

MRT LAUNCH

VITAL LINK TO NATION'S GROWTH

Improving public transport is an integral part of creating an efficient and competitive economy, say economists



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THE opening of the Sungai Buloh-Kajang mass rapid transit (MRT) line caps another milestone in Kuala Lumpur's rapid modernisation into a city

“By shifting more people to use public transport, it will create a smaller carbon footprint and make the city green, sustainable and liveable.

“An efficient and environment-friendly transport system has become an integral part of an efficient and competitive economy.

“It is necessary to

THE MRT PROJECT

- SBK LINE**
- Sungai Buloh
- Kampung Selamat
- Kwasa Damansara
- Kwasa Sentral

● The Klang Valley Mass Rapid Transit (KVMRT) System is the most important and largest transport infrastructure project that Malaysia has embarked on.

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● This project is listed as an Entry Point Project (EPP) under the Economic Transformation Programme, Greater Kuala Lumpur/Klang Valley National Key Economic Area (NKEA).

that Malaysians can be proud of.

Together with other proposed large intra- and inter-city rail projects, such as the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High-Speed Rail and the East Coast Rail Line, it will shift the country's landscape of moving people from a private to public transport-driven system, said Dr Yeah Kim Leng, a professor of economics at Sunway University Business School.

"The immediate impact of this large-scale investment can be felt — spurring of construction activities, spending on materials, employment of Malaysians, especially in managerial, technical and supervisory functions, and other multiplier effects through sub-contracting services and supplies.

"The large and long-term socio-economic impact will be generated indirectly through increasing the efficiency of the country's transport system, and its contribution towards a dynamic and competitive environment."

Yeah said an efficient public transport system would reduce travel cost, alleviate congestion and reduce pollution by vehicles on the roads.



Professor Dr Yeah Kim Leng

cope with rapid urbanisation and the accompanying rural-to-urban population shift.

"More importantly, an efficient transport system will cap the rise in the country's energy consumption and reduce its vulnerability to oil price shocks."

Although not sufficient by itself, Yeah said an efficient transport system was a necessary condition for economic growth as exemplified by thriving mega cities, including Singapore, Bangkok and Jakarta.

"Nowadays, competition for local and foreign investments, and attracting global multi-national companies is not between countries, but cities.

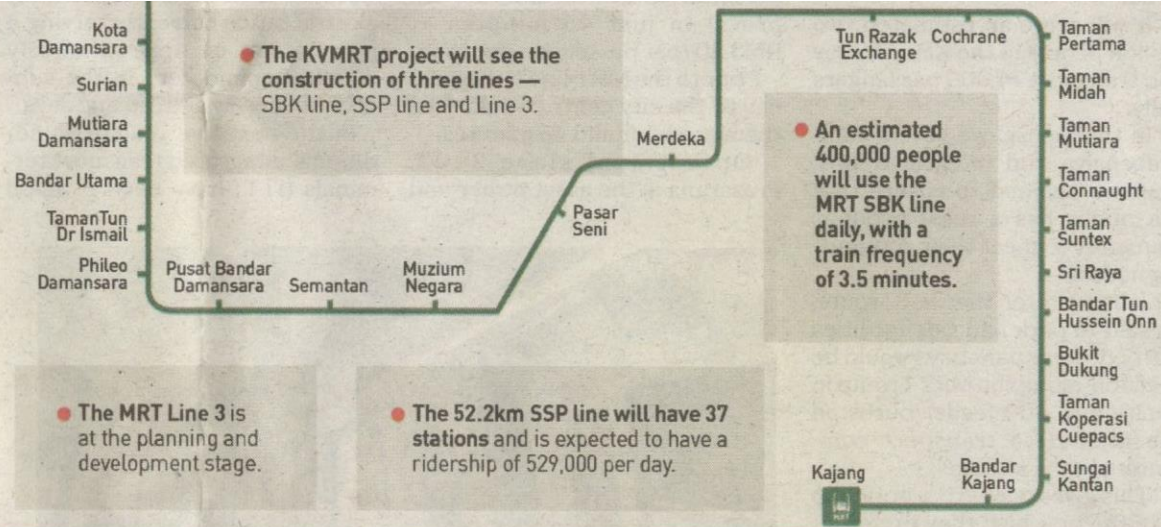
"It is crucial for KL and the state capitals to continuously upgrade their transport infrastructure as an integral part of the overall strategy to attract local and foreign investments," he said.

For commuters, besides the cost savings, there was also the convenience of travelling and reduced stress of being caught in traffic snarls.

"With greater ease and certainty in scheduling and commuting, there is also the indirect and long-term economic benefits of a



Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid



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more productive workforce.

"The ability to commute easily and cheaply over longer distances would enable people to live further from their workplace. Another indirect spillover is the appreciation of land and property value along the MRT route," he said.

Bank Islam Malaysia Bhd chief economist Dr Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid said it was typical for developed countries and metropolises to embrace various modes of transport rather than rely solely on private vehicles.

"Malaysia is moving towards such a direction, where the adoption of public transport has become the mainstream for people to be mobile. The existing infrastructure is somewhat congested, especially during peak hours.

"In some ways, Malaysians have

become accustomed to rail-related infrastructure and it has become part of their lives for a daily commute.

"Therefore, the investment in such infrastructure is paramount in order to improve connectivity and efficiencies, which would lead to better productivity gains.

"Better connectivity would also allow employees to commute from a long distance, such as those who reside in Seremban and Melaka.

"This will improve the living standards in those states following the high income earned by employees in cities."

He said each infrastructure would require skilled workers to perform maintenance, which should bode well for Malaysia as the country had a vast number of technical and vocational educa-

tion and training graduates.

Since urban folk can now stay in the outskirts following improvements in the public transport infrastructure, it will result in higher property demand from high-income earners.

He said last year, the median salary for Kuala Lumpur employees stood at RM2,500 per month compared with RM1,870 in Negri Sembilan and RM1,680 in Melaka.

"To some extent, it could also pose population challenges as property prices will rise steeply, affecting the locals.

"Therefore, the government needs to play an active role to ensure that such negative externalities can be managed."

Efficiencies and better connectivity of transport systems were an essential part in making a great country, he added.



A Mass Rapid Transit train passing through the underground tunnel at the Muzium Negara station in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.
BERNAMA PIC

Phase Two of SBK Line opens at 4pm tomorrow

KUALA LUMPUR: Phase Two of the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) Sungai Buloh-Kajang (SBK) Line between Kajang and Muzium Negara will open starting 4pm tomorrow, after the official launch by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

Rapid Rail Sdn Bhd chief executive officer Datuk Zohari Sulaiman said the public could travel on the train service by taking the SBK Line from Kajang station to Muzium Negara station.

“However, connection to Phase One of the SBK Line between Sungai Buloh station and Semantan station, as well as to integrated stations for Light Rail Transit (LRT) Kelana Jaya, Sri Petaling and Ampang lines will only be available from 6am on the following day,” he said.

Phase Two, covering 30km, has 19 stations, with seven of them underground.

The stations are Muzium Negara, Pasar Seni, Merdeka

Sebelas Cheras, Bukit Dukung, Sungai Jernih, Stadium Kajang and Kajang.

The line integrates with the LRT route at Pasar Seni station and Maluri station, as well as at Merdeka station, which integrates with the Plaza Rakyat LRT station.

It also offers connectivity with LRT, monorail, KTM komuter and Express Rail Link at the Muzium Negara station, which is connected to KL Sentral station via a linkway for pedestrians.

Phase One, covering 21km, with 12 stations from Sungai Buloh to Semantan, began operation on Dec 16.

Zohari said in line with the opening of Phase Two, feeder bus services for the newly-opened stations would be made available.

“It will expand the feeder bus coverage provided by Rapid Bus Sdn Bhd to 23 additional routes across 19 new MRT sta-

MASS RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEM

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PROJECT SHOWS LOCAL EXPERTS' CAPABILITIES

Malaysians recount their experience in building mega project

KUALA LUMPUR

THE construction of seven underground stations of the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) Sungai Buloh-Kajang (SBK) Line Phase Two has proven that local talent, including architects, designers and engineers, can undertake a world-class mega project.

One of the youngest engineers involved in this project, Izyan Syahirah Hasanuddin, 26, said various factors had to be taken into account in planning and building the underground stations, including the geological settings underneath the city.

She said the underground alignment for the SBK Line navigated past two geological settings, which were the Kenny Hill Formation (sedimentary rock and sand formation) and Kuala Lumpur Karstic Limestone Formation.

"Fifty per cent of the underground alignment was in the form of extreme karstic limestone. And, to dig the tunnel, we had to maintain the equilibrium of the sub-surface geological system containing underground reservoirs and water-filled cavities.

"It is challenging as any disturbances from underground activities could cause karstic sinkholes and ground subsidence.

"To overcome that, 10 tunnel boring machines (TBM) were used to dig in the ground as the TBM is the most efficient machine in clearing ground, be it all rock, all soft soil or all sand," Izyan said at the Cochrane MRT station recently.

Extreme karstic is a geological formation consisting of weakly soluble bedrock, such as limestone eroded by mildly acidic water over millions of years, leaving behind unstable caverns, cliffs and pinnacles in the depth of the city.

She said the most physically and mentally taxing moment was during the intervention process, which required her to temporarily stop the TBM to look at the underground cavity being dug.

"You cannot imagine how I felt when I faced temperatures of 38°C, the nauseating smell of dirt and the darkness, with limited movement in the tunnel," said Izyan, who holds a Bachelor's in Civil Engineering from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

Izyan said she was thankful for the opportunities given to her in undertaking the task as it was a specialised field, usually dominated by men and more often by foreigners.

Another engineer, Ismail Bukhari Wan Ibrahim, 27, who joined the MRT project when he was 23, after graduation, said: "It

was almost impossible for fresh graduates to land such a post abroad. So, when MMC-Gamuda KVMRT (T) Sdn Bhd made the offer, I could not refuse.

"It offered a unique learning platform, and each day, it gave me a new experience and knowledge, as well as problems to solve," said the Universiti Teknologi Mara graduate.

MMC-Gamuda KVMRT architectural manager Tricia Low Yi Ching said among those seven underground stations, Tun Razak Exchange was the deepest station for the SBK Line, with a depth of 45m, equivalent to a 13-storey building.

She said designing the underground stations' interiors was a challenge as the company needed to design a layout for ventilation and emergency exit routes.

"To allow perfect ventilation in and out of the stations, we needed to create a sustainable layout at entrances," said Low, who has 12 years' working experience.

She said the underground stations' design had taken into account the flash flood factor, so that its operation would not be affected should the problem arise.

"Historically, flooding does occur at the station areas.

"Hence, we have installed flood boards below the floor to prevent water from entering the stations."

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak will launch the second phase tomorrow. **Bernama**

Negara, Pasar Seni, Merdeka, Bukit Bintang, Tun Razak Exchange, Cochrane, Maluri, Taman Pertama, Taman Midah, Taman Mutiara, Taman Connaught, Taman Suntex, Sri Raya, Bandar Tun Hussein Onn, Batu

routes across 12 new MRT stations.

"A total of 100 additional feeder buses will be provided to connect residents in residential and commercial areas near selected MRT stations."

Cheras-Kajang Highway road closures extended 2 weeks

KUALA LUMPUR: Road closures in areas along the Cheras-Kajang Highway will be extended for 14 more days to facilitate Mass Rapid Transit construction works, starting Tuesday.

MMC-Gamuda KVMRT (T) Sdn Bhd, which is the project delivery partner, said the closures were to facilitate reinstatement of street lighting, permanent signage and road markings.

Areas to be closed from 10pm to 5am include the stretch for Kajang and Kuala Lumpur bound from Km14 to Km15.5, near Exit 703 of the Telekom interchange and Exit 704 of the Bandar Tun Hussein Onn interchange, as well as from Km13.3 to Km14.7 near Kampung Sungai Raya.

The slip road at Exit 702 of the Hulu Langat interchange, Exit 703 of the Telekom interchange and Exit 704 of the Bandar Tun Hussein Onn interchange will remain closed during that period.

Also affected is the stretch from Km10.6 to Km11.6 Kajang-bound from Cheras Hartamas entering Cheras Kajang Highway until the slip road entering FRU Complex at Batu 7, where there will be a two-lane closure, while another three lanes in the area will remain open.

In addition, some areas are to be closed from 10am to 4pm and 10pm to 5am. These include partial lane closures at the Kajang and Kuala Lumpur-bound route at Exit 701 of the PGA Interchange, as well as at the slip road from Taman Kota Cheras entering Cheras-Kajang Highway, Kuala Lumpur-bound.

The motorcycle lane at Kuala Lumpur and Kajang-bound Batu 9 and Batu 11 toll booths will be closed from 9am to 4pm and from 10pm to 5am.

During this period, motorcyclists are advised to use the left-most lane near the toll booth.

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