

**TRANSPORT**

Phuket tramway design to be finalised next week

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Design of tramway track construction in Phuket is likely to be concluded by next week, Deputy Transport Minister Pailin Chuchottaworn said, as a dispute over how the rail structure will be laid is close to being settled.

Speaking after a meeting of a panel handling the transport system in Phuket, Mr Pailin said the talks zeroed in on the design of tram track construction along densely populated areas from the province's airport to Muang district.

He said locals are opposed to elevated tracks and work is under way to determine how construction at three or four spots could be handled in a way that would have the least impact on road traffic.

The preliminary directive is to make sure the number of road lanes does not decline, he said. "It is possible that trams could share roads [with other vehicles]," Mr Pailin said. "There could be no separation of tramway tracks from the roads."

He said the Department of Highways (DoH)

would be allowed to decide on this matter as well as tram stations to ensure road lanes would not be affected. The State Railway of Thailand (SRT) would draw up designs and let the DoH choose.

The DoH was earlier opposed to the original design of the tramway construction and raised the issue with the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning. The delayed project was found with an environmental impact assessment (EIA) which had nearly expired, he said.

"This stems from the conflict between the organisations under the ministry over the issue," Mr Pailin said. Construction was planned to begin next year and services would start in 2024.

DoH director-general Anon Luangboriboon said that before light rail transits are developed in regional areas, such as Nakhon Ratchasima, Khon Kaen and Chiang Mai, talks must be held to ward off similar problems.

If roads under the supervision of the DoH are to be affected, analysis of the traffic impact would be needed.