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## Bidding on railway projects to close on Thurs

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ALL bids for the double-tracking railway projects linking Ipoh with Padang

Besar and Seremban with Johor Baru must be handed over to the Government by Thursday, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik says.

"By January 16, we will get hold of the bids for the project. As soon as

we get hold of the bids, we will study (the bids) and then start negotiations.

"We hope to finish (study and negotiations) as soon as possible so that

we can start the projects fast," he told newsmen after witnessing the handing over of the last batch of 195 units of bogie container flats wagon

worth RM38 million from MMC Metal Industries Sdn Bhd (MMI) to KTM Bhd in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Malaysia has agreed to parcel out the projects to India's Ircon International Ltd and a consortium led by China Railway Engineering Corp.

Ircon, which is a state-run engineering and construction firm, will undertake double-tracking and electrification works for the northern grid, spanning 338.8km that links Ipoh with Padang Besar. The parcel is estimated to be worth RM6 billion.

China Railway will work on the 297km southern grid linking Seremban and Johor Baru, also valued at RM6 billion.

Local partners for these two companies are DRB-HICOM, Emrail Sdn Bhd, MMC and Kien Huat Group.

Dr Ling said the Ipoh-Padang Besar and Seremban-Johor Baru double-tracking projects will be completed in stages by 2007 and 2008.

This north-south electrified double-tracking project is part of KTM Bhd's modernisation plan.

The project is currently in its second phase after the completion of Kuala Lumpur-Seremban-Rawang-Port Klang link on August 3 1995.

Dr Ling said infrastructure work on the current phase, which involves a

174km long track from Rawang to Ipoh, is expected to be completed by December 10 this year. The signal system will be ready by the end of 2004

and full operation of the service is scheduled for early 2005.

With the completion of the Rawang-Ipoh double track, he said, KTM's commuter services will be extended up to Tanjung Malim.

"KTM Bhd plans to provide 110 commuter services per day to this new destination, with an interval of 15 to 30 minutes per train. The company will also introduce rapid intercity passenger services between KL Sentral and Ipoh, with 24 services a day at intervals of half hour per train,"

Dr

Ling said.

The double-track line forms part of the Trans-Asia Rail Grid stretching from Singapore to Kunming in south China.

On the Trans-Asia Rail Grid, Dr Ling said Malaysia wants to start work on at least one missing link or gap - the 8km Poipet-Sisophon stretch in Cambodia and its subsequent link to Phnom Penh.

"If we can start work on the gap, then we would be able to realise the rail link mooted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad," he said.

Besides the Poipet-Sisophon route, he said, Association of South-East Asian member countries are also working on the construction of the 240km stretch from Cambodia to Vietnam.

"While a Malaysian company can do the 8km Poipet-Sisophon stretch, Malaysia proposes the longest stretch to be managed and constructed by a multinational consortium.

"The consortium would also comprise all Asean partners, such as China, even South Korea, Japan and India," he added.

In his speech earlier, Dr Ling said the overall completion of the electrified double tracks, coupled with the acquisition of new rolling stock, will enable KTM to increase the volume of cargo transported from five million tonnes per year at present to 10 million tonnes annually in 2008.

"Intercity ridership is expected to increase from 4 million per year at present to seven million per year in 2008."

With the completion of the double-tracking project, Dr Ling said, the Government would like to see more people using railway services, the cheapest mode after sea transport.

"You have to pay one sen to transport goods via sea, rail five sen, road eight sen and air 50 sen. Thus, rail service is cheaper than that for land," he said.