

# The MALACCA STRAITS DIAGONAL & the NEW SCALE of PLANNING

by Hamdan Abdul Majeed

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*More efficient cities are a prerequisite for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Think City looks beyond traditional city boundaries and shapes new thinking about strategic urban planning to influence the development of Malaysia's key urban areas.*

"The Malacca Straits Diagonal will connect about 16 million people, leading to an expansion of markets and a larger reach for products and services, and enhancing the ability to achieve economies of agglomeration to lead to increased productivity, innovation and compactness."

When Think City opened its office in Penang our work wasn't confined to just Penang but to examine the state as part of a much larger urban system. If we look at how urbanisation has taken place in Peninsular Malaysia, there is a high level of population and economic activities concentrated along urban regions of the Straits of Malacca including Penang, greater Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru and Singapore.

In the future, these four cities will all be connected by a new high speed rail link, increasing the level of connectivity of people and ideas. We coined the term the "Malacca Straits Diagonal" to describe the area. This fits in with ideas on the new scale of planning which is urban planning across larger territorial boundaries, where we are no longer confined by our own cities or states.

There are two examples that come to mind. The first is the Regional Plan Association's America 2050 plan, which posits the emergence of 10 urban mega regions across the US over the coming decades. Second is the European Diagonal, a roughly linear grouping of

## POPULATION BY METROPOLITAN AREAS

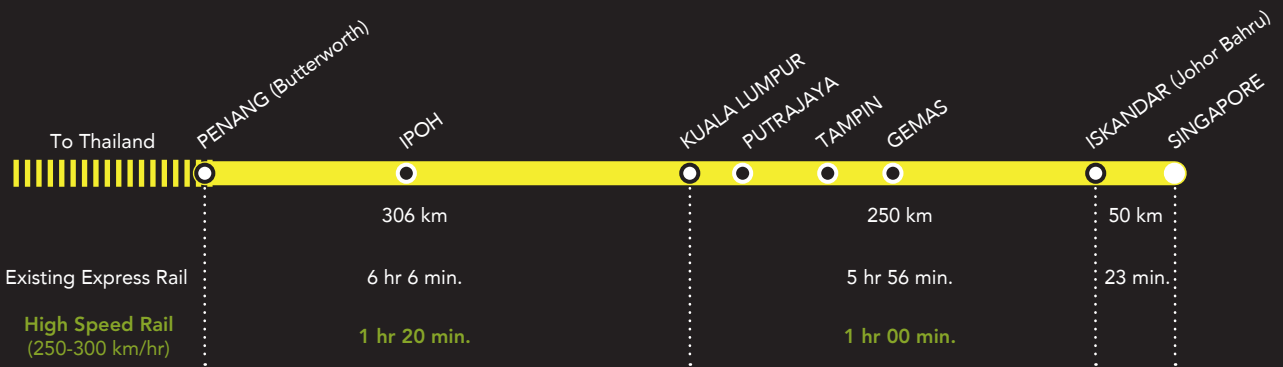
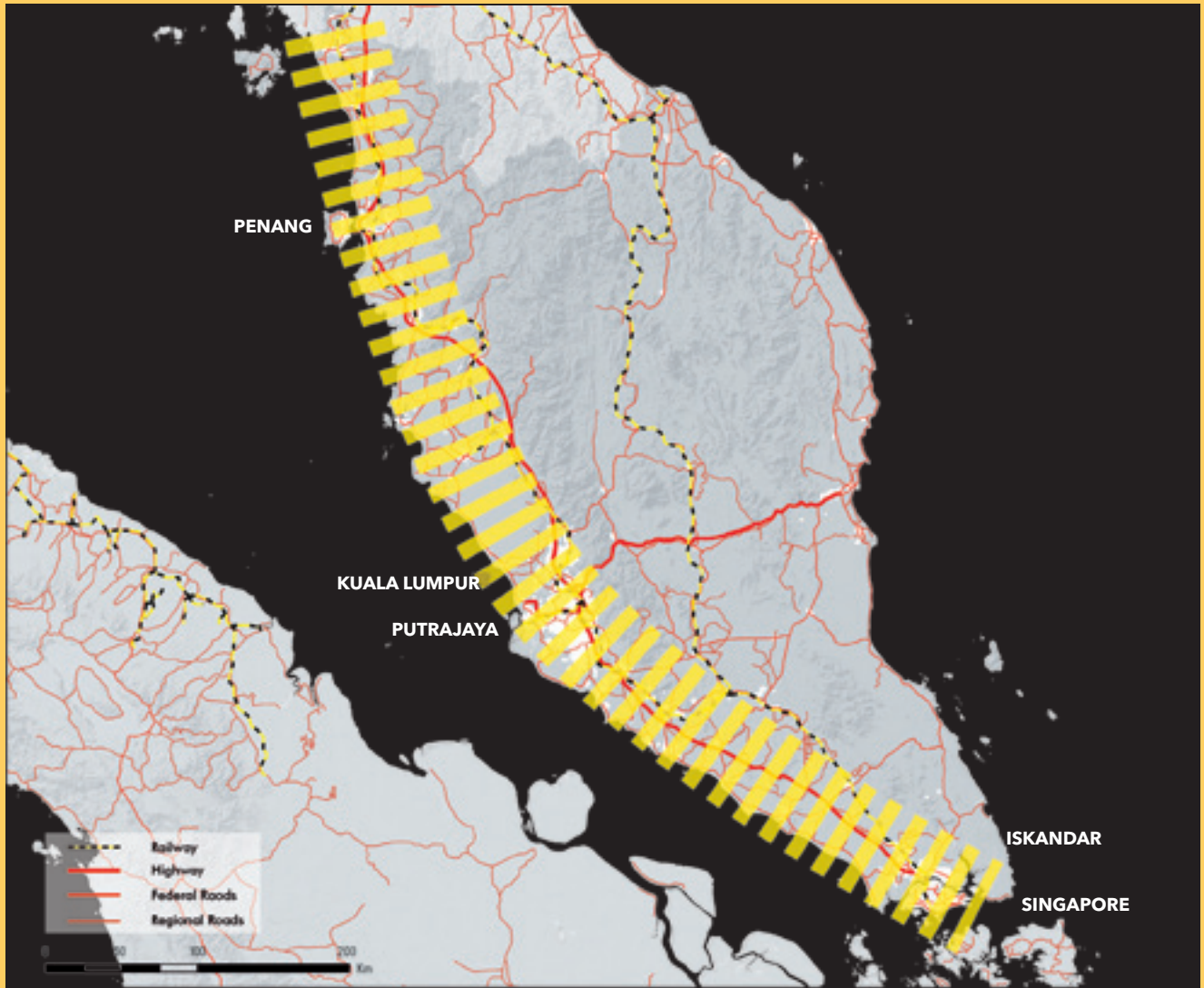


## OVER 16 MILLION PEOPLE IN THE MALACCA STRAITS DIAGONAL

"The Prime Ministers agreed to build a High Speed Rail link between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. This is a strategic development in bilateral relations that will dramatically improve the connectivity between Malaysia and Singapore. It will usher in a new era of strong growth, prosperity and opportunities for both countries. It will facilitate seamless travel between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, enhance business linkages and bring the peoples of Malaysia and Singapore closer together. Ultimately, this project will give both countries greater stakes in each other's prosperity and success."

*Joint statement by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Prime Minister Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak at the Singapore-Malaysia leaders' retreat in Singapore on 19 February 2013.*

# RAIL & ROAD NETWORK



Rail Distance / Travel Times along the Malacca Straits Diagonal (Penang to Singapore)

cities stretching from Lisbon to Milan which share the cultural roots of the Mediterranean. In these two cases, cities within a region will benefit from enhanced connectivity, economic integration and cross-promotional branding.

This new scale of planning brings efficiency to the use of public resources and at the same time creates economic hubs that optimise growth and development. This ensures that every dollar that the government spends will have a maximised outcome, while at the same time create synergy and symbiosis across traditional boundaries.

The Malacca Straits Diagonal will connect about 16 million people, leading to an expansion of markets and a larger reach for products and services, and enhancing the ability to achieve economies of agglomeration to lead to increased productivity, innovation and compactness.

Think City's research carried out jointly with Fundación Metrópoli on the Diagonal which was commissioned by PEMANDU<sup>1</sup> and Khazanah focuses on how this network of cities can be strengthened for better economic and social outcomes, and play a larger role within Asia and the world.

#### AT A GLOBAL CROSSROADS

In a sense, the Malacca Straits Diagonal is simply drawing on its historic role as a global economic hub. The Malay peninsula has always been the bridge that connected the east and west, China and India, the East Indies and the Middle East, thanks to ancient sea routes set by the trade winds.

With India and China's economies rapidly rising, the Malacca Straits Diagonal is well positioned to benefit from this growth. There is a need to prepare ourselves and to optimise this region to be able to ride this emerging growth cycle.

#### FROM CONCEPT TO REALITY

After three years of developing and implementing our urban regeneration project in Penang, we are expanding to Putrajaya. Our mandate is to identify catalyst projects that can enable Putrajaya to leapfrog to the next phase of growth and development, basically building on the existing infrastructure.

Our involvement in Putrajaya really depends on how well we can convince the stakeholders of the importance of the initiatives and how these fit into the larger picture – the Malacca Straits Diagonal. Based on our experience in Penang, we developed catalyst projects, moved these projects towards implementation, provided advisory and technical support and also positioned these projects to attract investment.

This effort represents the desire to bring a new international viability and visibility to Penang, which has great potential to become attractive as an urban laboratory and as a launch pad for emerging sectors in the global economy.

We are working in parallel with Putrajaya and plan to expand to Iskandar (in Johor) as we have a national mandate, based on our pilot experience in Penang. We're in the process of scaling up, moving from a project to a programme. True strategic reconfiguration of the Malacca Straits Diagonal will take place with a holistic and coordinated approach at the mega regional scale. This necessarily includes cross-border relations with Malaysia's immediate neighbours.

The new scale of planning is a participatory approach, yet there is strong leadership from the Federal government which is very cognisant of the need for effective public-private partnerships to achieve sustainable growth. The government's aim is to model it right to attract the best of the private sector, rather than passing on the problem (to the

private sector) and hoping that a solution will eventually come. When projects are not well developed and are prematurely passed on to the private sector, or public sector participation is not well thought through, this often results in poor outcomes.

#### EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS FOR EFFICIENT CITIES

Think City has tried to learn as much as we can about the experiences of other cities around the world, this is also why we are willing to work with diverse, international organisations such as the World Bank, Fundación Metrópoli, Project for Public Spaces, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and the Getty Conservation Institute, among others. The idea is that there is no need to reinvent the wheel when you can learn from others, there are plenty of lessons we can adapt or pick from.

Our partnerships are both to augment our own technical needs and also to bring about global sharing of experiences – we want to steepen our learning curve by tapping into our partners' expertise. This will allow us to shorten the time required to optimise Malaysia's urban development model.

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<sup>1</sup> The Performance Management & Delivery Unit (PEMANDU) is a unit under the Malaysian Prime Minister's Department, its main role and objective is to oversee implementation and assess progress of the Economic Transformation Programme and the Government Transformation Programme.