

Newspaper	THE STAR
Date	1 APRIL 2015

# 'Sarawak portion will be toll-free'

No charges for 1,076km stretch of highway as it's the only road network across state

*The Star - 1/4/2015*

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**BINTULU:** The Sarawak portion of the Pan Borneo Highway is going to be toll-free.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Tun Razak said this was because the 1,076km stretch was the only main artery spanning the state and there were no alternative routes available.

This, he said, was unlike the case in peninsular Malaysia where although the North-South Expressway was the main link, there were many toll-free alternative routes that people could choose to travel on.

He launched the first phase of the highway, the Pan Borneo Sarawak, that costs RM15bil, yesterday.

"I want to make it clear before people back in peninsular Malaysia start asking, why is Sarawak's highway toll-free? That is because this highway is the only road network across Sarawak.

"There is no alternative. In peninsular, there are alternatives to the North-South Expressway," he said.

He likened the highway, which was mooted when Malaysia was formed in 1963, to "how the railway opened up the wild west in America".

Najib said upon completion, the highway would not only improve the infrastructure of Sarawak but also open up economic opportunities for the people in the state.

The project will bring long-term benefits

for the people of the state and was not a mega project that drained public funds, he added.

He said the next phase of the highway would also be built this year, with the next launch expected to take place in September.

The 1,700km highway, to be built at an estimated cost of RM27bil, involves the construction and upgrading of the stretch in Sarawak while the rest will be in Sabah.

He also announced that the Sarawak portion of the project would be handled by Sarawakians themselves, saying infrastructure for the state should benefit locals right from the start, even during construction.

For a start, he said, 75 Sarawak consultant firms have been appointed to handle the project based on recommendations from the Sarawak Bumiputera Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Dayak Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The highway construction has already begun in Sarawak - starting at the 52nd kilometre mark of the existing Bintulu-Miri trunk road and Sabah's portion would begin after on-going negotiations was completed, he said.

A newly set up company, Lebuhraya Borneo Utara Sdn Bhd, is undertaking the development of the highway, which is scheduled for completion in Sarawak in early 2023.

He called on Sarawakians who will carry out the building of the highway to do a good job and to show to others what locals could do.

Presently, roughly 87% of the road between Sarawak and Sabah are nothing more than twisty country roads.