



Positives and negatives

A significant step towards completing the trans-Java toll road between Surabaya and Semarang was marked on 26 September with the ground-breaking for the 90-km link between Solo and Ngawi in the presence of the Minister of Public Works and local dignitaries, as well as those who will be contributing to the construction of the link.

With the adjoining link from Ngawi and Kertosono to follow, along with progress on the other missing elements of the overall route, completion by 2017/18 is now looking

distinctly possible. Now all we need is completion of the sections between Palimanan and Semarang and Jakarta to Surabaya and the toll road will become a reality.

I found it profoundly depressing recently to venture onto the existing Ciawi-Sukabumi national road, which for many hours of the day resembles a parking lot.

The development of the toll road for this corridor became a casualty of the 1998 financial crisis, despite some early pre-construction activities having taken place. But it has been 15 years since the crisis and no progress has taken place on what was even in

the 1990s deemed to be one of the important links requiring attention.

I am pleased to be advised, however, that early steps are now in hand towards seeing this important link being built and making a contribution towards improving the travel and logistics issues of West Java.

'Logistics' is a word that has appeared many times in conversations in the past month. The lack of good land-based infrastructure, roads and ports is costing transporters significantly more to move goods around the archipelago than anywhere else in Asia. These costs are naturally passed onto the public at large.

by Scott Younger



While there is a general understanding of the situation at many levels of government and the public generally, there remains overall a 'too-slow' bureaucratic reaction towards implementing works that would start alleviating this situation.

One other particular downside to this is the lost opportunity for employment that the related construction activity would require as well as other investments that would arise once new infrastructure were in place.

And now power cuts

A recent power cut in Jakarta, not to mention those that take place more regularly elsewhere in the country, serves as a salutary reminder that the safety margin in electricity supply over demand remains not just inadequate but dangerously low.

Nomally a country would operate on trying to maintain up to a 30% margin of supply over demand, which would allow for a structured and methodical maintenance policy, but the continual lack of completion of new power units has resulted in the margin falling to a very critical level with potential supply only surpassing demand by a small margin. Each power cut costs business and inefficient, irregular power supply is a major disincentive for FDI.

Furthermore, it is dismaying to learn that the proposed major 2,000-MW coal-fired power plant to be built at Batang, Central Java, is to be delayed a further year because of remaining land acquisition issues, despite the fact that it is coming up to two years since the new Land Acquisition law was enacted.

The overall delay to completion of this new power station will amount to at least two years and no power from this source will now be available until late 2018, nor is there the news on progress at other needed coal-fired

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projects encouraging.

In water, while decisions on the long-standing Umbulan project and further developments at Lampung are awaited, and the West Semarang project is being promoted under the public-private partnership (PPP) format, this barely touches the overall national water development requirement.

However, the players interested in investment in water projects are increasingly talking to district governments, having noted that except for major multi-purpose use or cross-boundary projects decisions on upgrading water supply and distribution services for the regions are made at that level.

Should this B-to-B approach take root with suitable agreements put in place between water industry investors and local governments then progress can be made towards closing the gap remaining towards achieving the coverage target in the Millennium Development Goals.

With regard to Millennium Development Goals, it is interesting to note that sanitation, particularly perhaps for the steady and expanding urbanization that is taking place, still receives inadequate attention across the country and achieving the goals that have been set is still a long way off. Where are the projects?

The World Toilet group, a body

growing in influence that is trying to raise global awareness on sanitation and hygiene issues, has just held its third conference in Solo. It is encouraging that the country has hosted this and perhaps there will be a positive follow-up.

On a worldwide scale there is a looming water crisis. Some countries with limited supplies have already started to become seriously involved in recycling wastewater and applications are particularly relevant to the efficient and comfortable living conditions that citizens of future large urban areas will be seeking.

While the government of the city of Jakarta is today naturally focusing on trying to alleviate its ongoing and vexing transportation problems, water and sanitation issues must also remain at the top of the agenda.

Ultimately, how water is handled will dictate whether an urban community thrives or fades. The history of mankind is full of cases where the issue of continuous and regular water supply has been neglected, and all that makes a city thrive becomes a ruin.

Finally, just a reminder that the 2013 Indonesian International Infrastructure Conference and Exhibition will take place at the Jakarta International Convention Center on 13-15 November. There is to be a strong emphasis on regional projects, with some 41 projects being highlighted.

It is to be hoped that the detail of the projects as presented will be adequate, so that there is good reason to continue with the various interacting and complex matters that must be addressed for successful delivery.

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