

Penang doesn't need a second bridge at all
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It has been reported that the planned second Penang bridge will cost RM4.3 billion. This is a staggering sum of money by any standards, even more so when one considers that a second bridge is not what Penang needs.

Another bridge will only bring more traffic congestion to the already car-choked streets of Penang island. It has been suggested that the ongoing widening of the existing Penang Bridge will not suffice as the bridge will become congested again in a few years.

If so, then the same logic equally applies to a second bridge which will also become clogged up eventually under current trends. What would the authorities' solution be then - build yet another bridge while Penangites struggle with bumper-to-bumper traffic?

There has to be a better option than constructing a second bridge. And there is. For one, the existing ferry service should be upgraded. More ferries can be obtained for this purpose, and more ferry terminals built at strategic points on the island and the mainland. There should also be adequate bus services to and from the terminals.

If indeed a third link between Penang island and Seberang Perai is deemed necessary, then it should be a light rail link, one that transports people rather than congestion-causing private cars. Like with the ferry service, buses and possibly an extended light rail system should service both ends of the cross-channel link.

In short, the focus must be on improving the public transport system in Penang. This is a much more efficient, cost-effective and environmentally sustainable way of ferrying people from point A to point B, especially in this time of skyrocketing oil prices and global warming.

In this regard, RM4.3 billion, or even a portion thereof, would be able to fund a quality public transport network that will efficiently serve Penangites. It may not be as glamorous as an 'iconic' second bridge, but it would be more people-friendly, and that is surely what matters most.

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