

State government defends RapidPenang's entry
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The Penang government has hit back at critics who claimed that it had surrendered control over the state metropolitan transport system to the federal government by allowing RapidPenang to start bus operations on the island.

"The state government did not surrender its control. Instead, it has secured the federal government's direct involvement to provide a better bus service to commuters," said state executive councillor Dr Teng Hock Nan.

He said Penangites should be proud that their state was the first outside the Klang Valley region to operate a public bus system on a government initiative.

"It has secured a direct financially-strong investment from a federal government-owned company, which has the experience, expertise and proven track record in operating an efficient, affordable and reliable public bus network.

"The government is confident that RapidPenang would operate a better bus system," said Teng, who oversees local government, traffic management, information and community relations.

RapidPenang, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Finance Ministry Incorporated's investment arm, Prasarana Negara Bhd, will start its operations by August.

The new operator is an expansion of Prasarana's bus company RapidKL, which operates a bus service in the Klang Valley.

It will deploy 150 new buses, imported for RM31 million from China, to ply both main and supporting routes on the island and a link bus service between the island and the mainland.

Broken promise

Bus Users Group (Bug) spokesperson BK Ong had criticised the Penang government for surrendering its control on the state metropolitan transport system.

He said RapidPenang's entrance exposed the weakness of Gerakan Chief Minister Dr Koh Tsu Koon's government.

"When the state government can't do its job, it gives up control to the federal government.

"It gave up control over the sewage system, water supply and now buses. It's a total surrender of Penang people's right to control and operate their own transport system," he added.

Ong also said the state government failed to keep its promise to representatives from the Citizens for Public Transport (Cepat) at a meeting last year that the new

tender for bus operations in the state would be opened to local operators.

Cepat is a local public transport watchdog group comprising 25 non-government organisations in the state.

Another failure

Refuting the claims, Teng hinted that the state government decided to opt for RapidPenang due to fear of another failure in experimenting a new bus service network involving local operators.

The state government revamped the state bus operations several times for the past 10 years by integrating local bus companies under a single consortium to improve its service.

But each attempt proved futile, resulting in the total collapse of the bus service in Penang.

"After much deliberation and pondering, we decided to secure the expertise of RapidPenang to resolve the state transport woes once for all.

"The state government did not surrender its control. It has brought in a financially strong and stable company to operate an effective bus system for a long time," he said.

On the advisory panel to monitor the development and operations of RapidPenang, he said the panel would work closely with Cepat to consistently improve the bus service in the state.

"We all want a better bus service. Let's work together to achieve it," he said.

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