

TARIKH : 8 MAC 2023
AKHBAR : NEW STRAITS TIMES
MUKA SURAT : 10

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WILDLIFE FRIENDLY

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TEMERLOH: The East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) project will see the construction of more than 20 animal crossings built along its 665km alignment.

Malaysia Rail Link Sdn Bhd (MRL) environment head Norhasrul Abu Hassan said 11 of the wildlife-friendly animal crossings would be built at the Kemasul forest reserve in Mentakab which has a huge elephant population.

"The wildlife box culverts, built at a height measuring 5.3m and 6m in width, are designed for elephants along with other smaller animals including Malayan tapirs and sun bears. The culvert's height is ideal for elephants which usually move in big groups.

"The longest wildlife box culvert in Kemasul measures about 75m long while the shortest is 15m. The size varies due to the topography and the height of the animal. Smaller box culverts were built near the tunnel in Kuantan," he told reporters during a media trip to the Kemasul wildlife box culvert crossing here.

Norhasrul said prior to designing and building the animal crossings, MRL had worked with the Wildlife and National Parks Department (Perhilitan)



Malaysia Rail Link (MRL) Environment department head Norhasrul Abu Hassan (second from left), with other senior officials, inspecting the plans of the 2.8km Kuantan Tunnel, which has been successfully completed as part of the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) Project in Jabor Kuantan. PIC BY FARIZUL HAFIZ AWANG

to conduct a wildlife survey and set up camera traps to capture images of roaming animals to identify the animal habitat areas.

"Wildlife surveys and camera traps were used to determine the species living in the area and the design of the animal crossings. If the area has no big mammals, then the animal crossings will be designed to cater for smaller sized tapir and sun bears.

"Initially, only seven animal crossings were planned to be built in the Kemasul forest reserve but as the project progressed, the final design had 11 box culvert crossings. All the animal crossings in Kemasul

will be completed by the end of this year," he said, adding that less than 40ha of the 21,900ha of the Kemasul forest reserve were utilised to build the animal crossings and rail alignment.

Norhasrul said to attract the mammals to utilise the wildlife crossings and help minimise human-wildlife conflicts, a wildlife management programme would be rolled out to help identify suitable plants or trees to be planted for the animals' nourishment.

"Perhilitan will assist to identify suitable nourishment plans for the animals and this will be planted near the crossings to encourage the animals to fre-

quent the area and become familiar with the crossings.

"This is part of the collaboration between ECRL main contractor China Communications Construction and ECRL Sdn Bhd (CCC-ECRL) and Perhilitan," he said.

He said beside the animal crossings at the forest reserves, viaducts would also be built at selected areas along the alignment to provide a safe crossing option for wildlife.

In 2018, CCC-ECRL had pledged over RM9 million to Perhilitan to minimise any negative impact from the ECRL project, including protecting the natural habitats of flora and fauna.