



**Sahabat Alam Malaysia**  
**Friends of the Earth Malaysia**  
For Environmental Justice

1, Jalan Joki, 11400 Penang, Malaysia  
Tel No: +604 827 6930  
Fax No: +604 827 6932  
Email: foemalaysia@gmail.com  
<https://www.foe-malaysia.org>

## PRESS STATEMENT

2 February 2017

### **CABLE CAR WILL DESTROY ENVIRONMENT OF PENANG HILL, BOTANICAL GARDENS AND SURROUNDINGS**

Sahabat Alam Malaysia is deeply concerned and objects to the proposal of a cable car system in Penang as it would bring about devastating impacts, result in a drastic change in the hill's atmosphere and surrounding the ground stations.

SAM therefore calls on the Federal and State government to scrap this proposal.

The proposed cable car plan, estimated to cost RM325 million will consist of a line linking the Penang Botanic Gardens and the peak of Penang Hill, and another that links the hill top to Teluk Bahang in the northwestern part of the island.

We do not agree with the Tourism Ministry's claim which supports the Penang state government's proposal stating that the return of investment (ROI) on the project was justified as there is a need to bring in more tourists.

The current number of visitors to the Hill has already exceeded its carrying capacity. It is reported that in 2008, over 200,000 people visited the hill but now, the number has jumped to 1.6 million.

The owner of the cable car project is likely to have commercial interest and profits as top priority. Thus the developer will attempt to maximize the number of people who will use the cable car to make profits for the investment. The inherent logic of maximizing the number of people who will use the cable car will lead to too many people on the Hill, thus exceeding its' carrying capacity, thereby contributing to severe environmental degradation.

To further compound problems, in order to attract more people to use the cable-car, there will be increased pressure from the developer to allow more projects on the Hill. There is a limit to the amount of development and the number of visitors that Penang Hill can sustain.

Large increase in the number of visitors will not only degrade the environment but also change the ambience. The peace, quiet and tranquility will give way to a highly commercialized atmosphere.

Penang Hill is a very important water catchment for the State and part of the lush forests here are protected forest reserve. Almost half of Penang Hill or 210.07 hectares is gazetted as water catchment area (Penang Hill Special Area Plan, 2013). In a fragile hill environment, any attempt to upset the delicate ecological balance is a mistake and the consequences will be costly in the long run.

If the constraint of limited access helps to maintain the functions of the Hill as a water catchment and other special characteristics of Penang Hill, then that constraint need not be seen in a negative light but as having a positive function.

The cable car proposal will also cause adverse environmental impacts as it involves erecting huge pylons and construction of towers and stations that will destroy our flora and impair our forests, hills and valleys. We also have to look at the traffic congestion and parking facilities at the ground stations.

The Penang Botanic Gardens is already congested and Teluk Bahang's peace and charm will be affected too.

The Botanical Gardens is a unique and valuable place, which represents a very popular and precious treasure in Penang and for Penangites. It has been described long ago as "the loveliest place in Malaya." It is the only or one of the only Botanical Gardens that are located in the foothills of primary tropical forests, which are the oldest in the world, and is part and parcel of the most natural environment. Thousands of people daily visit the Gardens and enjoy its natural environment and for exercise and for family and community interaction.

By locating the ground station at the Gardens or its vicinity, the cable car will destroy the tranquil atmosphere, natural surrounding and the charms of the Botanical Gardens as there will be thousands of people coming there to use the cable car and there will emerge a lot of commercial activities, food stalls and retail shops besides the large area needed for the cable car station and its administration.

Thus the cable car project will destroy not only the natural environment of Penang Hill as well as the Botanical Gardens, two of the most important components of the heritage of Penang which gave it the name of Pearl of the Orient.

Tourism development on Penang Hill is an incongruous development for a natural sanctuary which requires peace and tranquility, not commercialisation, crowds and tourist dollars. As it is, Penang Hill is already overrun with tourists.

The Botanical Gardens is also a valuable and fragile place which needs to be preserved in its natural state. We do not need or want the cable car and all the innate problems that will follow.

Penang's natural charms and heritage needs to be conserved as a top priority. The tourists which the authorities are trying to attract will instead be revolted by the spoilage resulting from mal-development and overdevelopment.

Hence, we reiterate our call to the Federal and State government to scrap this proposal.

**S. M. Mohamed Idris**  
**President**  
**Sahabat Alam Malaysia**