

EFFICIENT

BETTER PENANG FERRY SERVICES

Prasarana to take over firm and improve commuting experience

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COMMUTERS can experience greater improvement in services once Prasarana Malaysia Bhd takes over the iconic Penang ferry service next month.

Its chief executive officer Datuk Seri Azmi Abdul Aziz said RapidFerry Sdn Bhd would manage the operations once the ownership transition from the current owner, Penang Port Sdn Bhd (PPSB), had been completed.

He said commuters could expect a much better, seamless experience.

He also said his team was looking at methods to encourage more commuters to use the ferry services rather than private vehicle owners.

"They can expect improvements by end of this year. We will make further announcements. We also conducted a survey previously and the main concern highlighted by the users was the

frequency.

"Our team is looking at other areas to be improved as well, including the distance for the commuters to walk to the jetty and to ensure a comfortable journey for them," he said after attending Politeknik Seberang Prai's convocation in Permatang Pauh here yesterday.

Azmi said the improvements would attract more people to use the ferry services, instead of using Penang Bridge.

Since the mid-1980s, the ferry operator had reportedly suffered losses as people opted to use the Penang Bridge to travel back and forth the island and mainland.

It was reported that PPSB suffered about RM18 million losses from the ferry operations annually and had been struggling to overturn the losses, which continued till now.

Initially, PPSB had proposed the use of lighter craft such as catamarans, in replacement of the ferries. It however, could not be done without any funding.



Prasarana Group Berhad chief executive officer Datuk Seri Azmi Abdul Aziz (second from right) with Politeknik Seberang Prai director Zulkifli Ariffin (right) after the polytechnic's convocation ceremony in Permatang Pauh yesterday. PIC BY AMIR IRSYAD OMAR

In 2015, the Penang government made a bid to take over the ferry services.

After knowing that the ferry services could not be independently operated without the interference of federal agencies, the state government reportedly pulled out of the bid.

The negotiation was also halted because it could not get its full wish list met, which included 30 pre-approved licences for water taxis.

Azmi said Prasarana was in dis-

cussion with the Malaysian Resources Corp Bhd (MRCB) on plans to integrate a better transportation system for the under-construction Penang Sentral.

He said the area that needed improvement was the walking distance between the Butterworth train station and the ferry jetty.

Penang Sentral will play a major role in streamlining transportation in the state as the place is a hub for long and short distance buses, taxis, ferries and trains.