

Malaysia-Singapore bilateral deal on RTS Link sealed

BY MONICA KOTWANI

SINGAPORE: A legally binding agreement between Singapore and Malaysia brings the Johor Baru-Singapore Rapid Transit System (RTS) Link one step closer to fruition.

The bilateral agreement was signed yesterday by Singapore Transport Minister and Coordinating Minister for Infrastructure Khaw Boon Wan and Malaysia's Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Abdul Rahman Dahlan.

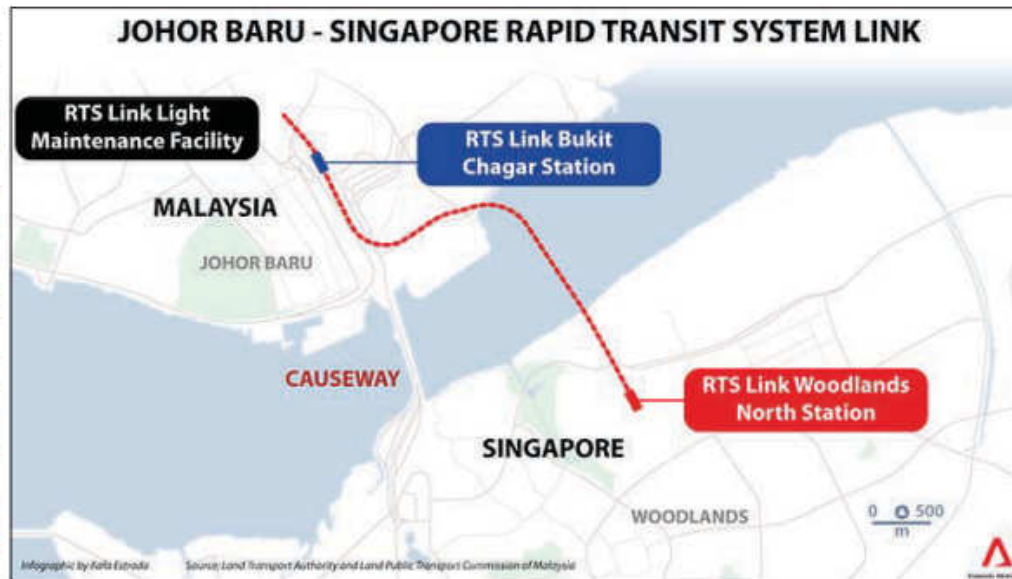
The signing was witnessed by Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and his Malaysian counterpart Datuk Seri Najib Razak during the eighth Singapore-Malaysia leaders' retreat.

In a joint media release, Malaysia's Land Public Transport Commission (SPAD) and Singapore's Land Transport Authority (LTA) welcomed the signing, saying it signifies a firm commitment to an important project that will benefit both countries.

It said the agreement is the outcome of extensive discussions led by officials from SPAD and LTA.

"It captures the key points of agreement on the RTS Link project, including the technical, safety and security requirements, commercial, financing, procurement and regulatory frameworks, as well as customs, immigration and quarantine arrangements," the release added.

When completed by 2024, the RTS Link will be able to carry up to 10,000 passengers in each direction every hour. This translates into an



additional capacity of 60,000 users crossing the causeway during peak hours.

It will also be much higher than the average 300 passengers per hour in each direction that Keretapi Tanah Melayu Bhd's (KTMB) Tebrau shuttle currently ferries. The shuttle service will cease operations six months after the RTS Link service begins operating.

Until the RTS Link becomes operational, the frequency of the KTMB shuttle services between Singapore and Johor Baru will be increased, Lee said at the joint press conference after the eighth Singa-

pore-Malaysia leaders' retreat.

Najib indicated that the KTMB's current 26 daily trips between Johor Baru and Singapore could be raised in future.

"I really appreciate the decision by the Singapore government to allow the KTM shuttle service to be increased. It has increased now to 26 [trips], and there's a proposal for it to go up to 31 in the near future and certainly this will be helpful," Najib said.

For ease of commute, the RTS Link will have co-located customs, immigration and quarantine facili-

ties in both the Bukit Chagar station in Johor Baru and the Woodlands North station in Singapore.

"Passengers travelling in either direction will clear both Malaysia and Singapore authorities at the point of departure, and need not go through immigration clearance again at the point of arrival," the statement said.

The media release also said the service will cross the Straits of Johor via a 25m-high bridge linking both the stations. It said the RTS Link will utilise the same "four core systems" as the upcoming Thomson-East Coast Line (TEL). These systems include

the same trains, signalling system, communications system and the integrated supervisory control system.

Heavy maintenance will be outsourced to SMRT Trains, which will operate TEL. This will be done at its Mandai Depot, although there will also be a light maintenance facility in Bukit Chagar.

Each country will appoint an infrastructure company (InfraCo) to fund, build, own, maintain, and renew the civil infrastructure and stations within their territories. In Malaysia, the InfraCo will be Prasarana Malaysia Bhd, while LTA will be Singapore's InfraCo.

Both governments will also jointly appoint an operating company (OpCo) to own, design, build, finance, operate, maintain, and renew the RTS Link's operating assets such as trains, tracks and systems.

The OpCo will pay a concession fee to the two countries in exchange for the right to collect fare revenue from operating the link. The authorities said fares will be set on a commercial basis by the OpCo and not regulated by the two governments.

Under the terms of the agreement, the OpCo for the first concession period of 30 years will be a joint venture (JV) between Prasarana and SMRT Corp in Singapore.

"The companies have committed to incorporating the JV by June 30, 2018, and to signing the concession agreement by Sept 30, 2018. Subsequent concessions will be awarded through open tender," the statement said. — Channel NewsAsia