

Kidex is now a national issue, say NGOs
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The proposed Kinrara-Damansara Expressway (Kidex) is no longer just a Selangor problem but a national issue, said non-governmental organisations who have now raised their objections against the elevated highway project.

The four national NGOs, Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP), Environmental Protection Society Malaysia, Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) and Third World Network, have questioned the findings of the project's Preliminary Environmental Impact Assessment (PEIA), which was commissioned and paid for by the project's proponents, Kidex Sdn Bhd.

The NGOs with experience evaluating proposed highway developments said there are serious concerns about the validity of the PEIA, including its assumptions and analysis, and about the inclusion of the authors' judgement in the report.

The NGOs are worried that the flawed analysis and conclusions may inadvertently mislead decision-makers.

"We are concerned that in a number of cases, the conclusion of the PEIA does not follow its analysis.

"Instead, they seem designed to present a rosier picture of the expressway than the data and analysis would justify," said CAP and SAM president S.M. Mohamed Idris.

The NGOs said the PEIA, for example, documents that noise pollution is above legally permissible levels for four out of five segments of Kidex, and that the project will further increase these levels.

However, the report downplayed the additional noise levels, stating vaguely that all stations "would be subjected to the same compliance requirements if Kidex was not constructed" and "the compliance status would be similar" – ie not legally permissible.

The NGOs said "existing violations should not be a justification for additional ones".

The groups also said that the PEIA confirmed that noise will exceed permissible levels at 12 locations, including at several schools and a hospital, and that to address the matter, it proposes construction of noise barriers.

The NGOs said noise barriers cannot remove noise altogether and the feasibility of the idea is also questionable as the barriers could block access to the residential roads over which Kidex will be built.

They argue that the report's conclusion that "sound level with noise barriers at the sensitive receptors are fairly acceptable and are below the permissible levels" is doubtful.

They say that will not be the case if the noise levels are already above permissible levels, and that the construction of Kidex will add more to it, putting the effectiveness of the noise barriers in question.

The NGOs also find problems with the authors of the PEIA adding their own opinions and value judgement in the final conclusions when they should not.

"On what basis do the authors assume that congestion will be reduced, given the fact that Kidex is to connect with other major highways via residential roads?"

"And on what basis do they conclude that any perceived reduction in congestion outweighs the costs in terms of social, environmental, health, safety, aesthetic and other impacts?" Idris said.

Nithi Nesadurai, who is Environmental Protection Society Malaysia president, said the proposal to build Kidex just to solve traffic problems is also fundamentally flawed.

"It is not a sustainable or sensible solution to cope with the increasing number of cars on the road. The solution lies in focusing on and providing easier access to public transport, and then disincentivising the use of private vehicles, especially those which are single occupant," he said.

The four NGOs stated that they do not see the need for the project but said if the Selangor government continues to pursue it, the Environmental Department director-general Datuk Halimah Hassan should exercise her authority to require a detailed environmental impact assessment for the project to ensure that decision-makers and the public have the detailed, independent information they require to make an informed decision about the project's likely impacts on the people and environment of Selangor. – June 5, 2014.

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