

On track to a clean, green link across the nation

THE STAR - 2

PUTRAJAYA: Both the High Speed Rail (HSR) and the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) can reduce CO2 emissions by millions of tonnes with more people leaving their cars behind in favour of public transport.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar said many people travelled by car for 12 or 15 hours just to reach Kelantan from Kuala Lumpur, especially during Hari Raya.

"Once this (ECRL) goes through, people will not travel by car any more.

"Can you imagine the millions of tonnes of CO2 not discharged into the atmosphere?"

"In terms of carbon emissions, Malaysia will fulfil our place in the world in the (UNFCCC) United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change with these two tracks - the HSR to Singapore and the ECRL.

"That's why I support this project," said Dr Wan Junaidi.

He was commenting on concerns expressed by conservationists, particularly on the ECRL, which is expected to cut through Peninsular Malaysia's Central Forest Spine, a stretch that is a series of reserve forests in Perak, Kelantan and Terengganu.

In a statement, environmental group Peka Malaysia called on the Government to engage local experts to oversee construction of the rail line.

She also claimed that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) study carried on the project was not enough.

Starting from Wakaf Baru in Kelantan and ending in Port Klang, the 688km link will see 22 stations.

Passengers will be able to complete the journey in less than four hours.

Dr Wan Junaidi said he had also asked for stretches of the rail line that passed through forest reserves and sanctuaries to be built underground.

"If it passes through a smaller piece of forest where it can't go underground, I would like for viaducts to be built so that wildlife can pass through," he said.

Asked if his requests had been fulfilled, Dr Wan Junaidi said he was told that the rail's design would include "many kilometres of tunnels", adding that he hoped to see the details.

Other areas such as Malay and orang asli reserve land as well as villages, he said, should also be taken into account in the construction of the rail.

To a question if he would emphasise on strict environmental standards, Dr Wan Junaidi said he had alerted the Prime Minister on the possibility of a new law to govern noise control.

"Noise is not yet an offence under Malaysian law. But the new law will make it an offence to cause noise pollution.

"So, any design with roads or trains must accommodate the law before it comes into effect," said Dr Wan Junaidi.