

JB – S'PORE RTS Expected To Run By 2026

KUALA LUMPUR : The Johor Baru-Singapore Rapid Transit System (RTS) is expected to begin operations by the end of 2026, with construction scheduled to begin next year. Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong said work would start in January after necessary approvals were obtained from Malaysia and Singapore.

“The construction of the RTS link will be done in two phases. “The first will take place between early 2021 and end 2024, which involves civil structure development. The latter, carried out between early 2025 and the end of 2026, will comprise development of systems, such as signalling, rolling stock, telecommunications, as well as system testing and commissioning,” he said to a question from Akmal Nizar Zakaria (PH-Johor Baru).

Wee said the signing of the bilateral agreement, as well as the concession and joint-venture operating company, or OpCo, for the project was expected on July 30 at the Causeway, which will be witnessed by the prime ministers of both countries.

Wee also clarified the project cost, which the previous Pakatan Harapan government had estimated at RM3.16 billion, a 36 per cent reduction from the original cost of RM4.93 billion. “Firstly, the MRT (Mass Rapid Transit) system was initially proposed for the RTS in 2018, but the government decided to opt for LRT after taking into consideration various factors. The specifications are different. “Secondly, the land cost (was waived) as the sultan of Johor (Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar) has consented to return the piece of land (at Bukit Chagar) to the federal government (at no cost) for the purpose of the project. Thus, the cost ceiling was not applicable then.

“The former transport minister (Anthony Loke) was right in announcing the project cost estimation of RM3.16 billion.” Wee, however, said an additional RM500 million would be incurred, which included land acquisition and safety features, for the construction of its depot in Wadihana, Johor Baru, a relocation from the original proposed site in Mandai, Singapore. He said discussions were being carried out with the Finance Ministry on the RM3.7 billion overall cost for the project which, among others, would be done through the governments’ infrastructure fund.

He said both Malaysian and Singaporean authorities had discussed the fare mechanism to ensure affordability for commuters. “A lot of matters are discussed in the concession agreement, including whether there is enough (passenger) traffic. The specifications include 10,000 passengers per hour per route during peak hours. “Based on this, we came up with a projected traffic and agreed on a fare mechanism that would not burden the people. “The (rail) tickets would be paid in ringgit here and Singapore dollars in the republic. We understand that many Malaysians commute daily to Singapore. We will ensure that the project cost will not be transferred to passengers (through ticket fares).”

He said the local workforce would be prioritised in the project, especially with the relocation of the RTS depot from Mandai to Wadihana. “Secondly, Woodlands will be connected through the Thompson line to Bukit Chagar, covering a four-km distance and will give huge impact to Johor Baru constituents as JB Sentral is right next to (the station).”