

Penang BN: Undersea tunnel an outdated proposal
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By Opalyn Mok

GEORGE TOWN, March 5 — The undersea tunnel linking Penang to the mainland under the state's RM6.3 billion mega infrastructure project is an outdated proposal mooted by the previous administration and which was subsequently shelved, said Penang Barisan Nasional.

The previous state government, under BN, had mooted the underground tunnel to cater to an expected increase of traffic due to a proposed international airport on an artificial island in Kedah.

Penang BN local government bureau chairman Teh Leong Meng said the project was shelved when the international airports object was shelved.

"The federal government then decided to build the second bridge in lieu of the scrapped tunnel," he said.

The tender of the massive RM6.3 billion project, that includes the tunnel and three highways, had been recently awarded to a consortium of five companies consisting of three local and two China companies.

The announcement has sparked strong objections from civil society groups such as Penang Forum, the Consumer Association of Penang and Malaysian Nature Society, citing environmental concerns and that instead of dispersing traffic, the project could bring in more traffic to the island.

Penang BN has also questioned the speed with which the project was "rushed" and the motives behind the awarding of the tender now, with the polls just around the corner.

Today, Teh criticised the state government for acting in an "ad hoc and disorderly manner" for going ahead with this project without proper planning and strategy.

"Is the state government sincere in resolving traffic congestion problems here?" he asked at a press conference this morning.

He also pointed out that the tunnel and three highways project was against the Penang Structure Plan (PSP) that was gazetted in 2007 and spanned from 2005 to 2020.

The PSP is a 15-year development blueprint for Penang that was gazetted after full public consultation.

Teh said the tunnel and the highways were not in the PSP so the state government was going against a development blueprint that was earlier accepted by the people of Penang.

"It is also against the Penang Transport Master Plan (PTMP) which the state government had spent RM3.2 million to engage a consultant to prepare.

"The PTMP had considered the undersea tunnel as unimportant and that it is more important to 'move people and not cars' so the state government is going against the consultant's recommendations to focus on public transport system instead," he said.

In announcing this project earlier, which was initially estimated to cost RM8 billion, Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng had said the state government does not have the jurisdiction when it comes to public transport so it had to do the next best thing, to build roads to disperse traffic.

He had said if Pakatan Rakyat were to take over Putrajaya in Election 2013, then a tram system will be seriously considered but major infrastructure such as highways and wider roads are also needed in order to fit in the trams.

Teh proposed that the state government cancel the project and concentrate on improving the public transport system and also in building more affordable housing for the people.

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