

As flooding looms, Jokowi told not to rush deep-tunnel project

Urban planning experts are calling on Governor Joko “Jokowi” Widodo to be cautious about his plan to build a giant Rp 16 trillion (US\$1.66 billion) underground tunnel.

“The city has no comprehensive underground spatial plan that regulates the depth limit of land ownership. The administration should consider this factor before deciding to start the project,” urban planning expert Nirwono Joga of Trisakti University said on Tuesday.

Nirwono said that underground spatial planning only began to be discussed by officials when the city started developing its Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system. “The administration should carefully consider whether the deep tunnel project will be integrated with the MRT.”

The construction of an expensive and large-scale multipurpose tunnel could wait, according to Nirwono, who advised the administration to focus on smaller, basic projects to mitigate flooding, such as dredging the city’s 13 rivers, enlarging existing culverts from 60 centimeters to 2 meters in depth and obliging buildings to provide absorption spaces for flood water.

“These basic projects will not cost more than Rp 5 trillion. The administration should fix them first before spending Rp 16 trillion from the city’s budget [for the tunnel],” Nirwono told The Jakarta Post.

“By the time all those things are fixed, then they can start a study to see whether the city needs a deep tunnel or not,” he added.

Separately, Yayat Supriyatna from Trisakti University, echoed Nirwono, saying that the governor should first finish work on a proposed regulation that would govern underground spatial planning.

“A regulation that determines the ownership of the land underground is important to anticipate problems, for instance a disaster. The regulation is needed to ensure environmental safety as well,” he told the Post.

Yayat said that the administration should think about the budget for the project, as money to build the deep tunnel has not been included in this year’s city budget.

“This year’s budget is only Rp 46 trillion. If the administration wants to immediately build the tunnel, they should start looking for investors, who of course will look into the business prospects of this project,” Yayat said.

According to Yayat, it was equally important for the administration to stop residents from littering. “If the culture isn’t changed, no matter how often drainage system is cleaned, the city will always be inundated during rainy season.”

As reported recently, Jokowi is planning to build a giant underground water drainage tunnel to prevent flooding. Jokowi said that the budget needed to build the tunnel would be Rp 16 trillion, which he said would come from the city budget and from investors.

The tunnel, which he called a “multipurpose tunnel”, would be built under Jl. MT Haryono in East Jakarta and run all the way to Pluit, North Jakarta.

Construction on the project is slated to start sometime this year, according to the governor.

The tunnel was reportedly inspired by Malaysia’s Stormwater Management and Road Tunnel (SMART), a dual-purpose tunnel that has dedicated lanes for vehicles and that can channel storm water.

The 9.7-kilometer tunnel was launched in 2007 in Kuala Lumpur.

The administration has proposed a host of schemes to mitigate flooding in the capital after a heavy downpour led to severe flooding on the city’s main streets, including Jl. Sudirman, Jl. MH Thamrin and Jl. Gatot Subroto, two weeks ago. **(nad)**

