

PPC: Penang tunnel must be at least 23m under seabed

By R. SEKARAN
rsekaran@thestar.com.my

GEORGE TOWN: If there is to be a tunnel under the sea between the Penang island and the mainland, it needs to be at least 23m beneath the seabed – almost equal to the height of a seven-storey building.

This is among the critical technical considerations to ensure the port's growth if the tunnel is built.

The Penang Port Commission (PPC) and Penang Port Sdn Bhd (PPSB) had sent to the state government yesterday a list for the state must consider if it wants to go ahead with the tunnel.

PPC chairman Datuk Tan Teik

Cheng said the suggested tunnel depth was vital to cater to the future deepening of Penang's channel to let larger ships sail into the harbour.

It was earlier reported that the plan was to bore the tunnel at a depth of 11m to 13m under the seabed.

Tan said while PPC and PPSB welcomed the state's intention to give Penang a third link between the island and the mainland, it was vital to factor in the future expansion of Penang Port's services.

"We have always stressed that ships entering the harbour from the northern channel, especially large ones with a draft of 16m, need a minimum depth of 23m," he said.

The width of the northern chan-

nel must also be maintained at 2.2km to ensure the safe movement of large vessels, he added.

"We have sent a written review stating our concerns on these and other issues on the undersea tunnel project to the state government on Wednesday," Tan told a press conference at the PPC office at Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal yesterday.

He said PPC had also asked the state to review the construction of an artificial island near the mainland end of the proposed tunnel, in Butterworth's Bagan Ajam.

"The construction of the island should be nearer to shore to prevent disruptions to North Butterworth Container Terminal's (NBCT)

activities. It may also be an obstacle to the future development of the container terminal," he added.

PPC, on Feb 20, 2020, had approved plans to expand the NBCT, including the reclamation of 217ha and lengthening of the docks by 1.5km.

Tan said PPC and PPSB found that the port's expansion had to go northwards because at the southern side of Penang lies Penang Water Supply Corp's twin submarine pipeline and the cargo operations of Shell and Petron terminals.

"We have been reviewing the undersea tunnel project since 2019 and sent a report to the state economic planning unit on May 20, 2020, with several suggestions on

how it could be done," said Tan.

"There is no change in our stand. We welcome the effort but the future of Penang Port must be considered for the sake of the state."

The controversial 6.5km undersea tunnel and three main roads were among several projects forming part of Penang's Transport Master Plan.

It was reported on March 11 that no decision had been made on the construction of the tunnel.

Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow had said the project's concession company had presented its findings on the project feasibility study to the state exco last month.

He said the state had requested a written review from PPC and PPSB.