

Double-track rail project on schedule

CONNECTIVITY The electrified double-track project will meet the rising volume of commuters and cargo shipments

NURADZIMMAH DAIM
KUALA LUMPUR
streets@nstp.com.my

The Ipoh-Padang Besar portion of the electrified double-track project is now more than 75 per cent complete. Land Public Transport Commission (SPAD) chairman Tan Sri Syed Hamid Albar said the project included the construction of a 3.3km tunnel in Bukit Berapit, a

marine viaduct in Bukit Merah (both in Perak) and a swing bridge in Perai, Penang, which he recently visited.

"These projects are vital in ensuring an improved rail system as they allow faster journey time. The new rail tracks in certain places in Perak are being constructed away from flood-prone areas.

"Apart from replacing the old tracks, the project also includes the building of railroad crossings



for motorists and pedestrians.

"And as we provide better services through upgraded tracks and facilities, it is also important to educate the public on proper usage.

"For instance, the bridges that

are built for crossing the tracks. We need to educate the children to use them instead of risking their lives crossing the rail tracks, which is currently a problem for KTMB," he explained

New train sets to come

RIISING LANDMARK The project includes the building of a tunnel cutting through Bukit Berapit, said to be the longest main-line tunnel in Southeast Asia

Syed Hamid said over and above catering for the rising number of commuters, the project would also improve the potential of cargo shipments from southern Thailand to Port Klang and at the same time, enhance the competitiveness of the country's main ports.

"With the completion of the tracks, the frequency of trips and the number of trains will need to be increased to accommodate the rise in commuters."

KTMB president Dr Aminuddin Adnan said two sets of six-car trains were currently being commissioned, or tested, before they were open to the users.

"We expect to carry out the final stage of commissioning next month, and introduce them to commuters."

He said KTMB had ordered eight more six-car trains that would take 12 to 18 months to arrive.

"With the completion of the double-track project and the arrival of new trains, frequency will definitely be improved, thus cutting travelling time," he said.

Also present were SPAD chief operating officer Azhar Ahmad, MMC Gamuda JV general manager Szeto Wai Loong and project director Datuk Mohd Nor Idris director.

Szeto, who conducted the



briefing at the Penang site, said the new swing bridge replacing the old one would allow boats in Sungai Prai to pass by more quickly as the bridge only took five minutes to lift, compared with the 20 minutes required by the old one.

Another iconic structure is the 3.3km tunnel cutting through Bukit Berapit, between Taiping

and Padang Rengas.

It is said to be the longest main line tunnel in Southeast Asia.

The tunnel, which also runs under the North-South Highway, is 86.5 per cent completed.

The group also visited the 3,450m marine viaduct crossing Bukit Merah lake.

It is built 100 metres away from the existing track, away from flood-prone areas.

It is learnt that there are proposals to remove the nearby Bukit Merah train station to upgrade irrigation.

To curb illegal crossings, 200 crossings for motorists and pedestrians are being built along the train alignment.

Level crossings for vehicles at rail tracks will be replaced by road overhead bridges.

Double tracks ensure smoother rides as trains for both directions can use separate rail tracks. This eliminates delays brought on by trains waiting for others to pass first.

The double-track railway system will cut travelling time from KL to Butterworth from the current nine hours to only three or four hours.

The project includes the construction of 23 stations along the northern alignment (Kedah, Perak, Perlis and Pulau Pinang) including three Royal stations Anak Bukit, Arau and Kuala Kangsar.

Each is built in a different design and with a different facade.

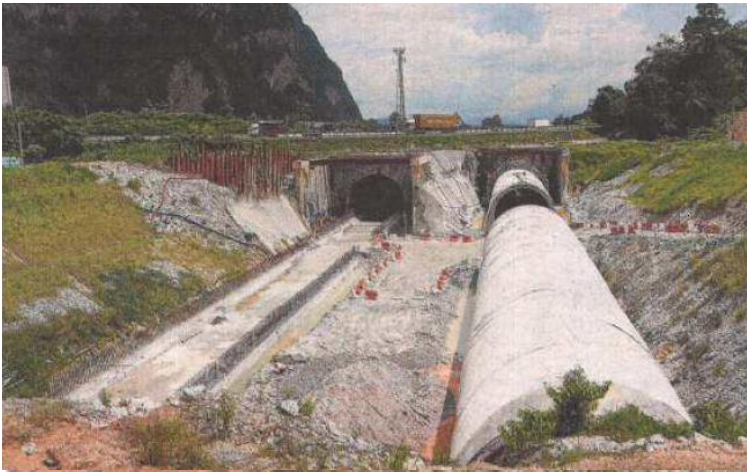
Tracks from Ipoh to Padang Besar (329km) are expected to complete in 2014; Seremban to Gemas (102km) to be completed next year, and a Gemas-JB track is in the pipeline.

The completed tracks are Rawang-Seremban (105km); Sentul-Pelabuhan Klang (45km); and Rawang-Ipoh (180km); Sentul-Batu Caves (7.5km).



Tan Sri Syed Hamid Albar (left) visits the site of the new swing bridge, which will allow boats in Sungai Prai to pass by more quickly as it only takes five minutes to lift, compared with the 20 minutes required by the old bridge.

MOKHSIN ABIDIN



The construction of what is said to be the longest main line tunnel in Southeast Asia