

MRT Corp: MRT makes access easier to Jalan

Sultan area

MINIMAL IMPACT:

Following our previous cover story on heritage buildings, we talk to Amir Mahmood Razak, Director of Strategic Communications & PR of Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) Corporation Sdn Bhd to clarify on some issues related to heritage and historical buildings in Jalan Sultan and Petaling Street area

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Amir ... The MRT alignment does not affect any schools in the area.

RED: MRT Corp has expressed support for preservation of heritage buildings in Jalan Sultan. Besides an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), has there been any Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment done or any input from Jabatan Warisan Negara on the heritage value of the buildings located within the proposed MRT route?

Amir: A Social Impact Assessment (SIA) was indeed conducted as a component of the EIA. Among

other impacts, the SIA identifies the impacts of land acquisition and prescribes steps to mitigate the impact. The EIA also identifies impacts arising from construction work, such as vibration and noise, and also recommends mitigation steps. As there is no need for acquisition at Jalan Sultan, there is no negative impact arising. As for tunnelling works which will be done 85 feet below the surface, MRT Corp will be taking all necessary steps to ensure minimal impact on the buildings above such as inspecting the structure of the shophouses, installing monitoring devices and propping the buildings, if necessary.

MRT Corp has also engaged Jabatan Warisan Negara on the buildings. They have concluded that the three buildings which have to be demolished – Klang Bus Stand, Plaza Warisan and Bangunan UO – are not classified as heritage buildings. The department also found that many of the Jalan Sultan shophouses have been greatly modified and renovated, and thus do not qualify to be heritage buildings.

Still, MRT Corp recognises that these buildings are part of KL history and contributes to the aura and charm of the city. Apart from our tall buildings and mega office complexes that reflect the growth and advancement of the city, areas like Petaling Street and Jalan Sultan depict the history of KL, and thus must be preserved as best as possible.

RED: One of the MRT's routes may run through the proposed site of the Warisan Merdeka building. One of the schools affected by the Warisan Merdeka building is said to be Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (Cina) Jalan Davidson. How will this impact the school? Will there be any encroachment on the schools within the area, for example, Victoria Institution which is one of the listed buildings in Jabatan Warisan Negara's heritage sites?

Amir: The MRT alignment does not affect any schools in the area. No school land is being acquired and no school buildings are being demolished. In fact, the MRT station at Merdeka will greatly improve access to the various schools in the area and be a boon to students. Currently, the roads are constantly jammed with buses and cars when children travel to school. SJK (C) Jalan Davidson will be very near the MRT construction site and MRT Corp has engaged with the school management and informed them of what is going to happen in the area. MRT Corp has also explained all the mitigation steps to minimise any negative impacts. We engaged them on 2 Feb 2012, with our team informing them of the utility relocation works, the schedule of works and what mitigation measures

we will put in place. MRT Corp will again engage with the said school and other schools when actual construction work begins

RED: With the MRT (and Warisan Merdeka) to be built within the vicinity of Jalan Sultan, will this cause the area to be over-commercialised, causing amongst others, the eventual sale of some heritage buildings (including schools) to be redeveloped into commercial buildings?

Amir: MRT Corp is only responsible for the construction of the MRT line and station at Merdeka. The government is redeveloping the area near Merdeka Stadium as it is located in the heart of the city. The MRT is in fact critical for mobility of access to the area. As the MRT will run underground, this access is being provided with minimal impact on the surface. Without the MRT, the roads around the area will not be able to cater to the increased traffic volume.

MRT Corp's focus is building the Sungai Buloh-Kajang (SBK) line. It currently does not have any plans on property development. However, redevelopment of properties or areas – by a third party – can be beneficial to an area. This can be done without impacting heritage or history.

RED: KVMRT website also mentions an effective Traffic Management Plan (TMP) to ensure minimal disruption during the MRT construction. Are there any particular measures in the TMP to ensure that school will not be disrupted during construction?

Amir: A comprehensive TMP has been drawn to ensure minimal impact to the traffic flow in the area. As mentioned above, all schools in the area will be engaged with when construction work begins in the area. Part of the TMP includes non-closure of lanes during daylight and peak hours. Any lane closure will only be implemented between 12 midnight and 5.00 am. Our plan also specifies that lanes cannot be removed. If any lane is to be removed for construction, a replacement lane will be constructed to ensure traffic flow is not disrupted.

RED: What is the current status of the Mutual Agreement negotiations with Jalan Sultan landowners? Are there any new developments to highlight?

Amir: The owners of 18 out of 24 affected lots of land have signed the Points of Agreement (POA) which forms the foundation for the Mutual Agreement. One owner is overseas and will sign the POA soon. Two owners have not objected to acquisition. The owners of three lots have refused to talk to MRT Corp and insist on realignment.