

**MRT project: Show us the money**  
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Petaling Jaya Utara parliamentarian Tony Pua has challenged the government to show how it intends to pay for the estimated RM36 billion mass rail transit project, on which work is due to begin next July.

This is especially since Syarikat Prasarana Negara Bhd, which is behind the project, has yet to recoup construction costs from the light rail transport (LRT) project completed more than a decade ago, and is unlikely to be able to do in the next 20 years so at prevailing fares.

"The (2009) audit report on Prasarana showed that the current average LRT fare of RM1.60 has to be increased to nearly RM9 for infrastructural costs to be fully recouped within the next 20 years despite the LRTs costing the federal government less than RM8 billion, nearly five times less than the proposed MRT system," Pua (left) said in a statement.

"It is highly misleading for the prime minister to espouse the viability of the project by claiming that it will generate gross national income of up to RM4 billion per annum when the interest servicing cost for the project at completion may in itself come up to more than RM2 billion each year."

Pua said concern also stems from the fact that Prasarana is already "heavily indebted with RM8.5 billion in bonds" and is even unable to service the interest costs.

The government-linked company was ticked off in the Auditor-General's 2009 report for "making accumulated losses of RM840 million as at December 2007, in part due to suspicious activities and management".

To make matter worse, the government has allocated RM2.5 billion to pay for Prasarana-issued bonds which are due in November 2011, Pua said.

'What about the Spad report?'

While the MRT system will benefit Klang Valley residents, the government may be jumping the gun by planning to commence construction before a holistic land transport plan is unveiled by the Land Public Transport Commission (Spad) in September 2011.

"In fact, Spad is still unable to declare, as at today, backed by a thorough and professional study that the MRT is the best option for the Klang Valley in the near future, as opposed to cheaper alternatives like buses or even trams based on travel patterns and population statistics," Pua said.

But giving due credit, Pua lauded the premier for announcing that the MRT project will be tendered out openly via nine project parcels.

"We call upon the government to be completely transparent with the entire plan, design and financial impact of the MRT project to convince the rakyat...that it will not become an unsustainable project which will leave our future tax-payers with billions in debt."

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