

A historic feat, indeed

MASS RAPID TRANSIT: Game-changing link will put KL on a par with world's best cities

IT was a rolling start to a historic day in Malaysia.

When the landmark Klang Valley Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) line opened its doors to the public on Friday, office worker Emmanuel Surendra was among the first to experience the thrill of riding the shiny new trains.

"I was stoked as not only do I live near an MRT station, but my office, notorious for the lack of parking space and exorbitant parking fees, also neighboured another MRT station. Lucky me!" she wrote on www.imoney.my.

"Imagine all the money I will save by taking the train, especially with the free rides for the first month!" (See accompanying table.)

"However, even with the fare, I will see significant savings by taking the MRT to work.

"The waiting time between the trains was not long, just a few minutes apart. The ride was smooth and the cabins spacious, wider than those on the LRT (light rail transit), which is great for wheelchair users.

"There is also the usual priority seating for pregnant women, the elderly and people with disabilities."

By the first full day of operations of the MRT Sungai Buloh-Kajang (SBK)

Line, a whopping 23,000 people had taken rides, said MRT operator Prasarana Malaysia Bhd.

"It will be convenient for me to go to school as a station is nearby," said 14-year-old student Liew Jieh Wei.

"With feeder buses available, I can use them to get home."

Welcome to the latest addition to Malaysia's growing urban public transport network, with the rollout of Phase One of the MRT SBK Line right on time and well below budget.

Malaysia made history with the opening of the nation's first MRT line, a mere dream for many global cities, by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak on Thursday.

The game-changing project will catapult Kuala Lumpur to being a world-class and liveable city, on a par with Singapore, Hong Kong or London. It will also generate greater connectivity and spawn huge economic spin-offs.

The public response to the MRT has been overwhelming.

The first train, carrying Najib and 400 guests, left the Kwasa Damansara Station for the Sungai Buloh Station, and made a return trip. The entire journey took less than 15 minutes.

I found the ride in the German-built train to be very smooth and quiet. It is very user-friendly and the interior design is very pleasant.

When fully operational in July next year, the 51km line is expected to carry 400,000 people daily across 31 sta-

Monthly travel expenditure

By car	By MRT
Petrol: RM250 (Round trip)	Ticket: RM6.40 x 20 = RM128
Toll: RM6 per day x 20 = RM120	TOTAL: RM128
Parking: RM280	(With the MRT, I save RM6,264 a year just on transportation to the office)
TOTAL: RM650	

"These figures are just an estimate. Also, as I live and work near stations, I save more than the usual commuter who would need to park his or her car at a parking bay and use the MRT for transit." (Emmanuel Surendra, www.imoney.my)

tions, seven of which are underground. There are two reserve stations.

Phase Two, from the Semantan Station to the Kajang Station, will be operational by July, allowing trains to run the entire alignment.

Each train set has four cars, with a total capacity of 1,200 people. The driverless trains run at intervals of 3.5 minutes.

Last week was also a defining week for Malaysia's public transport planners.

The end of the MRT SBK Line's construction coincided with the start of another mammoth undertaking, the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High-Speed Rail (HSR) project, with the signing of the legally binding agreement between Malaysia and Singapore.

Najib and his Singaporean counterpart, Lee Hsien Loong, both of whom had mooted the idea and spearheaded the project, witnessed the historic signing of the agreement in Putrajaya on Tuesday.

When completed in Dec 31, 2026, travel time between the two cities will be cut down to just 90 minutes, from the road journey of more than four hours.

Transforming public transport has been one of the hallmarks of the Najib administration, a legacy that the prime minister would like to leave behind.

In fact, it took six years from the government go-ahead for the project to reach completion and the rollout. The construction of the biggest infrastructure project in the country to date took just five years.

With the Klang Valley MRT, the target to have 50 per cent of all journeys in the Greater Kuala Lumpur/Klang Valley region be made via public transport can be achieved.

There were, of course, sceptics and critics when the Klang Valley MRT

project was first announced.

The government proved them wrong when the project cost RM2 billion less than the targeted RM23 billion.

If we follow the ranting of opposition leader Rafizi Ramli, he had claimed that the project's cost could have ballooned to RM80 billion.

And, in DAP-held Penang, the biggest partner in a consortium spearheading a Penang transport project publicly said it was unaware that the proposed Penang Transport Master Plan's (TMP) original RM27 billion cost had ballooned to more than the reported RM40 billion.

Gamuda Bhd has a 60 per cent stake in SRS Consortium, which is the project delivery partner for TMP. Two property developers — Ideal Property Development Sdn Bhd and Loh Phoy Yen Holdings Sdn Bhd — each has a 20 per cent stake in SRS.

Gamuda group managing director Datuk Lin Yun Ling recently said: "The RM40 billion is new to me. As far as we know, it shouldn't vary too much from the earlier figure."

But, there are also other questions on the feasibility of the projects under TMP, with Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng claiming that he wanted to avoid repeating the so-called "failures" of the Federal Government's

public transport projects in the Klang Valley.

But, one non-governmental organisation has noted that the population projections by the Gamuda-led consortium for Penang in 2030 had been "highly inflated" — some 500,000 more than the official forecast.

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A veteran newsman, Jalil believes that a good journalist should be curious and sceptical at the same time

WIDE ANGLE

A JALIL HAMID



Prime Minister **Datuk Seri Najib Razak** after taking a ride on the **MRT Sungai Buloh-Kajang Line**. The project is set to generate greater connectivity and spawn huge economic spin-offs.