

Malaysia: ECRL - More in depth study needed to reduce environmental impact

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PSM welcomes PH governments efforts to enhance public transport when they decided to revitalize the ECRL as means to connect the east coast and west coast of Malaysia that will reduce travel time greatly. Avoid tunneling through the 16km Klang Gates Quartz Ridge is a right move to protect geological heritage of our central spine. The Titiwangsa Mountain Central Region" located at Pahang-Selangor-Negeri Sembilan borders is a mega biodiversity region that needs to be preserved.

However the proposed route from Mentakab to Jelebu may harm Titiwangsa tropical rainforest ecosystem. Instead we should consider a surface railway track from Mentakab to Karak parallel to the Federal Route 2 (MFR2). Where from Karak, the ECRL could either;

- explore a 40km tunnel from Karak to Ampang Jaya before merging to KL Sentral to avoid Klang Gates Quartz Ridge and Titiwangsa Mountain Range surface forest. OR
- align parallel to Federal Route 8 to Genting Sempah before merging into KTM's Batu Caves-KL Sentral tracks.

By utilizing the existing Federal Routes, the construction route could be minimized reducing the impact on the sensitive region. Presence of ECRL's high voltage overhead power lines deeper into the surface forest and closer to ground could generate electromagnetic waves tempering with animals' bio-magnetic compass also known as magnetoception particularly with birds, reptiles and mammals. Thus causing them to be stranded and lost, especially the young ones reducing their survival rates.

ECRL may explore tunnel realignment if could protect the surface forest biodiversity. The condition deeper underground in Titiwangsa Mountain is too hostile for complex organism so tunnel impact will be minimal. Surface railway tracks fencing creates "islanding effect" by dividing the forest. Thus, trapping the animals within a limited area jeopardizing the animals' access for food and water.

Merging of ECRL operator, MRL Sdn Bhd into KTMB will reduce the projects price tag. Post-merger, ECRL could utilize KTM's Port Klang tracks, ETS coaches, maintenance depot, ticketing system and cargo handling equipment reducing development cost. Tunnel Boring Machines (TBM) and tracklaying equipment from MRT might be used for the construction of ECRL. Malaysia successfully refurbished MRT 1's TBM using mostly local components and reused in MRT 2.

ECRL's biggest problem is the absence of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Social Impact Assessment (SIA). A credible SIA would have recommended merger of ECRL into ETS to promote cohesive and affordable interstate railway network. EIA would have proposed multiple options and its impacts to connect Mentakab to Klang Valley. Without credible SIA and EIA, PSM is concerned that the project will be skewed towards only financial considerations that would potentially harm our ecology and geological heritage.

Sharan Raj (National Coordinator of Environmental Bureau, Parti Sosialis Malaysia - PSM)

P.S.

- THINK LEFT PSM on APRIL 19, 2019:

<https://thinkleft.net/2019/04/19/ecrl-more-in-depth-study-needed-to-reduce-environmental-impact/>