

Transport corp in a spot

CEO Azhar says five property owners have yet to sign agreement

By FAIZAL NOR IZHAM

faizal.nor@mmail.com.my

MRT CORPORATION (MRT Corp) is urging Jalan Sultan property owners to sign the Points of Agreement (POA) to legally-bind the government to return them their respective properties once the multi-billion ringgit project is completed.

The plan to merge underground LRT and MRT lines is expected to be completed by 2017, with initial tunnel-drilling scheduled to commence in 2014.

However, only 16 of the 21 property lots have signed the agreement so far.

At a media briefing here yesterday, a clearly-frustrated MRT Corp CEO Datuk Azhar Abdul Hamid (*pic*) said refusal to sign by the remaining few is delaying the project.

"Despite being a government representative, I don't have the authority to withdraw the compulsory property acquisition process beforehand," he said.

"Therefore, I hope it will

all be done within a month, after which I will invite the prime minister, who has also disagreed to private property acquisition or demolition, to go to the ground. Our intentions are sincere and we're also willing to compensate owners for any damage."

Azhar stressed that KL is in dire need of MRT services to improve its parking and traffic woes.

"We want the area to be ideal for living, business and leisure. We also plan to eventually have these stations in places such as Bukit Bintang. It will help boost tourism and the economy.

"By having world-class facilities, foreign investors will also be enticed to relocate here," he explained.

Azhar said the initial tunnelling would take three weeks and, at 20 metres underground, would not be heard from street level.

However, a six-month safety probe would be conducted beforehand and temporary accommodation would be provided for landowners.

"The area here is made up of hard soil and ideal for



tunnelling. Various alternative locations proposed are not as viable, as some cannot be successfully merged, are made up of limestone or feature heritage buildings," he said.

He said MRT Corp had received conflicting viewpoints during meetings with property owners to explain the situation.

"We imposed no deadline to sign up, as some would then accuse us of forcing them to do so. However, while some agreed to it, others have accused us of wanting to acquire or demolish property.

"To be honest, I'm unsure what their objectives behind these accusations are," said Azhar.

The meetings held were

with Gospel Hall Church on Jan 10, Malay Chamber of Commerce on Jan 17 and March 1, and Jalan Sultan property owners on March 21 and April 26, with the last also being attended by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz.

Despite this, Azhar said the dissenting voices of a minority appear to be the loudest.

"Some were quiet during meetings but expressed themselves outside. Why not bring them up during the meeting?"

"We cannot force the media and the public to listen. While I believe in democracy and freedom of speech, it must also be done responsibly and objectively."

He said MRT Corp had spent much on meetings and Press releases to counter such accusations, when such funds could have been used for the project itself.

Also present were MRT Corp Stakeholder Relations director Haris Fadzilah Hassan, Public Relations director Amir Mahmood Razak and Underground Station director Keith Allenby.