

# WORK ON ECRL GENTING TUNNEL BEGINS

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PM: Excavation of longest rail tunnel in Southeast Asia will take up to three years to complete

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**E**XCAVATION work for the 16.39km-long Genting Tunnel for the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) began yesterday with the launch of the project's first tunnel boring machine (TBM).

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob said it would take 2½ to three years to punch through the tunnel.

"The construction of the twin-bore Genting Tunnel is one of the main components of the ECRL project.

"It will complete the landbridge for the transport of cargo from Kuantan Port to Port Klang.

"The excavation of the tunnel will be completed in 2½ to three years, making it the longest rail tunnel in the region," he said in a speech at the launch ceremony at the Genting Tunnel site here yesterday.

The commissioning of the 8.98m diameter TBM marks another major milestone for the ECRL project.

The China-made state-of-the-art machine, the largest of its kind for rail construction in Southeast Asia, will bore through the Titiwangsa Range in the Bukit Tinggi area to link Bentong, Pahang, with Gombak, Selangor.

"I saw some claims on social media that the fare will be high.



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob (fourth from left) at the launch of the start of excavation work for the Genting Tunnel of the East Coast Rail Link project in Bukit Tinggi yesterday. PIC BY FARIZ ISWADI ISMAIL

This is not true.

"I have asked the Transport Ministry to discuss with stakeholders to formulate very affordable ECRL fares, like the people-friendly fare rates for the Keretapi Tanah Melayu Electric Train Service."

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong said the use of the TBM excavation method for the tunnel marked a new chapter

in the ECRL project as excavation of other tunnels in the 665km alignment used the drill-and-blast method instead.

"We are optimistic that the TBM can meet the engineering challenges and geological conditions when tunnelling through the hilly and mountainous terrain of the Titiwangsa Range.

"The teamwork and dedication at all levels of the ECRL project

will pave the way for the tunnel breakthrough at the Genting Tunnel to be achieved on schedule."

Present were Finance Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz, Chinese ambassador to Malaysia Ouyang Yujing, Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Wan Rosdy Wan Ismail, Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Ahmad Yakob, Malaysia Rail Link Sdn

Bhd (MRL) chairman Tan Sri Mohd Zuki Ali, MRL chief executive officer Datuk Seri Darwis Abdul Razak, China Communications Construction Company Ltd vice-president Sun Ziyu and China Communications Construction (ECRL) Sdn Bhd managing director Kong Qi.

Wee said the beginning of excavation work at the tunnel was a major step forward for the ECRL project as it was nearing the peak construction period in 2023, when some 23,000 workers, comprising at least 70 per cent locals, were expected to work on this national infrastructure.

Sun said the company was recruiting local talent to join the team of more than 8,909 employees along the alignment from Kota Baru in Kelantan to Port Klang in Selangor.

"Together with more than 5,663 workers from our local subcontractors, we are pushing ahead in full force in more than 300 work sites and we are expecting to engage more local vendors and encourage more participation, especially from the east coast.

"The construction of the Genting Tunnel is challenging as the tunnel passes through several fault lines and chlorite rock pockets.

"However, with our engineering teams' experience from similar projects around the world, we are confident in overcoming these challenges."

The project involves the construction of an electrified rail network linking Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang with the Klang Valley. Construction is set to be completed by December 2026.

ECRL will be driven by a revenue ratio of 70 per cent freight services and 30 per cent passenger services when it begins operations in January 2027.