

CM: Penang undersea tunnel feasibility study can't proceed
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Lim Guan Eng blames this on a reclamation project in Butterworth which he says has not even begun despite the project being awarded by the last BN state government.

PETALING JAYA: Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng today said the feasibility study on a proposed undersea tunnel between Penang island and the mainland cannot proceed despite having declared in August that it would be ready by early this year.

He said the study, which has been reported to cost RM305 million, is 87% complete but cannot go on as the state is awaiting a master plan for a reclamation project in Butterworth.

He claimed the reclamation work, involving 650ha near the Penang Port, had still not commenced despite being awarded by the former Barisan Nasional (BN) state government to Rayston Consortium Sdn Bhd in 1999.

He hoped Rayston could proceed with its land reclamation master plan and complete it within the next six months.

This reclamation agreement was done on terms that were unfavourable to the interests of the people of Penang, he further claimed in a statement today.

Lim was responding to Works Minister Fadillah Yusof, who on March 30 said the ministry had yet to receive any updates on the feasibility and detailed design studies for Penang's proposed undersea tunnel or a third bridge project.

Lim had told Fadillah in a letter, dated Aug 3, that these documents would be submitted when they were ready by early this year.

The letter was sent after Fadillah said the RM305 million feasibility and design reports commissioned by the state for the tunnel and three associated paired roads were considered over-priced by the ministry.

He also noted Lim's administration had replaced the initial idea of the tunnel along the North Channel with that of the bridge.

He had said this appeared to be a "deliberate diversion" to escape from scrutiny over the state's financial arrangement on the tunnel's construction.

“Truth be told, our ministry is also curious to see what the reports, that cost the Penang government RM305 million, look like as we consider these to be highly over-priced – particularly the RM208.755 million cost of the feasibility and detailed design reports for the 20.3km three paired roads – of which RM135 million has already been paid by the Penang government,” Fadillah had said.

Lim today claimed the feasibility study cannot be completed unless it takes into account the hydraulic flow data and road network after the Butterworth reclamation is done.

“This is the reason why the tunnel feasibility study is only 87% complete and cannot proceed, while awaiting for the sea reclamation master plan from Rayston,” he said.

“Let us reiterate that despite the 87% completion of the tunnel feasibility study, not a single sen has been paid to the consortium awarded the contract.”

Lim said Fadillah had the right to seek an update on the feasibility studies on the tunnel, “done to support Penang’s request for approval, at our own cost, to build a third bridge”.

He said the state government is willing to meet Fadillah next week to explain why replacing the undersea tunnel with a third bridge is not only cheaper and more efficient but also technically possible.

He reiterated his call for an “approval in principle” from the ministry to build the third bridge so as not to waste tens of millions of ringgit required for the detailed drawings and design.

Fadillah had announced on July 25 last year that the ministry would shelf the state’s request for a toll-free third bridge as documents had not been presented to the ministry despite four reminders to do so.

Fadillah said the state had also failed to meet a July 22 deadline to do this.

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