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# 'Bridge over Johor Straits best option'

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**PUTRAJAYA:** Malaysia and Singapore yesterday agreed that building a high bridge over the Johor Straits under the Johor Baru-Singapore Rapid Transit System (RTS) was the best option for the project.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong both welcomed the progress made on the RTS project under the Transportation Links Work Group and affirmed the key areas of agreement reached to date.

"We have discussed the RTS for some time. There were many options to look into, but finally both sides agreed that the best solution will be the high bridge.

"And, we think it is the most cost effective solution, which is why we have gone for the high bridge solution to be integrated with Singapore's MRT system.

"(In this respect), we want to announce the RTS project will involve a high bridge solution and we will look into the details relating to its implementation," Najib said.

In a joint statement, the two leaders said they looked forward to signing a bilateral agreement on the RTS link by the end of next year.

Najib said both sides believed the details of the RTS agreement could be finalised on schedule and did not foresee any significant problems.

When completed, the prime minister said the RTS Link would improve connectivity and reduce congestion at the countries' border crossings.

The RTS Link will connect Bukit Chagar, Johor Baru, in Malaysia and Woodlands North in Singapore where passengers can transfer to Singapore's upcoming Thomson-East Coast Line. The RTS Link will

use the four core Thomson-East Coast Line systems to reap economies of scale, and will be operated by a corporate entity.

Fares for the RTS Link will be market-based and set by the operator, and will not be regulated by the governments.

On a request to improve connectivity using Keretapi Tanah Melayu Bhd services between the two countries, Najib said Lee had agreed to look into it.

"Perhaps we can look at how to improve the (service) frequency and the volume to reduce congestion at the Causeway and pollution," he added.

Meanwhile, MyHSR Corp Sdn Bhd chief executive officer Mohd Nur Ismal Kamal said the bridge would be about 2km long and it will be constructed 25m above water at the highest point.

Nur Ismal said one of the deciding factors to build the bridge above the sea was the lower cost option.

"In general, the bridge is a lower cost option and where the architecture can be made iconic, if needed. Operationally, it is easier to maintain and safer," he said.

Nur Ismal did not say how much the bridge would cost, but some have put their estimates at about RM1 billion.

Broadly, the bridge crossing will begin from the west side of the Second Link, he said after the signing of the bilateral agreement for the HSR project here yesterday.

Nur Ismal said the signing of the bilateral agreement marked the start of the implementation phase, including design works and preparation for civil tenders and the establishment of an AssetsCo.