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At least five firms had submitted their bids as the tender process closed for the construction of the rail lines connecting East Coast Rail Link's (ECRL) station in Jalan Kastam, Port Klang, and the two container ports — Westports and Northport — in Selangor, sources say.

More than a dozen tender documents were given out by the project's main contractor China Communications Construction Co Ltd (CCCC) after the detailed information was provided at end-February, one source tells *The Edge*.

Bidders for the rail lines spanning 25.14km, now also known as Section D, include a company linked to YTL Corp Bhd (KL:YTL) via its construction arm YTL Construction, WCT Holdings Bhd (KL:WCT), and Dhaya Maju Infrastructure (Asia) Sdn Bhd (DMIA), which holds a 61.39% stake in Pestec International Bhd (KL:PESTEC), say sources.

Physical work for Section D, which will mainly pass through private land, is expected to begin be-

fore the end of this year, as all parties involved race to finish the portion from Gombak, Selangor, to the ports — currently scheduled for completion by end-2027. This compares to the main portion of the 665km-long ECRL, from Kota Bharu in Kelantan to Gombak, which is set for completion before the end of 2026.

The tender is capped at RM2 billion for the construction portion, one of the sources says.

In terms of rail-related expertise, WCT was involved in the development of sections of the second mass rapid transit line (MRT2) and third light rail transit line (LRT3). DMIA, meanwhile, is the main contractor for the Klang Valley Electrified Double Track (EDT) owned by Keretapi Tanah Melayu Bhd (KTMB).

YTL Construction, or Syarikat Pembinaan Yeoh Tiong Lay Sdn Bhd, is part of the consortium constructing the Gemas-Johor Bahru EDT, and also constructed the Sentul-Batu Caves EDT extension — both for KTMB. It also runs the Express Rail Link from Kuala Lumpur International Airport to KL Sentral.

ECRL's owner Malaysia Rail Link Sdn Bhd (MRL) has said it is expecting to sign the supplement-

tary agreement on Section D with CCCC as early as July.

Plans to connect ECRL's Jalan Kastam station with the ports have been in the works since the government finalised the rail project alignment in 2021 to pass through Selangor directly from Pahang, instead of going through Negeri Sembilan first.

Much deliberation was made on how the rail lines were to be constructed. One option was to develop two overlapping rail lines shared by both KTMB (1m wide, also known as metre gauge) and ECRL (1.4m wide, known as standard gauge), a track-laying that is also known as dual gauge. The cabinet in January decided to go for the second option, which is to have two adjacent lines for the two different rail services instead.

One of the Section D rail lines will branch out from Jalan Kastam to Westports in the southwest while the other will link with Northport in the northwest.

It is understood that the RM2 billion construction cost also covers the refurbishment of parts of KTMB's railroad as well as a short bypass less than half a kilometre long for KTMB that allows it to trav-

el between Westports and Northport without having to go back to the Jalan Kastam station.

For KTMB, Westports will utilise its existing rail terminal, whereas Northport will see the construction of a new KTMB rail terminal.

Also included are the construction of rail-mounted gantries, which are a fixed infrastructure to efficiently lift containers and place them on trains — also known as rolling stock — instead of having to use mobile cranes that can only lift one container at a time.

It is worth noting that while ECRL, like most long-distance trains, uses rolling stock that is electrified using overhead wires, rail operations within ports typically avoid overhead wires because fixed container cranes usually need wide vertical clearance, and overhead wires could increase the risk of accidents. Thus, port sections typically rely on diesel locomotives — like some KTMB trains — or hybrid or battery-powered locomotives.

Minister of Transport Anthony Loke in a February statement said Section D's construction "does not require additional allocation from the government".

In total, the ECRL will have 22 stations across Kelantan (two stations), Terengganu (six stations), Pahang (seven stations) and Selangor (seven stations). It will have interchange stations that link to KTMB (four stations) and the LRT Kelana Jaya Line at the Gombak station (one station).

Excluding Section D, the development of ECRL was projected at RM74.96 billion. This comprises construction costs of RM50.27 billion, interest charges during construction of RM15.59 billion, land costs and fees to Tenaga Nasional Bhd (KL:TENAGA) of RM7.55 billion, project cancellation and suspension costs of RM1.1 billion throughout the project review by the government over the years, and operating expenditure of RM0.45 billion. There is also a proposal to extend the line from Kota Bharu to the Thai border, expected to cost another RM2 billion.