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TRANSPORT

B150bn govt nod for train lines

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The cabinet has authorised the Mass Rapid Transit Authority of Thailand (MRTA) to mobilise 150.3 billion baht through a public-private partnership (PPP) scheme to develop the Yellow and Pink mass transit lines.

The 34.5km Pink Line which will stretch from Khae Rai to Min Buri will require an investment of 53.49 billion baht while the 30.4km Yellow Line from Lat Phrao to Samrong will need 51.81 billion baht.

Speaking after a cabinet meeting yesterday, Transport Minister Arkhom Termpitayapaisith said the amounts to be invested were scaled down from the original 56.69 billion baht for the Pink Line and 54.64 billion baht for the Yellow Line.

A net cost PPP model will be adopted for the two lines, both of which will be built as monorails, the minister said. He

said the government will invest in property development while private parties will deal with civil engineering projects, power systems, trains, consultants, train operation and maintenance.

Mr Arkhom said it is estimated the construction of the lines will take three years and three months while train operation concessions will last 30 years.

The MRTA, he said, will set up a committee based on the Private Investment in State Undertaking Act to select private operators to handle the projects. The bidding documents for the projects are about 90% complete, he said.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has ordered the finance and transport ministries, the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) and other state agencies to supply information to interested foreign investors. There are several foreign operators capable of handling

the project, including from Europe, Canada, Korea and Japan.

A breakdown of the costs showed land expropriation and exploration will require 6.84 billion baht for the Pink Line and 6.01 billion baht for the Yellow Line.

The cost of construction is estimated at 20.13 billion baht for the Pink Line and 22.35 billion baht for the Yellow Line.

The state will repay construction costs to the private companies in annual installments over at least 10 years.

"The private firms contesting the bidding must be equipped with the proper technology and be able to cope with the number of passengers," said Mr Arkhom.

According to the minister, the Pink Line is expected to handle 270,000 commuters a day while the Yellow line is estimated to serve 247,900 daily. He said the fares for the two lines will not exceed the rates imposed on existing lines.