

Govt to speed up railway projects next year

President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo plans on launching several major railway projects next year to connect cities and strengthen the logistics network across the archipelago.

During the opening of the National Development Planning Conference on Thursday, the President called on regional administrations to support these projects by simplifying the land acquisition process.

The first railway project to launch will be the long-awaited Trans-Sumatra railway in March.

Aside from the Trans-Sumatra railway, the government will accelerate construction of the Trans-Sulawesi railway and start the Kalimantan railway project.

“As for the railway project in Papua, the feasibility study will be completed within six months, so the project can begin soon after,” Jokowi said. “Intercity and inter-province connectivity must be in place to better manage distribution of the country’s logistics,” he said.

National Development Planning Minister Andrinof Chaniago separately said the government would start the projects as the Transportation Ministry had them ready and confirmed the feasibility study for the Trans-Papua railway would start by early next year.

In the government’s 2015-2019 Medium-term Development Plan draft released by the National Development Planning Board (Bappenas) last month, the 2,168-kilometer Trans-Sumatra railway will stretch from Aceh to Lampung, connecting to the existing Dutch-built line in Sumatra.

The railway will link major cities, seaports and airports to ease traffic and reduce logistics costs in the country’s largest island.

The agency expects to complete the Rp 65 trillion (US\$5.17 billion) project in 2025.

The Transportation Ministry's director general for railways, Hermanto Dwiatmoko, previously said the ministry was planning to construct the section alongside the Trans-Sumatra toll road's Pekanbaru-Dumai section to speed up land acquisition.

The ministry's spokesperson, Julius Andravida Barata, however said it would not be easy to immediately begin the work because of the island's geographical condition.

"Sumatra is mountainous, which makes construction more challenging," Barata said.

Construction of Trans-Sulawesi railway will start with a 150-km section from Makassar to Pare Pare scheduled for January next year. The second, 340-km section, from Manado to Bitung, will begin construction in 2018.

Meanwhile, the first section of the Kalimantan railway connecting Tanjung and Banjarmasin is scheduled to start construction in 2018. The total investment needed to build the railway is estimated to reach Rp 3.5 trillion.

The Transportation Ministry has allocated the largest portion of its state budget to the railway directorate general. The budget allocation amounted to Rp 14.35 trillion from the total Rp 44.93 trillion in the ministry's 2015 state budget.

