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'RTS must move before HSR'

Better for Bukit Chagar-Woodlands link to start ASAP, says monitor

By MOHD FARHAAN SHAH
and REMAR NORDIN
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

JOHOR BARU: The government should get the Rapid Transit System (RTS) linking Bukit Chagar and Woodlands moving first before going ahead with the High-Speed Rail (HSR) between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, says a monitoring group for the project.

While describing the HSR as an "ambitious infrastructure project", its representative Dr Tee Ching Seng agreed that it could help to boost development out of the Klang Valley.

"The project will uplift the gross domestic product for the entire southern corridor and the country but with our current economic situation, we should get the RTS going first.

"We would also like to know how

the government is going to finance the project beyond extensive borrowing under the present condition," he said when contacted.

Tee, who is also MCA International Communication and Diplomacy bureau chief, said the government should justify the expenses of the project to show "positive returns" to taxpayers.

"I suggest the project go under the Build-Operate-Transfer financing model that will allow the government to transfer the costs on to the private sector.

"It could look for an operator with a proven track record to finance the construction and then take over the rail operations upon completion.

"Through this, we would be able to reap the economic benefits without shouldering the financial burden," he said.

Tee also pointed out that the con-

struction cost might increase if the project was delayed further.

Johor government is still in the dark about the HSR project as Putrajaya has yet to make a decision.

State Public Works, Infrastructure and Transportation Committee chairman Mohd Solihan Badri said the government was still conducting studies on the project.

"So far, there is no discussion on the project since the last announcement. We expect Putrajaya to make a decision by this May," he said, adding that there should be a high-profile meeting between Transport Minister Anthony Loke and Menteri Besar Datuk Dr Sahrudin Jamal prior to the decision.

Mohd Solihan refused to be drawn in when asked on the construction cost, said to be less than RM30bil.

Last month, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the revived Bandar Malaysia project would house a Kuala Lumpur-Singapore HSR station.

The Prime Minister said although Malaysia and Singapore had yet to finalise the project details, it would definitely have a stop in Bandar Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir also said that talks on the resumption might take place this year.

In December--2016, the then Barisan Nasional administration signed a bilateral agreement with Singapore to build a 350km high-speed railway, linking Kuala Lumpur and Singapore with an estimated cost of RM110bil.

However, the project was put on hold by the Pakatan Harapan government after taking over Putrajaya, citing high costs.