

SPEECH BY MR NG CHEE MENG, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT, AT THE NATIONAL KINDNESS AWARD – TRANSPORT GOLD CEREMONY, ON 26 OCTOBER 2016 AT THE JOYDEN HALL, BUGIS+

Dr William Wan, General Secretary, Singapore Kindness Movement,

Award Winners,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. A very good morning to all. I am honoured to join all of you today for the National Kindness - Transport Gold Award 2016.

2. Today, we celebrate the achievements of 394 transport service professionals, who have gone the extra mile in making a difference to the public transport experience of Singaporeans.

Relentless Drive to Improve Singapore's Public Transport Infrastructure

3. Our public transport system plays an important role in the lives of Singaporeans. Our MRT, LRT, buses and taxis, clock over 7.9 million trips daily, bringing more than 2 million commuters to school, work and recreation.

4. Public transport ridership will continue to grow. Today, about two in three peak hour journeys are taken on public transport. We hope to increase this to three in four by 2030. To do this, we need to make public transport more convenient, connected and reliable. That is why your partnership is so important in helping us achieve this vision.

5. What the Government can and will do is to continue to invest substantial resources in our public transport system. By 2030, we will have 360km of rail lines, with two times more train stations throughout the island. That's 280. Eight in ten households will live within a ten-minute walk from a train station. Over the next five years, we will be spending about \$20 billion to build new rail lines, opening the Tuas West Extension, Downtown Line 3, Thomson-East Coast Line. Another \$4 billion on renewing, upgrading and expanding operating assets.

6. Buses too, which play an important role in public transport, are benefiting from the \$1.1 billion Bus Service Enhancement Programme. This will help expand our bus fleet by 35% and add over 80 new bus services between 2012 and 2017. With the bus contracting model, we will spend \$3.5 to \$4 billion over the next 5 years and improve service further.

7. However, better hardware for our public transport system is only half the story. As I said earlier, the people who partner the government and the union in breathing life into the transport network are just as, if not more important. This is why the Government, together with National Transport Workers' Union, and the industry, will professionalise the public transport workforce, and to ensure that there are good jobs to attract Singaporeans to the sector.

8. There will be more jobs for bus captains, technicians and planners to drive the bigger fleet and bring about positive service standards under the Bus Contracting Model. Just on bus captains alone, we are looking at hiring another 2,000, bringing the total number to 12,000 over the next five years. The Singapore Bus Academy, which was recently opened, will help bus captains attain higher skillsets and professionalise their careers.

9. Similarly, we are looking at growing the manpower in the rail sector to support our growing rail network. We need an additional 5,000 operations and maintenance workers, up from the over 6,000 workers today. That's almost double. Likewise, a Rail Academy will help build up and deepen skills of those who want to work in the rail sector. There are many projects for those who are still thinking of making the switch to this industry. The Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High Speed Rail, our upcoming domestic lines – such as the Cross Island Line, Jurong Region Line, just to name a few.

10. Beyond land transport, the aviation and maritime sectors are also exciting places to work in. The expansion of our Changi air hub will create more good jobs for Singaporeans. Changi Airport and our national carrier are world class and are well regarded among local Singaporeans for being good employers. We will step up our efforts to attract Singaporeans to take up aviation careers and continuously upgrade their skills. We will need more Pilots, Air Traffic Controllers, Engineers, and ground handling staff as Changi grows.

11. In the maritime front, greater automation and the deployment of technology has helped improve the productivity of maritime jobs. For instance, at the port, a single crane specialist can now remotely control up to five cranes at time – all from the comfort of an air-conditioned office.

12. In short, land, air and sea transport in Singapore is a sunrise industry. So all of you seated here today are in the right industry!

Customer Service Excellence is Equally Important

13. Public transport plays an important role in the lives of Singaporeans. Many of us encounter public transport workers at least twice a day, be it the bus captain, the service ambassador at the train door, the cabby, or the station manager. You are the face and the ambassadors of our public transport, meeting thousands of commuters daily. As public transport service personnel on the frontline, you have a tremendous influence on whether a commuter has a good start and end to his or her day. It is not an easy job. It is not easy to smile when we have just driven a long trip or when we encounter commuters who are less than reasonable. I am proud that 394 of you are recognised for your exemplary service and gracious behaviour. You are an inspiration, setting good examples for everyone.

Acts of Kindness on our Public Transport

14. Let me share the stories of a couple of our award winners.

15. **SBS Transit Bus Captain Sugumaran** has received many compliments for being gracious and friendly to his passengers.

- a. He is well-known for never failing to greet his passengers with a bright smile as they board. And he also makes an extra effort to assist some of our less-mobile senior commuters board and alight the bus.
- b. To quote an example: Once BC Sugumaran noticed that an elderly commuter had forgotten to tap her fare-card and had already taken a seat at the rear of the bus. Rather than ask the commuter to walk back to tap the card, he got up, walked to her seat, took her fare card, tap it, then returned to her.

16. **SMRT Station Manager Katijah Bte Sarbu** went beyond her line of duty to ensure that her passengers were taken care of.

- a. Once, she noticed a mother looking for a place to feed her wailing and hungry baby. Reacting quickly, she offered the family the staff room so that they had necessary space and privacy.
- b. At another occasion, noticing an unwell passenger, Katijah similarly extended to her the staff room, and also gave her with a warm drink and blanket to keep warm. Katijah then accompanied her to the taxi stand and made sure she got into the taxi safely.

17. **Mr Voon Chee Keong** who works with ComfortDelGro Engineering receives more than 25 written compliments every quarter – that's more six times the average!

- a. Cabbies have nothing but praise for Chee Keong, who puts in the extra mile for them during their taxis' monthly preventive maintenance checks.
- b. Even though the cabbies may not have highlighted certain parts that require replacement, Chee Keong makes the effort to check, and do the necessary replacement.
- c. Knowing that time is precious for cabbies, Chee Keong would sometimes forgo his breaks, just so he can finish up the repairs faster.

Conclusion

18. These stories are proof that a little kindness goes a long way. It takes a small effort to make a big impact on the lives of others and as transport service staff, you are in the best position to make that happen. I also hope that our commuters continue to appreciate and reciprocate the kindness shown by our public transport workers.

19. To all our 394 award winners, today is your day.

20. Keep up the high standards of service, and congratulations once again for your achievements.

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