

MRT Corp tweaks alignment of Line 2

BY JOSE BARROCK

Mass Rapid Transit Corp Sdn Bhd (MRT Corp) has tweaked the alignment of Line 2 to have a station in Bandar Malaysia near Sungai Besi, where the terminal of the high-speed rail connecting Kuala Lumpur to Singapore will be built.

"We did it (the change) on our own initiative ... we believe stopping there (Bandar Malaysia) would help improve ridership," says CEO Datuk Seri Shahril Mokhtar, who is in the hot seat — he decides where the MRT should go and which contractors should build the massive public infrastructure.

"There wasn't any directive from the top," he quips.

According to him, the proposed new alignment has got the green light from the Economic Council. MRT Corp is expected to submit the proposal to Suruhanjaya Pengangkutan Awam Darat (SPAD) by the end of this month.

"We are working very closely with SPAD to relook at the alignment," he says.

Shahril, who took the helm at MRT Corp early this year, reiterates that the company's role is to develop the rail project and hand it over to Prasarana Malaysia Bhd to operate. "Prasarana will have KPIs to meet ... if it fails to do so, MRT Corp will have the right to take it back," he says.

MRT Line 2 is targeted for completion in 2022, which should allow any possible issues on the development of Bandar Malaysia to settle before the line is built, Shahril explains when asked if the redevelopment of the former Royal Malaysian Air Force base by 1Malaysia Development Bhd will get off the ground.

Because of the realignment, Shahril reveals that MRT Line 2 will run from KLCC to Tun Razak Exchange, pass through Jalan Chan Sow Lin area to Bandar Malaysia, towards Sri Kembangan and Putrajaya. There isn't much



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change in the northern portion between Sungai Buloh and KLCC.

The salient features of the new plan, which will be submitted, are basic information of the alignment, the length of the rail track, details of the land, the park-and-ride mechanism and the number of stations, among others.

Learning from past experience, Shahril stresses that the proposal is not cast in stone and it can be changed, depending on the feedback from the public. "We plan a public display for three months to May," says Shahril, stressing that engagement with the public and relevant parties is crucial. He is quick to add that the tweaking of the line is unlikely to change the cost of MRT Line 2 as the new alignment will not alter the length much.

Initially, 49km of the total track were to be elevated while 10km were to be underground. The number of stations was 40.

Back in 2011 and 2012, the construction of

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MRT works in progress ... Line 2 is targeted for completion in 2022

the MRT lines was put at RM424 million per kilometre but Shahril estimates an increase of 15% to 20% if work on MRT Line 2 was to commence now.

"The cost of raw materials has increased, not to mention the forex (foreign exchange) rates. But it's not too huge, still manageable ... All I can say is that it is within budget and I am certain it won't exceed costs."

Shahril takes pride in the fact that the 51km MRT Line 1, which is under construction, is on track. "So far, the awarded contracts stand at about RM21 billion ... I stress that it's still within budget and the timetable is intact. As at the end of last month, the progress of the line was about 60%. And the amazing part is that the underground work is now 74.5% completed."

Some 20km or 40% of the line has been handed over to the track work contractor — Mitsubishi Heavy Industries in partnership with Sumitomo. The RM855 million job was awarded in October 2012.

The fast pace of work is attributed to some stations having the flexibility to work at night.

Shahril admits that land acquisition for MRT Line 2 could be tricky as the stations and

alignment are in congested areas such as Kelpong, Jinjang, Jalan Ipoh and the Kuala Lumpur Hospital locality.

Without divulging any details, he says apart from direct acquisitions, other methods, such as joint ventures and mutual agreements, may also be used to gain control of the land to build the line.

"We learnt a lot from the first time ... it was quite an experience. For land acquisition this time around, I'm very confident it will be done in a better manner."

Shahril has been on MRT Corp's board since its inception, having been the head honcho of Syarikat Prasarana Negara Bhd. "I had my first board meeting at MRT Corp a week and a half after I joined — it was very smooth," he says of his transition from Prasarana to MRT Corp.

But he acknowledges that the two roles are very different. While he handled 8,000 people in Prasarana, he has only 360 working under him in MRT Corp. Furthermore, under the project delivery partner concept, MRT Corp merely monitors the project and infrastructure development. "Whatever the differences, I'm enjoying myself," he laughs. ■