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For Environmental Justice

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Press Statement

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CABLE CAR PROJECT

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) is very alarmed to learn about the announcement by the Chief Minister of Penang that the cable car project to Penang Hill has been awarded to Hartasuma Sdn Bhd, at an estimated investment of RM 245 million and is based on a 30-year concession period and will be located in the Botanical Gardens area.

SAM along with other NGOs including the Consumers Association of Penang, had last year raised our concerns about the proposal for the cable car project in what was then the draft Special Area Plan (SAP) for the Hill.

We had opposed the need for the cable car given the limited carrying capacity of the Hill and had also seriously challenged the projections in the draft SAP on the number of people that should be allowed on the Hill at any one time.

The pre-feasibility study for the cable car pushed a number of 6,463 persons at any one time to justify the cable car project based on a flawed methodology, while the 2016 SAP for the Hill provided a carrying capacity figure of only 4,800 persons at any one time. Our challenge in relation to this was not responded to at all.

If the 2016 figure was used of 4,800 persons, there would be no need for a cable car, as the funicular railway would have been sufficient.

Our concerns in opposing the cable car stem from the need to ensure the environmental and biodiversity sustainability, management and conservation of Penang Hill, especially given its recognition as a UNESCO-Biosphere Reserve.

The overarching objective should be to limit the number of tourists up the Hill, given the environmental imperatives and not require more tourism products and people up the Hill.

Our fear is that the continued economic viability of the cable car will necessitate more tourists and more tourism products on the Hill, beyond its maximum carrying capacity of 4,800 persons at any one time, as per the 2016 SAP. In addition, the State, in deciding that the cable car will begin at the Botanic Gardens is also jeopardising the Gardens environmental integrity.

We are very concerned about the environmental and social impacts, including on traffic congestion of the cable car construction and its maintenance, which involves the bottom station right up to the top station.

Penang Hill and the Botanical Gardens are very sensitive environmental ecosystems. We are very worried that the cable car project will gravely impair these sensitive areas.

A detailed environmental and social impact assessment is much needed as required by the laws, which must involve the public consultation and transparency.

Apart from the environmental and social impacts, the State, in giving the company a 30-year concession must make transparent the details of the financing involved. What will be the ticket charges that will be imposed on the public in relation to this?

The Penang State government needs to be transparent in relation to these concerns.

Meenakshi Raman
President
Sahabat Alam Malaysia