

KL to Butterworth in four hours

By G. SURACH | surach@nst.com.my

ELECTRIFIED DOUBLE-TRACKING PROJECT: KTM Bhd will have new coach trains that can travel at 160kph

IPOH: COMMUTERS are in for great news as future train trips from Kuala Lumpur to Butterworth will take only half its usual time -- thanks to KTM Berhad's electrified double-tracking project which will be ready by June next year.

The northern phase of the project between here and Padang Besar serves as the catalyst for KTMB to order 10 new coach trains, capable of travelling up to 160kph, thus, making them the fastest trains in the country.

The New Straits Times travelled with a team comprising KTMB operators, design-and-build contractor MMC-Gamuda Joint Venture Sdn Bhd representatives and project management consultant KSET Konsortium on an inspection tour along the northern line yesterday.

The Ipoh-Padang Besar railway track boasts several architectural accomplishments along its line.

The three new iconic structures include the 3km Bukit Berapit tunnel in Padang Rengas, the 3.5km Bukit Merah marine viaduct which crosses Tasik Merah in Kerian, and a 90m swing-bridge crossing the Prai river in Seberang Prai, Penang.

The new structures were built to accommodate the project requirements as well as to replace the current structures.

It is learnt that the former 3.3km Bukit Berapit railway tunnel, built in 1905, will fall out of use once the new tunnel is operational.

The marine viaduct replaces the normal embankment bridge and benefits the ecosystem of the lake as it takes up less land and expedites the construction progress while the 72.3 degree swing-bridge replaces its 1967 predecessor.

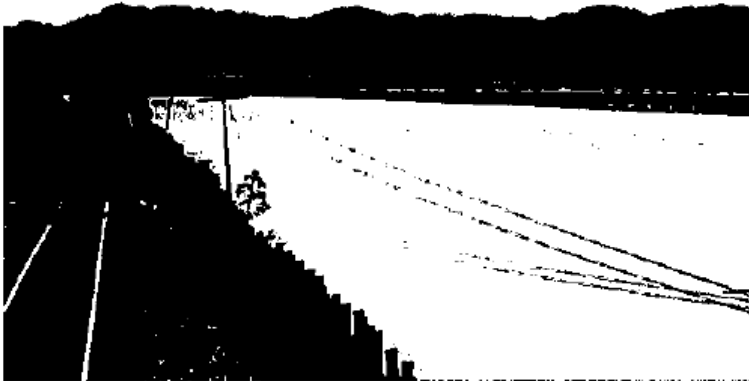
According to KTMB Ipoh-Padang Besar Electrified Double Tracking Project general manager Jeffrey Osman, the main line along here to Padang Besar would have 30 stations, including 23 passenger stations and seven cargo stations.

"We have completed 93 per cent of all works involving the line.

"When the new train service is up and running, we will be able to travel from Kuala Lumpur to Butterworth in four hours compared with nearly eight hours previously," he said.

KTMB is currently embarking on its electrified double-tracking project in west coast from Johor Baru to Padang Besar, which is divided into several phases.

When fully completed by 2018, it is expected to be the fastest metre-gauge railway line in the world.



The existing train track (on the left) and the new 3.5km marine viaduct along Tasik Merah in Kerian, are part of the electrified double-tracking project by KTM Berhad. Pic by Muhaizan Yahya