

Plan was to have several more feeder ferry services

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GEORGE TOWN: The plan is to have ferry terminals not only between the mainland and the island but several more on the island for feeder ferries to take commuters from one point of the island to another by sea.

Besides the terminals at Butterworth's Penang Sentral and Weld Quay on the island, the Penang Transport Master Plan (PTMP) advocates five other smaller terminals in Straits Quay, on the island now being reclaimed off Tanjung Tokong, Gurney Wharf, The Light, and near Queensbay Mall.

Based on the original PTMP developed by Halcrow Consultants in 2013, commuters from Butterworth would be able to take catamaran passenger ferries to Weld Quay, Queensbay Mall and Gurney Wharf on the island.

These were called core ferry services and a ferry is supposed to be available every 15 minutes.

But the plan warns that passenger revenue would not be able to sustain the service because the cost is calculated at RM1.08 to RM1.97 while the federal government regulated Malaysian ferry fare rates at 94 sen for the first 2km and 94 sen for every subsequent kilometre.

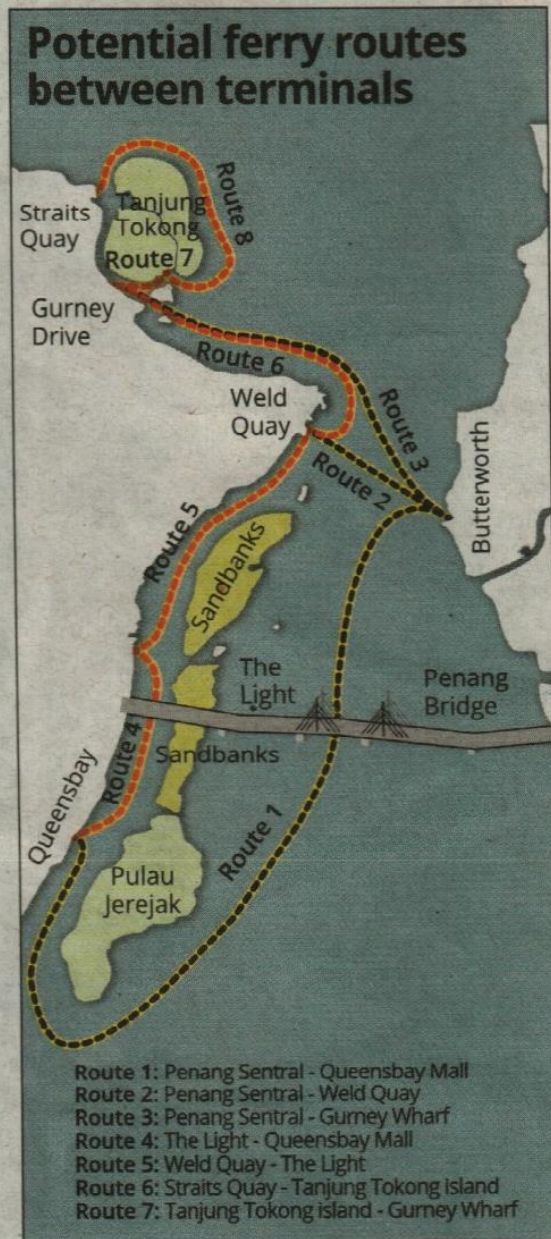
The plan states that improving the ferry service can only be justified as an integral part of a wider transport strategy, with revenue deficits of the ferry operations "being seen in the context of the overall benefits" of the overall public transport service.

By 2020, however, the plan estimates that the Penang Sentral-Weld Quay route would need to operate at 7.5-minute frequencies to handle a projected 2,000 passengers per hour during peak hours and 4,300 passengers per peak hour by 2030.

Halcrow Consultants recommended a gradual growth of the Penang ferry service from 2020 to 2030.

The PTMP it developed comprises six volumes, and the ferry service plan is a volume by itself, titled "Water Transport Pre-Feasibility Study", containing 146 pages.

The consultants detailed the ferry terminal plans and suggested catamaran passenger ferries. It proposed increasing the number of catamaran ferries till there are 27 - in varieties of 100, 200 and 400 passenger capacities - in operation by the end of 2030.



THE
STAR
17
AUGUST
2018

In 2015, when the Penang government offered to take over the ferry service, it laid down a condition that the federal government grant the state permits for 30 more licences for "mini-ferries or water taxis".

Aside from the ferry service to move pedestrians between the island and the mainland, the other plan is to build a light rail transit line across the Penang channel, parallel to the Penang Bridge. It is projected to kick in only 50 years from now.

17/8/2018 - Star