

Rail networks are future of Malaysian logistics



**DR MARCO
TIEMAN**

WITH the completion of the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) rail line last month, Malaysia is another excellent rail infrastructure richer. My personal experience in using the MRT for business meetings in KL Sentral and dinners in Bukit Bintang has been positive.

The MRT has excellent connections to other rail networks at KL Sentral and a modern feeder bus network that gives many people direct access to the MRT.

This new link will mean that people won't need to own a car in order to go to work, go shopping or meet with family and friends.

The MRT makes it easier for travellers by shortening transit times. I guess it is just a matter of time before we see pizza deliverymen and couriers taking the MRT instead of using motorcycles!

Last week, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak announced that Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP) will be the first university in the country to introduce studies in railway technology.

UMP will hereby be able to play a major role in the construction of the East Coast Rail Link, set to start next month.

UMP has been expanding its transportation and logistics education programmes to deliver the next generation of transportation and logistics engineers.

For cargo, rail transport is basically a long hauler and mover of bulk products (coal, timber, chemicals, cement) and containers. But in Malaysia, rail contributes to less than one per cent of the freight being transported.

Rail offers many advantages over road transport, including lower costs and less carbon dioxide emissions.

Rail also has advantages over sea transport due to its higher speed and possibly shorter routes. For example, sending goods from the Klang Valley to Bangkok takes close to a week via sea as the ship needs to sail round Singapore before going north to Laem Chabang or Bangkok Port. The same trip takes less than two days by rail.

As local ports have been very successful in growing their volume, there is an increasing shortage of storage space for containers. These containers would be more cost effectively stored inland, connected via a rail line to an inland container terminal.



The current rail network accounts for only about one per cent of overland freight haulage in the country.

This inland container terminal also could play a role in bundling container flows destined for the port further inland, extending hereby the port network inland.

At this terminal, the necessary declarations and other paperwork could be completed (instead of doing this at the port) as well as value added activities, such as stuffing, unstuffing, cleaning, inspection and repair of containers.

With the double-track rail infrastructure in the country, there is great potential to boost rail transport in the country.

Critical areas to look at are efficient handling at inland container depots and border crossings.

These facilities should operate 24 hours a day, including customs. Availability and upkeep of equipment, locomotives and wagons is

essential. Delays at these inter-modal points significantly increases not only journey time but also variability of delivery times by sending goods by rail.

Reducing the variability of delivery times will be mission critical in order to realise a significant shift from road to rail networks, from the less than one per cent currently to levels even beyond 10 per cent of freight transportation.

marco@lbbinternational.com

The writer is founder and CEO of LBB International, the logistics consulting and research firm that specialises in agri-food supply chains, industrial logistics and third-party logistics. LBB provides logistics diagnostics, supply chain design and solutions and market research in Asia, Europe and the Middle East.

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