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Gateway project calls for new rail link with S'pore

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A NEW rail link will be constructed to replace the existing one on the Johor-Singapore Causeway as part of the Southern International Gateway (SIG) project.

It is, however, not immediately known whether the new rail link will be in the form of a separate bridge or an undersea tunnel.

The SIG masterplan calls for the demolition of the Causeway and its replacement with a futuristic bridge, but both the Malaysian and Singapore Governments had agreed for an undersea tunnel to replace the Causeway.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Singapore Premier Goh Chok Tong had first discussed the undersea tunnel possibility in Hanoi last November. The issue was further discussed by the two governments during Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's official visit to the republic last month.

During Abdullah's visit, Singapore had agreed in principle to the construction of an undersea tunnel while Malaysia requested time to study the details of the project, which was part of the package to resolve outstanding issues between Malaysia and Singapore.

Details of the SIG are posted on the Shout! Johor Bahru website. The project aims to put Johor Baru in the same league as other famous waterfront cities such as Sydney and San Francisco.

The SIG masterplan says that together with the new futuristic bridge, there would be land reclamation on the Johor side to facilitate the construction of a new Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) complex and the traffic dispersal roads leading to and from the new CIQ complex.

The new bridge will be stretching a kilometre across the strait with three-quarters of it in the Malaysian waters. It will have a navigational clearance of between 9m and 25m.

The bridge will be large enough to support a dual five-lane vehicular traffic, a motorcycle lane and pedestrian walkway.

The CIQ complex, on the other hand, will be an integrated structure spread over 29.5ha of reclaimed land extending some 300m from the shoreline. The sinuous bridge would be joined to this two-storey building located at the site of the present Tanjung Puteri Customs Complex for lorries, on the eastern side of the present Causeway.

The SIG also said the futuristic and high-technology CIQ complex would cater to lorries on the ground floor, with light vehicles using the upper deck. The CIQ complex will have 56 heavy-vehicle immigration counters, 50 light-vehicle immigration counters, 28 motor-cycle immigration counters, 48 customs counters and a 350-bay car park for staff.

When completed, the project would divert all traffic from the city centre where the present customs complex is, to the newly developed innerring road, which would be upgraded to become a multi-tiered expressway together with the development.

Extensive landscaping would be done along Jalan Bukit Meldrum, Jalan Selat Tebrau, and all other connecting roads, with new traffic interchanges on Jalan Ibrahim Sultan and the inner-ring road.

The strait's navigability would also be reinstated with the construction of the new bridge and the demolition of the Causeway.

According to SIG, the Johor Government approved the development project in November 2000 and work on the project was to start early this year.

However, work on the new bridge would not start until the Singapore

Government approved the project.

The project is privatized and will be developed by Gerbang Perdana consortium, which is given a 33-year concession by the Federal Government to design, finance, build, operate and transfer the entire project.

Gerbang Perdana is 60 per cent owned by Merong Mahawangsa Sdn Bhd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Ibex Corp Amalgamated; 20 per cent owned by Diversified Resources Bhd; and 20 per cent owned by Transwater Corp Bhd's Detik Nagasari Sdn Bhd.

The entire project is expected to cost between RM1.5 billion to RM2 billion over a five-year period starting 2001. It involves 0.6480 sq km of land.

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