

# Ipoh-Padang Besar rail project on track

TAIPING: The Ipoh-Padang Besar electrified double-tracking railway project costing RM12.48 billion is expected to be completed on schedule despite the global economic slowdown, said Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat.

He said the project undertaken by MMC-Gamuda JV was proceeding smoothly in Perak, Kedah, Penang and Perlis and was expected to be completed in 2012.

"It is an alternative form of transportation that is convenient and safe compared to highways and would reduce road fatalities.

"With the completion of the project, the rail transportation system is expected to be more economical and competitive while

passenger numbers would go up by 10 times," Ong told reporters after launching the drilling for the 300-metre long Larut Tunnel at Air Kuning, near here.

The project is part of a master plan to develop the public transportation system in the country and is an extension of the railway system in the Klang Valley, and the Rawang-Ipoh and Seremban-Gemas lines.

Ong said the railway would attract more users and be more popular after the existing trains were replaced by faster trains at the end of next year.

He said all obstacles to the Ipoh-Padang Besar project had been identified and the matters of squatter resettlement and compensation would be resolved

soon.

"Although many employers had retrenched workers in the economic crisis, this project created 7,000 jobs and would create 6,000 more soon," he said.

The project also provided work for 305 subcontractors in the four states involved while 95 contracts were offered to building material suppliers and other businesses over the next five years.

"The project can provide down-line work of more than RM10 billion," Ong said. Besides the Larut Tunnel, the project has a longer tunnel of 2.9km at Bukit Berapit, Padang Rengas on which work would start soon.

— *Bernama*



Ong (right) with staff of MMC-Gamuda JV after launching the drilling for the 300-metre Larut Tunnel yesterday. Photo by Bernama