

**SPEECH BY MR RAYMOND LIM,
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PUTTING THE COMMUTER AT THE CENTRE

Introduction: The Land Transport Review Journey

1. I am happy to join you this morning to launch the Land Transport Gallery and to share with you the outcomes of our land transport review.

2. We started this review more than a year ago to take stock of the 1996 White Paper on Land Transport and to put in place a new roadmap that will guide land transport developments over the next 10 to 15 years.

3. Today, I will speak about making public transport a choice mode, a viable alternative to the car; and in particular, how we will make public transport more seamless for commuters and improve bus services to help achieve this. I will cover our MRT enhancements and car demand management plans later this month.

4. The central question that we sought to answer in our review was this: What will it take for the majority of Singaporeans to choose the bus or MRT over the car?

5. This is a key question for us because a high reliance on public transport is fundamental to a liveable and environmentally sustainable city. As a city state, Singapore is the second most densely populated country in the world. Already, roads take up 12% of our total land area and the demands on our land transport system are set to increase by 60%, from our current 8.9 million daily journeys to 14.3 million by 2020. Making public transport the centrepiece of our land transport system will be crucial, to keep congestion in check and help protect our environment.

6. With this question in mind – how we can make public transport a choice mode - we set out to understand the perspectives of our commuters.

Insights from Commuters

7. Now, for many, a car means convenience, more control over one's schedule and time saved, all very important given our busy lives.

8. Hence, if we want people to embrace the bus or train as ‘my other car’, then it stands to reason that the bus and the train will have to be more like ‘my car’. Public transport must be more convenient and comfortable, and journey times more competitive with the car, while remaining affordable.

9. So we asked people, where are the pain points in our public transport system?

10. These were the common refrains: Long waits. Erratic bus arrivals. Circuitous feeders. Overcrowded buses. Give us more point-to-point buses because transfers are inconvenient; the waiting time for each leg adds up, and the total journey time is much too long.

11. To be fair, these comments do not give us the whole picture. In representative surveys taken to get the view of commuters as a whole, 8 in 10 commuters that LTA polled in their 2007 Public Transport Customer Satisfaction Survey were satisfied with the public transport system as a whole, similar to 2006. The International Association of Public Transport (UITP) also named Singapore as one of the top cities for public transport in their 2006 “Mobility in Cities” report.

12. However, LTA’s commuter surveys have also highlighted long waiting times and overcrowding as key concerns. To make public transport competitive with the car, we agree that the system must do even better, and in particular, our review has zeroed in on these problems that commuters have highlighted.

A People-Centred Land Transport System

13. Let me spell out our new philosophy in developing our land transport system going forward.

14. We will do more to put the commuter at the centre of our land transport system. Our land transport system must be planned and built for people, not vehicles. This means seeing through the eyes of the commuter from the time he steps out of his house to the time he gets to his destination. In fact, it starts even before that, as soon as he thinks about making a journey.

15. We will invest in quality, not just system capacity. Simply saying we have planned for enough trains and buses for the increased travel demand in 2020, is not enough. We need to ask: Can people get to a train station or bus stop quickly and comfortably? Are the connections good? How long is total journey time and waiting time between transfers? How crowded are the buses and trains? Can people get

timely and user-friendly travel information? And so on. Everything that is important to the commuter needs to be thought through. Only then would we be able to achieve our target of making 70% of all morning peak hour trips on public transport by 2020.

16. I will now highlight the principal strategies to address the problems raised by commuters:

- (I) Making our Hub-and-spoke System Seamless
- (II) Introducing More Competition to Drive Efficiency and Service Improvements
- (III) Involving our People in the Land Transport System

(I) Making our Hub-and-spoke System Seamless

17. First, we will enhance our hub-and-spoke system to address the key problems of waiting time, travel time and over-crowding. It is the right model for our public transport system. The alternative is to have many direct services, which cannot work in a compact city state like Singapore.

18. Let me illustrate the difference between the two approaches. Let us take 20 origins and 20 destination points with a hub in the centre. With a hub-and-spoke system, you will have 20 buses going into the hub from the origins and 20 buses leaving the hub to the destinations, or 40 bus services to run this system. Take away the hub, replace it with direct services, and you will need 400 bus services.

19. A direct service between every origin and destination point is thus inefficient and expensive. There would be long waits between buses as the passenger volumes would not be able to justify frequent services for many of the services. Our hub-and-spoke model is not only much more efficient, but also delivers better outcomes for commuters.

20. Transfers are part and parcel of a hub-and-spoke system. They can in fact reduce overall travel time, especially for longer journeys using rail, because trains travel faster than traffic on the roads. But unfortunately, transfers today are not as seamless and easy as they should be.

21. Ms Jeanne Conceicao, a participant at one of the focus group discussions, told us about her experience with the daily commute. She gave up on the MRT in favour of the taxi. Taking the bus or MRT was just too wearying. Too many decision points, she said. She had to take a feeder bus to the MRT station, hop on the North-South line, then transfer onto the East-West Line, and then hop onto another feeder

bus that took her to Heng Mui Keng Terrace where she worked. The uncertainty of the journey time - how long it would take for the feeder bus to arrive; whether taking the MRT to Raffles Place or Jurong East interchange to transfer would be faster - it took too much out of her. In the end, she decided to take a taxi, and would be buying a car.

22. This really drives home the point that we need to improve the connectivity of our hub-and-spoke system, in particular the integration between the feeders, trunk buses and the MRT. Only then can we ensure seamless transfers and make the whole public transport journey as convenient as possible.

23. System unity is thus critical: the entire public transport system should be planned and operated as a whole and not as separate parts. The choice for the commuter should not be between bus or rail but between public transport and the car. But this is not the case today.

24. Currently, the two public transport operators plan the bus routes within their areas of operation based on commercial considerations, subject to minimum service obligations.

25. This has led to a situation where out of more than 250 bus services, only 35% are run at intervals of 10 minutes or less. Some even run at intervals longer than 30 minutes.

26. Then there are the feeder buses that make huge, circuitous loops before they get to the MRT station or bus interchange.

27. Yet others have pointed out that there was no integrated travel information across both operators. Up till recently, before LTA worked with the operators to develop the Electronic Bus Journey Planner which is now on the Transitlink website, you could go to the SBST website, look up a bus service to take you from Orchard Road to Choa Chu Kang and fail to find one. This is because Choa Chu Kang is under SMRT's area of responsibility, and not SBST's.

28. We will undertake five major initiatives to enhance our hub and spoke system and address the problems I have highlighted. They are:

- (a) LTA to undertake Centralised Bus Planning;
- (b) Distance-based Through Fares to Facilitate Transfers;
- (c) Bus Priority Measures to Speed Up Buses;
- (d) Integrated Public Transport Hubs; and
- (e) Integrated Public Transport Service Information.

(a) LTA To Undertake Centralised Bus Planning

29. Buses are an integral part of our public transport system, serving two-thirds of all commuter trips today. If we allow the bus to become the poor cousin of the train, the system as a whole suffers and commuters suffer. Rail and buses must work in close partnership.

30. This is why, by 2009, LTA will also take on central planning of the bus network, so that we have one agency that does all the land transport planning with the people in mind. By integrating the planning of the bus, rail as well as the road network, LTA will be able to optimise the performance of the entire land transport system for commuters' benefit. The Public Transport Council (PTC) will continue to have oversight of the bus network and service quality.

31. By 2015, our target is for 80% of public transport commuters to complete their journeys within an hour, from the point they set off, to arriving at their destination, up from 71% today. We will narrow the gap between public transport and car journey times. By 2020, journeys on public transport should not take more than 1.5 times that by car, a reduction from the current 1.7 times.

32. The LTA and Public Transport Council (PTC) have already made a start by tightening the Quality of Service (QoS) standards for buses to address problem areas. To shorten waiting time for buses and reduce crowding, the bus operators are now required to despatch buses from the bus interchanges at more frequent intervals. At least 80% of bus services must be run at peak frequencies of 10 minutes or less by August 2009, compared with 15 minutes today.

33. Going forward, LTA will ensure that there are more frequent and direct feeder services so that commuters get to MRT stations and bus interchanges in less time. Bus and rail service schedules at the interchanges will also be better coordinated, to cut down waiting times and facilitate transfers.

(b) Distance-based Through Fares to Facilitate Transfers

34. To further enhance transfers, we will introduce a distance-based through fare system by 2009 to get rid of the transfer fare penalty. Under a through fare system, commuters will pay a fare based on the distance they travel on bus, rail or both, irrespective of the transfers they make.

35. For example, an SMU (Singapore Management University) student who lives in Sin Ming Avenue could take a direct bus service 162 from SMU which costs \$1.19. Or he could hop onto 166 or 167 if it comes along first, and make a transfer along Upper Thomson Road

onto bus service 52, 410 or 162, whichever arrives first. The latter would be more expensive and cost up to \$1.61 today. With through fares, the student would pay the same fare, whether he takes one bus, or two buses, along the same route as there will be no transfer penalty.

36. As LTA works with the operators to refine the fare system, it will also work towards making available an integrated season pass for travel on both bus and rail regardless of operator.

(c) Bus Priority Measures to Speed Up Buses

37. To speed up the buses and enhance their reliability, we have introduced bus priority measures such as full-day bus lanes so that buses can travel unimpeded by other traffic. These have improved bus speeds by an average of 7% and as much as 16% on some roads. We will do more.

38. We will make the coverage of our network of bus lanes more comprehensive, especially within the CBD. By June 2008, the network of normal bus lanes will be extended from 120 km to 150 km, and full-day bus lanes will treble from 7 km to 23 km.

39. Even with the bus lanes, buses are sometimes slowed down by other left-turning traffic at traffic light junctions. LTA will therefore be piloting a new scheme by end 2008, to give signal priority to buses at traffic light junctions, so that buses have right-of-way over other vehicles turning left into side roads.

40. Another key aspect of reducing travel times on our buses is to reduce the dwell time at bus bays. An SBST survey showed that up to 9% of travel time on buses is spent trying to get out of bus bays. To address this, LTA will make it mandatory for motorists to give way to buses exiting from bus bays by end 2008.

41. All these bus priority measures will help work towards increasing bus speeds to 20-25 kph by 2009, up from the current 16 kph for feeder buses and 19 kph for trunk buses.

(d) Integrated Public Transport Hubs

42. Part of making public transport more convenient is to reduce the physical effort of accessing our bus interchanges and MRT stations, especially with our high humidity and sudden rain showers. We will do more to integrate our bus and MRT stations and even turn them into lifestyle hubs like Raffles Xchange and Tanjong Pagar MRT station.

43. With the opening of Ang Mo Kio Hub last year, residents have told us they liked the air-conditioned bus interchange where they can pop into shops at the passenger concourse before their bus arrived. Others liked the convenience of the underground linkway to Ang Mo Kio MRT station. These attributes have helped increase public transport ridership at this hub.

44. We will therefore embark on a programme to build more integrated public transport hubs as well as upgrade existing bus interchanges. We have already started building two more integrated bus interchanges at Boon Lay (2009) and Clementi (2011) which will be ready in a few years, bringing the total number of integrated bus interchanges to 5 (Ang Mo Kio, Toa Payoh and Sengkang). Over the next 10 years, we will upgrade another 5 interchanges at Bedok, Jurong East, Serangoon, Joo Koon and Marina South in tandem with the re-development in these areas, to better integrate our transport hubs with the surrounding facilities.

(e) Integrated Public Transport Service Information

45. Travel information was another missing link in the commuting chain until recently.

46. Now, all 4500 bus stops island wide have bus service information posters unlike in the past. LTA has also installed Key Bus Service Maps at 36 bus stops in the Orchard Road area. These maps set out the key bus routes and places of interest in a clear pictorial format, so commuters can find their bus more easily.

47. Going forward, to reduce the anxiety of waiting and provide more certainty on journey times, we will make available dynamic, real-time travel information to commuters on the go. Last year, LTA piloted real-time bus arrival information panels at 30 bus stops in the CBD and two HDB towns (Yishun and Ang Mo Kio). This has worked well and LTA will install these panels at another 20 bus stops by May 2008. In addition, from July, LTA will embark on a trial to use SMS to provide real-time bus arrival information to commuters at these bus stops.

48. To help people plan their journeys better, LTA and Transitlink will come up with an enhanced Integrated Public Transport Journey Planner which also has basic map features, by July 2008. You can get travel information via the internet or the hotline to plan out your route, and yes it will cover both SBST and SMRT services.

49. As a further step, LTA will develop an Integrated Multi-Modal Travel Information System for door-to-door travel planning. It will have an interactive electronic map of the island where commuters can get

information on bus service routes, bus stops and rail stations, arrival information and landmarks at a glance, at home or on their office computer, and also when they are on the move via their mobile devices.

(II) Introducing More Competition to Drive Efficiency and Service Improvements

Enhance Contestability of Bus Services

50. Competition enhances efficiency and keeps costs competitive. Cities in Europe and Australia and Hong Kong have moved towards making their bus services more contestable. They found that introducing some form of competition, or even just the real threat of competition, is an effective way to keep bus operations efficient and raise service standards.

51. Hence, our second broad strategy is to gradually open up our basic bus service sector for more competition, by making the right to operate bus services contestable. There are limited economies of scale for bus operations above a fleet size of 500 buses. Hence, our current bus industry of about 3,700 buses could potentially support more than the current two operators.

52. Our intention is to introduce competition “for” the market, where operators compete periodically for the right to provide a package of bus services designed by LTA. They will have to fulfill service obligations or risk being replaced when their term is up. This is different from competition “in” the market or head-on competition for market share, which would be detrimental to an integrated public transport system where the emphasis is on co-operation to grow the overall pie.

53. Injecting greater contestability into our bus industry is a major change. Not only is it critical to get the policies right, it is just as important that we implement the changes smoothly. Hence, over the next year or so, we will study all the issues carefully together with all relevant stakeholders, before embarking on any changes.

More Niche Services - Premium Bus & other Non-Basic Services

54. To keep up the momentum of service improvement, we will continue to encourage a range of niche bus services to give commuters more choices. One example is the premium buses which are proving to be very popular. Another example is the FastForward services which are express services that run during peak hours, and which can cut journey time by up to 20% because of fewer stops.

(III) Involving our People in the Land Transport System

55. Now, these exciting plans that we have for public transport commuters would not be what they are, if not for the contributions of the many people who took time to share their perspectives.

56. Indeed, the whole land transport review has benefited from the inputs of a broad spectrum of stakeholders and public. Besides the many emails, web postings and letters we received, numerous people participated in our focus group discussions, and Great Transport Challenge Game. In total, more than 4500 people contributed their time, energies and ideas to the review.

57. We will continue to keep our fingers firmly on the pulse of our people, their changing travel needs, preferences and the interests they represent. We will also enhance what we have already started with this land transport review.

58. Moving forward, the community, the people who use the transport system, will play a larger role in helping to shape and implement land transport plans and initiatives.

59. To support the community's involvement in transport issues, LTA has set up a new "Land Transport Community Partnership Division". Teams from this division will be assigned to each constituency to handle not only the day-to-day road and traffic management functions more effectively, but to also engage the community more closely on the ground.

60. LTA will also be launching its Community Outreach Programme where gatherings will be held with grassroots leaders to share and discuss land transport policies and plans. To reach out to young people, LTA will step up efforts to engage them in their schools and through the new media. And of course, today's launch of the Land Transport Gallery is an important part of this holistic effort to reach out to our people.

Conclusion

61. With all these changes, commuters will have a public transport system where the bus and rail work together in close partnership. Fast and frequent feeders will bring commuters to the high speed trunk routes served by rail or trunk buses. Services will be co-ordinated and easy to understand. Buses will travel speedily on the roads, aided by comprehensive bus priority measures.

62. Commuters will make convenient transfers, without any fare penalty, in the comfort of integrated public transport interchanges. Those who wish to can make use of an integrated season pass. They will have easy access to public transport information on the web and on the phone, including real-time information while on the go.

63. Now, besides making these public transport improvements, it is also important that we manage car usage. We need to do more of both to ensure that we have a quality urban living environment. In particular, to keep our roads free flowing, we will need to lower our vehicle growth rate and raise ERP charges. In the past few years, our roads have become more congested. Driving in the Suntec area in the evening, for instance, is often a real challenge. We must do something about this as the city centre is the heart of our economy. We will also need to raise the performance bar for our ERP system, so that motorists who use these roads, be it in the CBD or the expressways, get a better driving experience. I will be announcing these measures later this month as part of our land transport review.

64. Together, these initiatives to transform our public transport system and manage car usage will help ensure that Singaporeans enjoy the benefits that come from a vibrant and growing city, rather than pay heavily for it through gridlock and pollution.