

Is there light at the end of the Penang tunnel?

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Traffic congestion on the Penang island is a daily headache that locals have had to deal with for years now.

To date, no comprehensive plan has emerged to relieve the massive jams that the people go through each and every day.

For a long time now, the people of Penang have suffered, first from the apparent inaction of the BN government, and now from the back-and-forth between the Pakatan-led state government and the federal government.

In many ways, at the crux of the problem lies partisan politics - the issue is that the federal government has a stranglehold on any public transportation developments and can make it difficult for a state government to proceed without its blessing.

Penang is further faced with the unique challenge of conforming to strict restrictions put in place by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) that comes with George Town's heritage status.

It is with all this in mind, says caretaker Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng (left), that the state government has chosen to try and solve the traffic headache by expanding its highway network in building a third link - this time under the seabed - from Bagan Ajam on the mainland to Gurney Drive area on the island.

It is hoped that by alleviating some of the traffic coming through the city centre heading towards the existing Penang Bridge and by diverting some of the traffic to bypass the city centre, some of the state's crippling traffic congestion - especially in the city centre - might be eased.

Pakatan not a 'do nothing' gov't

Lim has said that this is the best option the state government has on hand, given the lack of cooperation from the federal government.

He says that the Pakatan government will not be a "do nothing" government, and he is determined to see the project come through what may.

The caretaker chief minister has even stated that he would be willing to lose votes over the project, rather than sit idle on this matter.

But not all are convinced by Lim's conviction, or agree with his statement that it is better to

do something rather than nothing.

Various reasons ranging from viability and costs, to the environment, have been levelled as criticisms against this project. Among his most vocal critics have been several NGOs and perhaps unsurprisingly, political opponents of BN.

What is surprising, however, is the criticism coming from circles that are normally behind Lim, perhaps putting the caretaker chief minister in unfamiliar territory.

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