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Trans-Asia Railway project to be sped up

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WORK on the first route of the Trans-Asia Railway project linking Singapore to Kunming in South China will begin as soon as possible, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said.

Speaking to reporters after chairing a two-day special working group meeting on the Singapore-Kunming Rail Link yesterday, Dr Ling said the group had accepted Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's proposal to speed up the project by developing the easiest route first without having to wait for the completion of individual reports.

Dr Ling said the group had unanimously agreed on route one out of the five possible branch routes to be developed as soon as possible.

He added that he hoped it could be fully funded by the private sector. Route one will run through Singapore, KL, Bangkok, Poipet, Sisophon, Lok Ninh, Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi and Kunming. It will cost approximately RM1.5 billion.

Dr Ling also said the meeting, which was held in Shah Alam, ended on a successful note with the Trans-Asia Railway experts from eight countries accepting the consultant's inception report.

The consultants are Zaabar Consultancy, KL Consult and University Malaya experts.

"With the acceptance of the first report, which contains very basic information on the project, the experts can now begin work on the interim report which is expected to be ready in January next year," he said. He added that the draft final report and the final report which will include an analysis of all the data and figures and the economic studies will be completed in March and April respectively, next year.

"The meeting also agreed that a consortium comprising Renong Bhd, Bolton Properties and DRB-Hicom should study and put together the most commercially viable package for route one's infrastructure.

"Once we put together this viable package, then we will invite the private sectors from the other countries which are interested to take part in the development of the project," he said, adding that this is in the "spirit of Asean, for the good of Asean."

"This project will unite the people and economies of the region as well as strengthen the political ties among the countries," he said.

He said the venue for the next meeting of experts, which will discuss the interim report, has been left open as there are few countries which have expressed an interest to host it.

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