

Ireka to promote autonomous trains in Malaysia

by LYDIA NATHAN

IREKA Corp Bhd is confident the autonomous rail rapid transit system (ART) will be a solution for Malaysia's increasing concerns on public transportation, traffic congestion and pollution.

Ireka group deputy MD Monica Lai Voon Huey said the system should be the focus in Malaysia now as cities must be able to be connected to each other in a clean, environmentally friendly way.

"Both the electric buses and trams will run on electricity, instead of using fossil and fuel. It's all about being as sustainable as possible," she said to reporters after the company's AGM in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The construction firm had inked a joint venture with CRRC Urban Traf-

fic (Europe) Co Ltd, a subsidiary under China-based CRRC Group, in December 2017 for the duration of two years with the aim to promote such technology in the country.

CRRC is the world's largest manufacturer of rolling stock and rail-related products and systems, and has implemented ART in second-tier cities in China in the last two years after some eight years of research internally.

She added that CRRC — which is a shareholder in Ireka — will provide the technology and the trams, while Ireka will build the lines and be the local know-how on the infrastructure here.

"The system will not require an overhead line like some of the older



Pic by Hussein Shaharuddin

Lai (fourth from left) and Monica (sixth from left) with Ireka's board of directors at the company's AGM in Kuala Lumpur yesterday

tram systems do. Instead, ART will run on a sensor and can run alongside cars on existing roads. No new roads will need to be built, maybe widen a little, but that's it. It uses existing road infrastructure and has the advantage of being scalable as we go along," she said.

Ireka group MD Datuk Lai Voon Hon said the cost to implement the system is about 25% of what it costs to build and implement the light rail transit (LRT).

"So far, the government seems positive because it is an alternate solution into solving the transportation problems faced today. Because it is cheaper, the government can implement ART instead of building another LRT station, so in reality, they will actually be saving money," Lai said.

Lai added that because urban

growth is so high, the country will require a last-mile solution.

"We have been talking to all major cities and townships, to see which ones are more receptive to it. Once we get the green light from the government, we will hit the ground running.

"For now, because it is so recent, no monetary investment has been injected yet — but we are currently awaiting directives and approval from the government, we understand they need time to go through the proposals again," he said.

Lai said if all goes well, work will commence within two years, but they are hopeful it will happen sooner than later, adding that the only challenge they foresee for now is the change in the way traffic is currently managed.

"The system will need to be coordi-

nated across traffic lights and people will need to be educated. But there is no reason why it cannot be implemented here," Lai said.

He added that he would love to see Malaysia be the first country outside of China to use this technology, which will subsequently be able to be marketed to other regions in South-East Asia.

Meanwhile, Lai said Ireka's property segment is expected to keep them very busy this year with many internal launches for its various developments under its brand i-ZEN and new brand ZenZ.

Ireka recently launched KaMi in Mont Kiara in June 2018 and its 168 units are slated for completion in 2021.

"The take-up rate has been very good so far, almost 50% sold. We are now focusing on launching our

mid-market project in Nilai, Negri Sembilan. The residences will be more within reach for that segment, as it is also a university township," Lai said.

Ireka has partnered Osaka-based Hankyu Hanshin Holdings Inc to leverage on their expertise for the local market.

"They are huge in Japan, as they own most of the railway lines, but their biggest segment is affordable housing, so we are excited to be partnering them. People will soon see Nilai as a hub," he said.

He added that the project will be launched in the fourth quarter this year, but the groundwork has been done.

He said even though demand for residential units are on the rise, the

challenge for developers is to be able to match the demand with affordability and cost.

According to Lai, the government's step of formulating a national housing policy will benefit all — especially the younger generation.

"It's good the government recognises it now, so we can all work together to find a solution. More people will be able to afford homes then," Lai said.

In the near term, the group expects its construction arm to be the main driver of revenue, contributing about 80% of the group's earnings with the remaining 20% coming from its property segment.

Lai said the company's future goal is to have both segments contributing equal amounts.

SUMMARIES

IREKA Corp Bhd is confident the autonomous rail rapid transit system (ART) will be a solution for Malaysia's increasing concerns on public transportation, traffic congestion and pollution. Ireka group deputy MD Monica Lai Voon Huey said the system should be the focus in Malaysia now as cities must be able to be connected to each other in a clean, environmentally friendly way.