

MRT line changed to save ex-minister's house, claim Pakatan MPs
The Malaysian Insider
October 05, 2011
By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 5 — While Jalan Sultan and Jalan Bukit Bintang traders are facing possible eviction to make way for the MRT, project regulators have allegedly agreed to reroute the underground line to save the bungalow of a prominent former minister, opposition lawmakers claimed today.

The lawmakers told a press conference in Parliament today that according to the original MRT plan, its tunnel was to pass beneath the bungalow on Jalan Damansara, off Jalan Duta.

But, they said, work on the original site has now been stopped, the tunnel portal relocated and a variation order has been issued to the contractor, ensuring that the line no longer passes beneath the house.

DAP MP Tony Pua questioned the regulator's "double-standards", pointing out that the Land Public Transport Commission (SPAD) had already claimed the MRT's Sungai Buloh-Kajang alignment, particularly the tunnel route, was final and could not be changed.

"Now, with the fact that SPAD did indeed make a realignment concession to save a VIP's bungalow from being affected by the tunnel route, the government must explain its hypocrisy and double-standards in dealing with the above issues," he said.

Pua said if the MRT tunnel route beneath the bungalow could be realigned, the same could be done for the portions that run beneath Jalan Sultan and Jalan Bukit Bintang.

A comparison between the original alignment and the revised alignment. — Diagram courtesy of Tony Pua

"Why are they willing to realign only when it affects a VIP's house? Why the hypocrisy?" he asked, reiterating his view that the National Land Acquisition Act stipulates that properties above ground would not have to be acquired to facilitate tunnelling works for the rail project.

Lembah Pantai MP Nurul Izzah Anwar voiced suspicion in the realignment, questioning today if this meant that SPAD was "open to political intervention".

She also questioned SPAD's postponement of the Kuala Lumpur public transportation master plan, which she said was initially due to be revealed in September.

Bukit Bintang MP Fong Kui Lun urged the government to conduct a thorough study on the social and economic impact of the MRT's SBK line.

When questioned later on the identity of the VIP, the MPs declined comment but told The Malaysian Insider later the house likely belonged to a prominent former minister.

The fates of Jalan Sultan and Jalan Bukit Bintang land owners currently still hang in balance despite a recent pledge by senior Cabinet member Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Aziz to lobby for a realignment from Prasarana and the prime minister.

"The best practice for underground engineering: First, you must do it under a wide road; secondly, it shouldn't have any sharp cornering, it has to be smooth.

"So they suggested a new alignment, alternative route, under Jalan Cheng Lock and goes until Jalan Tun Perak, Jalan Pudu. So the alignment, the cornering is very smooth and gentle," he said, referring to the Jalan Sultan committee that has a few engineers contributing to the new proposed route.

SPAD and Prasarana have been under constant fire from angry traders with businesses located in the historic Chinatown area over the plan to acquire their properties to facilitate the tunnelling portion of the multibillion ringgit rail project.

Suspicion has also arisen over whether the transport regulator's purpose of acquiring the prime land lots was to exploit their commercial value to fund the construction of the MRT, Malaysia's most expensive infrastructure project to date.

SPAD has denied any intention of a "land grab" in its acquisition of Jalan Sultan properties but admitted it could not guarantee that the acquired lots would later be returned to landowners.

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright© 2011 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/mrt-line-rerouted-to-save-vips-house-claim-pakatan-mps/>