emissions," he said.

The EIA report states that an estimated 132,860 MT/annum of carbon emissions would be avoided through the use of the MRT system following the shift of some 200,000 vehicle/trips from private transport to rail.

"But this is a conservative estimate as it was assumed that the average vehicle trip is only 10km," the report said.

To calculate the net emissions avoided, the report factored in likely emissions that the MRT system itself would generate.

"The main source of emissions will be from power stations that generate electricity to be used by the trains and the stations.

"But it is not possible at this stage to estimate the amount of electricity that will be consumed at stations. This is also complicated by the fact that there will be other activities at the stations," the report said.

The EIA estimated that a total of 98,459 MT/annum of carbon emissions would be generated due to electricity consumption at the MRT rail stations.

As such, the net emissions avoided according to the report were 34,400 MT/Annum.

Piarapakaran stressed that Awer was not against the MRT project as it viewed it as necessary to improve the country's public transportation system and reduce energy usage through fuel.

Awer had conducted a financial modelling study on the project earlier and claimed that commuters would have to fork out an additional RM403.5 million in fuel cost in the first five years of the MRT's operations.

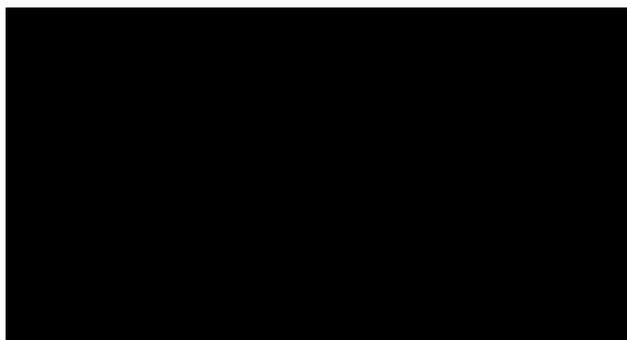
Without having conducted the study, Piarapakaran predicted that the Department of Environment (DOE) was likely to approve the MRT project once public viewing on the document closes this March 15.

"Looking at things, it is likely that the DOE is going to approve the EIA for the MRT and the project will kick off in July," he said.

The EIA report was prepared by ERE Consulting and involved 15 DOE-registered EIA consultants. It also included professional inputs from five other firms — Halcrow Consultants Sdn Bhd (traffic projections/MRT ridership), AECOM (alignment planning), Gamuda Engineering Sdn Bhd (geology and geotechnical), AJM Planning and Urban Design Group Sdn Bhd (land use) and Environmental Asia Sdn Bhd (erosion and sedimentation control plan).

"We are not against the MRT but what we are unhappy with is the way the project is being carried out without sufficient studies.

"For such an important, multibillion ringgit national project, the government needs to make sure that they take everything into consideration to make sure that it goes well and is cost-effective," said Piarapakaran.

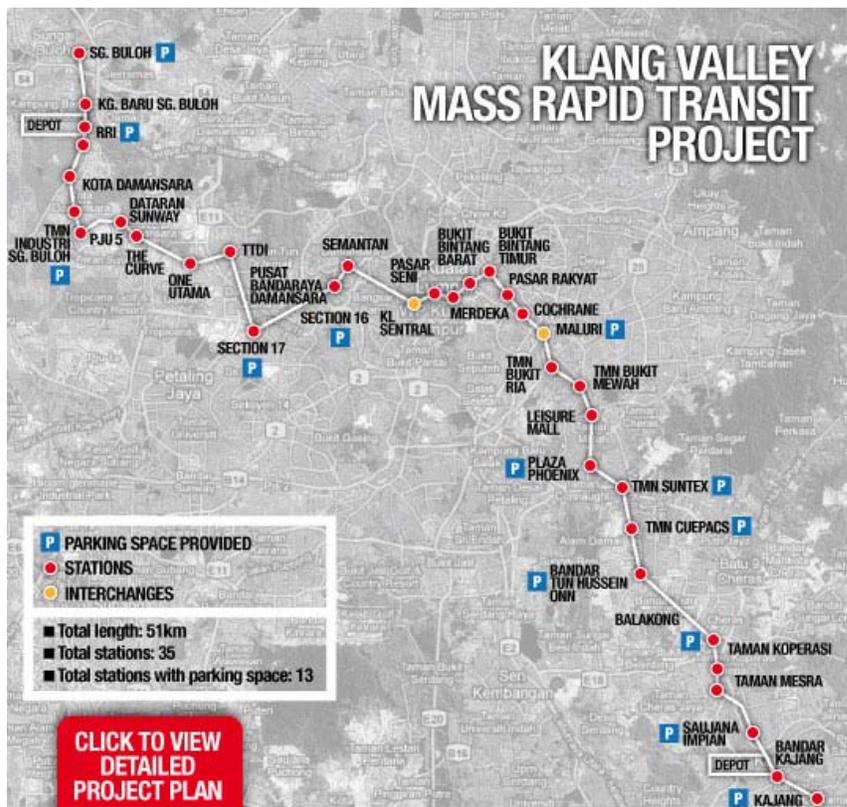




The proposed Klang Valley MRT alignment map is up for public viewing until May 14 at seven locations across the city.

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.



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