



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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**Letter to the Editor**

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## **Furor over Penang Forum letter to UNESCO is unjustified**

Much furor has been created over Penang Forum's letter to UNESCO requesting for an advisory mission and an impact assessment of the proposed Penang Transport Master Plan and how it might affect the Outstanding Universal Value of Penang's World Heritage property.

NGOs have been accused of putting Penang's world heritage status at risk and back stabbing the Penang State.

Are these accusations justified?

Under the Operational Guidelines Clause 172, the World Heritage Committee invites the States Parties to the Convention to **INFORM** the Committee, through the Secretariat, of their intention to undertake or to authorize in an area protected under the Convention major restorations or new constructions which may affect the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property.

This clause makes it abundantly clear that the George Town World Heritage Inc. (GTWHI) as the protector of George Town's OUV has the responsibility to, at the very least, inform the UNESCO of the Penang state's proposal to build elevated LRT and monorail stations bordering the buffer zones of George Town heritage site and to invite them to send an advisory mission.

NGOs have raised their concerns on the possible impact of massive construction of elevated structures bordering the heritage zones on many occasions in public forums, in discussions with officials of the Penang State, as well as in the Penang Transport Council of which the Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) is a member. Hence GTWHI has been made fully aware of these issues and their significance.

The public has a right to know if the GTWHI as the main protector of George Town heritage status has taken any concrete steps to contact and inform the UNESCO of these developments. If it has, we would like to have evidence and to know the response from the UNESCO. If it hasn't, it should answer why this was not done?

Penang Forum's letter to the UNESCO is titled "Melaka and George Town World Heritage Property: Request for UNESCO Advisory Mission and Impact Assessment of Proposed Transport Master Plan in George Town, Penang." It is not a letter of complaint. It is a letter of request to take proactive actions in order to prevent and to avert any actions that might threaten Penang's heritage status.

It is imperative that a fully independent heritage impact assessment be made and presented to the UNESCO for review **BEFORE** the Penang State government signs and commits itself to building the proposed projects in order to avoid legal complications and issues of compensation.

To this end, NGOs effort should be welcomed and not criticized.

As a government committed to competence, accountability and transparency, the Penang State government should engage more constructively with civil society.

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