

3,000 squatters to be relocated for rail link

RAWANG: Some 3,000 squatters need to be relocated to make way for the 329km Ipoh-Padang Besar double-tracking rail system.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Chan Kong Choy said the co-operation of four state governments was important to ensure the smooth implementation of the project.

The project is being undertaken by MMC-Gamuda Joint Venture Sdn Bhd and had started earlier this year with completion slated in five years.

"We need the support and co-operation of the Perak, Penang, Kedah and Perlis governments to address the squatter issue."

Chan said he and Transport Ministry officials would meet state government officials.

Chan yesterday witnessed a

ceremony marking the completion of the systems' work for the double-tracking train service by Mitsui & Co Ltd and KTM Berhad for the Rawang-Ipoh stretch.

KTM Berhad is now waiting for the delivery of five new train sets to run this route, which is expected to be operational by the middle of next year. The systems' work involves electrification, signalling and communications.

Chan said there would be five stops during the 135-minute rapid train journey between Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh — at Rawang, Tanjung Malim, Tapah Road, Kampar and Batu Gajah.

KTM Berhad managing director Datuk Mohd Salleh Abdullah indicated that the fare for the Kuala Lumpur-Ipoh journey would be between

RM30 and RM40.

Plans are underway for the Singapore-Kunming rail link, which will cover Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar as well.

He said the Malaysian government had recently agreed to accept the proposal for Malaysia to be the permanent chair for the project, given its active involvement.

Salleh expected KTM Berhad's average passenger load to increase to 130,000 a day with the expansion of the double tracking. Currently, the average passenger volume was 101,000 daily.

Besides the Rawang-Ipoh double-tracking rail link, the Sentul-Batu Caves Komuter line is also expected to be operational by May next year.

"If and when the government announces a fuel price

increase, there would be a sudden surge in passenger load for us," Salleh said.

The Sentul-Batu Caves KTM Komuter service alone is expected to transport some 10,000 passengers a day.

Salleh said the existing Rawang-Kuala Kubu Baru route, which will be extended to Tanjung Malim in June, has an average of 900 passengers a day currently.

He expects that once the line is connected to Tanjung Malim, the number of passengers will increase three or four times. "Tanjung Malim will be transformed into another Seremban by the end of this year."

Salleh hoped to increase Komuter train frequency to every 10 minutes (now 15 minutes) during peak times and 15 minutes (now 20 minutes) during

off-peak hours.

Fifty train sets (comprising three coaches each) are to be overhauled at a cost of RM2 million to RM3 million each.

A new three-car train set costs RM12 million to RM15 million each.

Salleh also said from 2000 until now, RM19.8 million worth of track materials, including copper wire, had been stolen along the Rawang-Ipoh double-tracking line.

On the advent of budget air travel, Salleh said that it had not impacted its train service business.

"We cater for the leisurely market, the elderly and college-going youngsters. And most of them are women, who travel in groups. We also cater for businessmen who need a good night's sleep when travelling to Singapore."