

UEM Group to build new bridge

KUALA LUMPUR: After 10 years of talking and debating about it, the second bridge to Penang will become a reality.

The Cabinet yesterday decided that the UEM Group will have the concession to build, manage, operate and maintain the project.

The Prime Minister noted that the company is best suited to spearhead the project as it is the concession holder for the Penang bridge built in 1985.

UEM is also a company which has extensive expertise and experience in the matter, said Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The *New Straits Times* has learnt that UEM is expected to finalise the bridge design over the next few months.

Datuk Ahmad Pardas Senin, the managing director and chief executive officer of the UEM Group, said he was confident the second Penang bridge would spur economic activity in the northern region.

It also expects local contractors to benefit from the project, which is likely to cost RM2.6 billion,

"We acknowledge the importance of this project for our country's development, particularly to

the people in the northern region," he said in a statement.

"Also through this project, we hope to provide opportunities to our local contractors to develop and enhance their skills and expertise."

The 24-km bridge will connect Batu Kawan in Seberang Perai to Batu Maung on the island.

The first bridge was built 21 years ago and is used by 110,000 motorists daily.

For the past few years, Penangites have complained of traffic congestion on the bridge during peak hours.

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