



22 September 2008

Integrated Mass Rapid Transit System Proposal for Greater Ipoh

Coordinated approach to improve public transportation woes with proven results

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In the name of the God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

Integrated Mass Rapid Transit System Proposal for Greater Ipoh

Coordinated approach to improve public transportation woes with proven results

Upon learning the [plan](#) from the Ipoh city authorities to add a new fleet of 200 buses and to build the Ipoh Sentral Transportation Hub (ISTH) in Bandar Meru Raya which sits in the northern fringes of the city, TRANSIT wishes to kindly suggest the Perak Public Transport Committee and the Ipoh City Council members to consider the suggestions within this proposal before going ahead with the RM188 million project. TRANSIT believes that transformation of Ipoh's mass transit requires the support systems to be put in place first, rather than embarking on piece-meal solutions that may end up with the results similar to the RapidKL and RapidPenang initiatives.

Issues and Concerns

TRANSIT has learnt that Ipoh Ratepayers And Taxpayers Association (IRATA) has [objected](#) the ISTH proposal based on the [feedbacks](#) obtained from Ipoh commuters. The ISTH is meant to replace both the [Medan Gopeng](#) and the [Medan KIDD](#) terminals.

Unlike the two terminals, the ISTH sits far away from the center of the city, and a public transportation hub which sits in the outer fringes of the urban vicinity that it serves will not be effective in moving commuters along the common corridor with greater efficiency (which is the objective of mass transit or public transport). TRANSIT views that the integrated transport complex proposal should instead be made as a gateway for northbound express buses, and district hub only for Bandar Meru Raya, not the entire Greater Ipoh (refer to Attachment 1).

TRANSIT is concerned on how the performance of the sole-awarded consortium responsible for the operations of the buses will be managed in absence of any healthy competition. 'Shape in or ship out' carrot and stick approach has been used by transport authorities worldwide to obtain the best service at the best price from competing operators, with transit operations contracts subject to periodical evaluations. Furthermore, the current lacking state of public transport infrastructure and confusing jurisdictions over various support systems may negate any potential benefits that the project might bring matter how much busses are being put into operations.

MASS TRANSIT WOES: More than meets the eye

Merely adding fleets of bright-sparkling buses and constructing grand sophisticated stations alone will not solve Ipoh's public transportation woes. A lot of factors need to be counted in before any viable solution can be singled out.

Correct understanding as to why we need Mass Transit

Public-funded public transport is a mobility right for every individual whose livelihood is affected by the population density and business activity of the surrounding area. The government has failed to grasp the fact that in any urban setting, public transport is crucially needed for the greater good of the public. Public transport investment (which is more aptly referred to rather than 'subsidy') is imperative to negate all negative externalities associated with lessening quality of urban life as a result of dependency on private vehicles. Without public sector's lead, public transport will remain unattractive to the masses as it is natural for private investors to avoid from absorbing the costs of setting up proper support systems needed to match the convenience that private transportation offers. A single occupancy vehicle driver takes up more public-funded travelling space than a passenger in a fully-seated bus, and hence eats a much bigger portion of the government's coffers.

No ownership and no accountability

The under-prioritization of public transport in Malaysia is evident through the uncoordinated involvement of 13 different federal agencies in mass transit industry where each passes the buck to another when any issue that need action arises. Local councils and city planners have neglected the entire mass transit infrastructure and support systems needed because public transport is seen as mean of travelling for people who can't afford private transport. No single government entity bothers to set transit performance management and standards for public transport, and 'subsidy' to fund transit operations is seen as costly when in reality, single-occupancy vehicles do not bear the full cost it generates to the urban society (congestion, accidents, stress, pollution, lost productivity, etc).

No competency and no transparency

Proper allocation of public transport's risk and responsibility must be sorted out between the public trustees and the private investors so that best service delivery can be ensured with the lowest possible administrative and operational costs. Without operations standards and regulations with periodical performance monitoring and review, operators as investors focus on maximizing profits to fulfill the shareholders' expectations at the cost of the greater urban society, which are the real stakeholders of public transport. Without support systems, operators have to cut corners in order to compete with any scarce public space left not taken by private transport. Bus drivers must never be given incentives to manage bus operations on their own through commission payouts based on passenger volume. The unethical 'pajak' system where permits monopolized by influential members of the society are leased out to actual operators whose survival depends on rental payouts instead of performance must be stopped at once.



Ipoh Sentral should not end up like KL Sentral. Despite being Malaysia's largest and sophisticated transport hub, KL Sentral suffers from various missing links and improper coordination among various mass transit modes and support systems.

SOLUTION: Integrated Mass Rapid Transit System

Despite most of the jurisdictions in the provision of mass transit support systems are in the hands of the Federal Government, there are several implementable initiatives that the Perak State Government can undertake to improve mass transit services at the local level.

Please refer to Attachment 1 titled Greater Ipoh's Integrated Mass Rapid Transit System for a snapshot proposal of different modes of public transport in Ipoh city's vicinity.

Ipoh is a blessed city which gracefully situated in the midst of the scenic and environmentally-plush Kinta Valley, and crisscrossed by the Ipoh-Lumut Highway, the North-South Expressway (NSE), the Padang Besar-Singapore KTM Train Tracks and the Kinta River waterways. A possible worst-case scenario of a man-made disaster which requires complete evacuation of the nearly 1 million Ipoh civilian and working populations out of the city within 60 minutes during the middle of any working day should guide us a clearer picture on how the mass transit system should be set up.

HUB: Center of Gravity for Greater Ipoh

The area encapsulating Medan KIDD, Ipoh Local Bus Transit Station and KTM Ipoh Station is the most strategic location for the ISTH to be constructed. The area is within the center of gravity of the entire Greater Ipoh townships, and it is well-connected to roads and rail tracks that reach all corners of the suburban population around Ipoh with potential future land developments. Hub-and-spoke mass transit routes can be easily formed when the hub is within the center of the urban population, rather than in the fringes of it.

Gateway for intercity commuters

Nonetheless, the ISTH originally planned at Bandar Meru Jaya is strategically suited to be Ipoh's mass transit gateway for northbound intercity commuters, albeit at a much lower scale (but upgradeable in the future). Another similar gateway can be built next to Simpang Pulai NSE Exit for southbound intercity commuters. These gateways are capable to reduce the number of express buses that enters the city center. These gateways will be served by high frequency bus services that will ply across main corridors and pass through the main transit hub in the Ipoh city center.

Bus Rapid Transit

Bus is the most suitable mass transit vehicle to serve Greater Ipoh because of its flexibility and extendibility. For a city with a sub-1 million population, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) serves just the right capability to move Greater Ipoh commuters along the common urban corridors with greater travel and cost efficiency.

3 BRT lines are proposed to form a hub-and-spoke mass transit system, covering the northern suburban areas of Bandar Meru Raya, Chemor and Tanjung Rambutan, and the southern suburban areas of Batu Gajah, Pengkalan and Simpang Pulai (refer to Attachment 1). The stops along these lines coincide as



BRT systems in 3rd world countries, such as Columbia's Transmilenio (above) have managed to achieve the same result as MRTs in advanced cities

transfer points for commuters who are coming from the surrounding suburban areas (refer to Appendix 1).

These 3 BRT lines will intersect at Downtown Ipoh, where commuters can hop on to Downtown bus service lines covering Jalan Sultan Idris Shah, Jalan Sultan Iskandar, Jalan Dato Onn Jaafar, Jalan Raja Musa Aziz, Jalan Dato Seri Ahmad Said and Jalan Hospital.



KTM Komuter and Interstate

Double-tracking and electrification of the current single KTM train track will provide the most efficient way of commuting along the Kinta Valley, especially from Sungai Siput down south to Batu Gajah, with stops in Chemor, Tanjung Rambutan, Klebang, Tasek, Downtown Ipoh, Menglembu and Bukit Merah. KTM rail track is usable for interstate and international travel as well.

Waterways

The historic Kinta River cuts across the city, subliminally divides the locality into the much fabled Ipoh Old Town and New Town. The river is only 200m west of the proposed Ipoh City hub, making it a potential tourism spot for water-based activities, including touring ferries and boats.

The above summarizes TRANSIT's proposal for the improvement of public transport in Greater Ipoh. However, the basic principles of Integrated Mass Rapid Transit System must never be neglected:

Integrated

All modes of public transportations must be considered in the overall mass transit planning. They must not compete with one another, as that will defeat the purpose of public transport which is to serve as the only viable alternative to private transport.

Thus, a uniform and simplified fare system has to be administered (all day pass, unlimited ride in certain zones, etc) by a centralized agency, in which commuters have the liberty to transfer to different modes of mass transit, and periodical payouts will be given to contracted operators based on agreed set of KPIs (driving man-hours, mileage, etc).

The centralized agency will also be responsible in handling mass transit operations management in terms of the designing and publishing of the entire interconnecting mass transit routes and schedules based on continuous travel demand analyses and feedbacks from the public.

Mass

The public transport appeal has to cover wide across the multiple segments of the society. Walking remains the single biggest mean of reaching transit points, and thus the City Council is responsible in providing safe, comfortable and accessible walking paths that are user friendly to small children, frail seniors and handicapped citizens.

Other creative solutions include designation of bicycle paths from deep, low-density suburban areas to bicycle garages near BRT stops, and substantial fee discounts on park-n-ride lot users who can provide proof of mass transit journey.



Rapid

A public transport mode which journey is tiring (due to overcrowding) and takes up too much time (due to too much number of stops, unreliable schedule and route, traffic bottleneck) will quickly lose its appeal especially for white collar workers whose opportunity cost of time and lost productivity (due to commuting stress) is high.

High frequency BRT lines must be fixed along main suburban corridors with bus stops evenly spread out roughly 1km from each other. Demand on certain sections of BRT lines near the city center might be overwhelming during peak hours, and thus truncated BRT lines should complement the regular BRT lines to cater the high traffic volume in areas nearer to the city center. With proper support systems and transit headway facilitation such as dedicated bus lanes, queue jumps and priority signal lights, BRTs can achieve the same commuting efficiency rate of LRTs and MRTs.

The suburban feeder routes must be simplified so that it will not take more than 5-10 minutes for each resident to walk to the nearest feeder bus stop, and not more than another 10-15 minutes for the bus to reach the nearest BRT bus stop (refer to Appendix 1).

Express, non-stop local bus service will perfectly complement the BRT services, considering the presence of Ipoh-Lumut Highway on the Bandar Meru Raya – Batu Gajah travel corridor and the North South Expressway on the Bandar Meru Raya – Gopeng travel corridor. Temporary permits can be issued to double deck express buses to cater the demand expected during peak hours.

Bus stops, stations, hubs and gateways must be designed exclusively for rapid incoming and outgoing traffic flow of buses. Idle vehicles must be stowed away at dedicated depots, which can be suitably constructed next to the proposed Simpang Pulau and Bandar Meru Raya mass transit gateways. These gateways must have clear, uninterrupted line of way to quickly reach the expressways.

Transit

Commuting can be made easy if transfer points are made accessible, convenient, safe and systematic (with stand-behind-the-yellow-lines markings). Walking distance between transferring points must be made as short as possible, with safe passageways (pedestrian bridge, zebra crossing, shaded pathways etc). Seamless connection guarantees various possible mass transit travel paths, provided that the infrastructure is well executed.



All mass transit facilities (depot, gateway, hub, station, stop, billboard etc) must never be privatized, as private owners always squeeze valuable public spaces in order to gain private profits out of rental and advertising income.

System

Effective mass transit cannot exist without coordination. A one-stop center for urban mass transit needs is typical for all major cities worldwide with well-developed mass transit. The coordinating agency must be

responsible in the provision of the systems necessary to uphold all of the aforementioned principles of Integrated Mass Rapid Transit System (including but not limited to: routes, fares, assets, traffic enforcement, land gazettes), and at the local level, it must be vested with enough powers on its own under the City Council's organizational structure (either in form of department, agency or commission).

Mass Transit Planning and Development

In Malaysia, public transport planning has always trailed behind rapid urban development when it should be vice versa. With the exception of few well-planned housing areas, most residents would find themselves landlocked from any routes that are viable to be served by public transport, especially if the surrounding areas are consisted of different conflicting land zones. Mass transit cost will rise if it is expected to cover remote high-density population areas tucked far away from main urban travel corridors, such as apartment blocks located among heavy clusters of industrial buildings.

The organic-shaped network of Malaysian roads and urban clusters make it more costly for straight forward, uninterrupted travel corridors to be constructed, considering the speed in which scarce available empty urban spaces are grabbed.

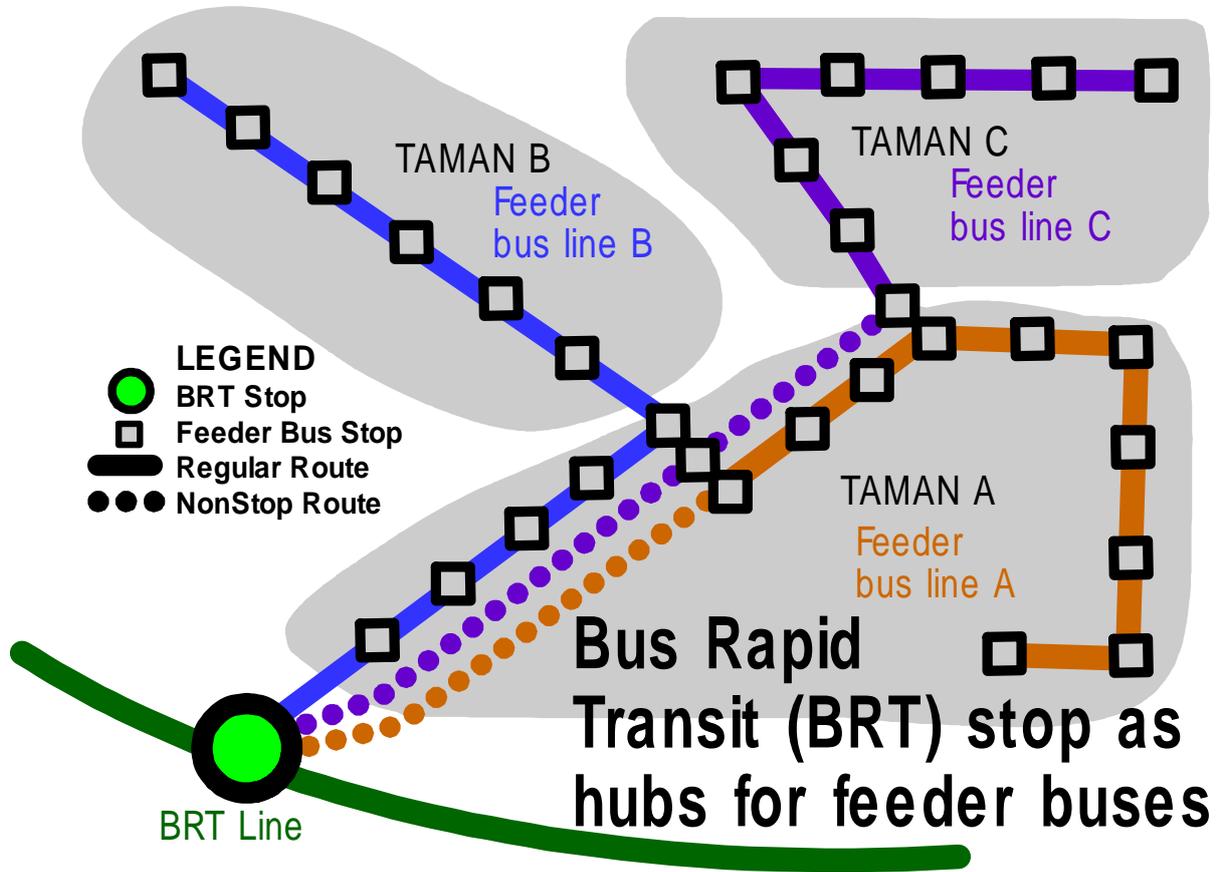
It is imperative for the Perak State Government to gazette Greater Ipoh's precious land spaces around highway intersections and exits, beside the common road corridors, along the existing KTM tracks and near the main entrances to housing clusters as untouchables, so that overhead terminals with direct expressway ramps, dedicated bus lanes, separated KTM Komuter tracks and suburban hub complexes can be built to improve direct transit connections and passageways in these respective areas concurrent with the increase in urban population density.



The land value of any piece of land in Greater Ipoh has to correlate with its accessibility to strategic mass transit points, and the City Council must be able to manage a scheme of non-discriminating distribution of revenue from quitrent money, trust funds and fare income to cover the mobility needs of the entire urban population.



APPENDIX 1



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