

Better CHEAPER *Faster* **PENANG** TRANSPORT MASTER PLAN



Executive Summary

July 2016

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Penang state government working in partnership with civil society commissioned the Halcrow Transport Master Plan in May 2011 to develop a holistic transportation plan for the state of Penang. The main purpose of the TMP is to shift demand for transport from car traffic to public transport. All strategies and measures should be guided by this overall objective. However, in moving towards implementation, in what has been termed the 'Big Bang' approach, both South Reclamation Scheme (SRS) and Zenith BUCG have to come to the table with their differing expertise. As a result we are losing sight of the aims of the original plan and it is time now to return to first principles.

Shortcomings of SRS/Zenith BUCG proposals

- Lacking a vision for the future of Penang and are trapped in an old paradigm;
- Based on questionable population and ridership projections;
- Proposes too many and poorly integrated modes of public transport;
- Under-emphasises short-term & more cost effective measures;
- A distinct lack of transparency on the part of the government;
- Questions need to be asked about conflicts of interest.

We need to ask ourselves why have we deviated so much from Halcrow's Plan?

- Why has the state not implemented Halcrow's Short Term Strategies?
- What happened to the Halcrow Highway Improvement Plan?
- What happened to the Traffic Reduction Strategy?
- What happened to the funding proposed by Halcrow for pedestrian & cycling infrastructure, water transport, feeder buses and taxis?
- Why has there been no follow-up of recommendations to improve technical competence in government?

What are the financial implications of the 'Big Bang' approach?

The SRS/Zenith proposal today is projected to cost RM46 billion, up from RM27 billion in the Halcrow Plan. These are only the construction costs. It is easy to build but difficult to successfully manage projects financially. The yearly annual operating and maintenance costs have not been taken into account and they can make or break a project. Taking the George Town – Bayan Lepas LRT line alone, as an illustration, we project the state can face huge financial deficits depending on the level of ridership compared to trams that are cheaper to operate. If we add up the annual operating costs of all the other proposed monorails, LRT, tram, BRT and highways, we could be staring at several hundred million ringgit of financial deficits for the state. The question is, what are the short-term and long-term financial implications of this 'Big Bang' approach for Penang? We should learn from the financial difficulties of the KL LRT and monorail projects.

What's the alternative?

We propose a holistic-incremental approach based on the following 5 principles:

- Principle 1: Cut your shirt according to your cloth;
- Principle 2: Adopt a sustainable financial model;
- Principle 3: One step at a time - an incremental approach;
- Principle 4: Prioritise public transport;
- Principle 5: Evidence based policy and far sighted leadership.

Better, cheaper, faster

Our Better, Cheaper, Faster strategy returns to the recommendations of Halcrow and proposes a combination of modern trams and Bus Rapid Transit.

Our fundamental premise is that the main purpose of the TMP is to shift demand for transport from car traffic to public transport. All strategies and measures should be guided by this overarching objective.

On the island a single, integrated modern tram based public transport system will allow vehicles to travel anywhere on the network, thereby increasing connectivity and accessibility. A system of mixed grade and elevated running rail would keep the large scale infrastructure to a minimum, significantly reducing construction cost and time along with the associated negative impacts (social, economic). A much more comprehensive BRT system is proposed for the mainland, linking the major urban areas of the mainland with key connectivity points in the system, strengthening linkages between the island and the mainland. By creating an exclusive, segregated right of way for the BRT, it becomes very simple in the future to expand the tram network onto the mainland, giving Penang one single public transit system. So eventually one could board a tram in Butterworth and alight in Tanjung Tokong, or board a tram at the airport and alight in Raja Uda.

Better

- Because it is more accessible for all;
- Has a smaller footprint and is friendlier to the environment;
- Is quieter and produces less vibrations;
- Is flexible and much easier to expand in the future.

Cheaper

- A modern tram and BRT system is no more than half the price to build, saving up to RM16bn of our money;
- A modern tram and BRT system is two to three times cheaper to operate and maintain, saving your children from having to bail it out in the future;
- The network will be cheaper to expand on the island and to the mainland.

Faster

- A modern tram and BRT system is twice as fast to construct and can be built on the island and the mainland at the same time;¹
- A system built twice as fast means half the disruption to daily life;
- A system which is half the price can be built far quicker, meaning no need to wait until 2030 for SRS to get round to completing their proposal.

¹ Neither the Raja Uda to Bukit Mertajam Monorail or the Butterworth to Simpang Ampat BRT have any committed timeline in the SRS RFP proposal.