

Catamaran ferries a flexible mode of transport, says group

GEORGE TOWN: Catamaran ferries as a form of public sea transport can make it possible for passengers to be picked up and dropped off at multiple coastal points.

It would go further and passengers picked up in Butterworth can, for example, be dropped off at a jetty in Tanjung Bungah, said SRS Consortium project director Szeto Wai Leong.

The corporation is the project delivery partner of the Penang Transport Master Plan (PTMP).

Szeto said catamaran ferries were in both their initial recom-

mendations and the Halcrow report.

That report was a study jointly commissioned by Northern Corridor Implementation Authority and the state government in 2013.

"There is nothing new about catamaran ferries. It's an established public transport mode in Sydney Harbour.

"In our plans, we even outlined a catamaran ferry service between Nibong Tebal and the southern side of Penang island," he said, adding that it was a long-term plan slotted after major components of the PTMP were in place.

Commenting on the addition of catamaran ferries into the Penang ferry service, Szeto said it was "only a matter of who would do it first".

"Since the ferry service will be sold to Prasarana Malaysia, perhaps there will be Federal funding to see it happen."

The Star reported yesterday that the addition of catamaran ferries would be one of the highlights in the future of the Penang ferry service following confirmation that it would be sold to Prasarana, which operates Rapid Penang, Rapid KL and also the light rail transit trains in the Klang Valley.

Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) president S.M. Mohd Idris called it good news.

"The biggest complaints from commuters is the long wait for ferries. CAP officers have experienced waiting over an hour for the ferry.

"If the ferry trips are frequent then more people will use it," he said.

However, Seri Delima assemblyman R.S.N. Rayer hoped the Penang Port Commission would thoroughly study it before adding high speed catamaran ferries to the current fleet of ferries.

"Maritime traffic in the Penang

channel is high and includes many cargo container vessels.

"We even see fishermen criss-crossing the channel regularly, and sometimes, not far from the route of the current ferries.

"A high speed catamaran ferry capsized in Sabah recently and the accident claimed a few lives, so such vessels may not be ideal for Penang," he said in a statement.

Rayer felt it was more prudent to spend money on upgrading the present ferry service rather than building new jetties for the catamarans, adding that the present ferries were an icon of Penang.