

**SPEECH BY COORDINATING MINISTER FOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND
MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT KHAW BOON WAN, AT THE SIGNING OF
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) ON PROFESSIONAL
CERTIFICATION OF BUS TECHNICIANS, ON 29 SEPTEMBER 2017, 4.30PM, AT
DEVAN NAIR INSTITUTE OF EMPLOYMENT AND EMPLOYABILITY**

1. Strengthening our bus industry is a tripartite undertaking which involves multiple stakeholders. This is evident from the fact that the MOU that is being signed today involves nine signatories.¹

2. This MOU also reflects the quiet revolution which has taken place in our bus industry in recent years. First, the bus industry has evolved from a duopoly involving local players to a contestable industry with multiple local and foreign players operating with shorter concessions. Second, we have shifted from a purely market-driven model to one where there the Government plays a significant role in owning buses, planning routes and subsidising public bus services.

3. Today, we have a more efficient industry which is more responsive to commuter needs. Service levels have improved, with shorter waiting times and more comfortable rides. The maximum scheduled headway for bus services during peak periods has shortened by 25% to 15 minutes, and about 9 in 10 bus services have become less crowded over the last five years.

4. These service enhancements to public transport would not have been possible without large subsidies borne by taxpayers. Over the past five years, the Government has committed \$1.1 billion to support launch of 1,000 new buses and 80 new bus services as part of the Bus Service Enhancement Programme. Over the next five years, as we complete the transition to the Bus Contracting Model, Government subsidies for public bus services will rise further, to about \$4 billion. While co-payment

¹ The nine signatories are LTA, SBS Transit, SMRT Corporation, Go-Ahead Singapore, Tower Transit Singapore, the Employment and Employability Institute (e2i), Institute of Engineers Singapore (IES), Institute of Technical Education College West (ITE), and the National Transport Workers' Union (NTWU).

by taxpayers is appropriate, we have to make sure that the burden on taxpayers does not become excessive. This requires cooperation by commuters. This means a need to regularly adjust fares. We look to the Public Transport Council which sets fares to help ensure prudence in public expenditure. But we also look to commuters to accept the need for regular optimisation of our bus resources even as we provide for ridership growth. As ridership patterns evolve, some existing bus services may have to be merged, re-routed or rationalised, especially when new rail lines are opened. We seek commuters' understanding on this.

Raising Competencies

5. Going forward, we expect yet another quiet revolution in the bus industry with the emergence of advanced bus technologies. The image of a bus technician conducting inspections with paper checklists is a thing of the past. Today, our bus technicians and engineers rely on web-based diagnostics tools for troubleshooting. Some of these tools will be showcased at the Bus Career Fair today. The industry is also moving towards the adoption of handheld devices and condition-based predictive maintenance, which aims to identify and resolve a fault even before it happens.

6. At the same time, with the emergence of greener propulsion technologies for buses, the maintenance challenges will be different. For example, with the 50 diesel-hybrid buses and 60 electric buses LTA is procuring, bus technicians and engineers will have to deal with electric charging systems and batteries, in addition to diesel engines.

7. Today, we have 880 bus technicians and engineers. By 2030, we expect this number to grow to over 1,100 to support a larger bus fleet. We must have a deliberate strategy to help them upgrade and up-skill to stay relevant. Indeed, the MOU affirms our partners' full support to up-skill the bus technicians and engineers who play a vital role to keep our buses run smoothly and commuters get to their destinations on time.

Standardising Proficiency Framework

8. With the transition to the Bus Contracting Model, we also need an industry-wide proficiency framework. Currently, each operator has its own proficiency framework for bus technicians and engineers. As part of the MOU, our partners will develop an industry-wide, mutually recognised proficiency framework by next year. In time, the Singapore Bus Academy will also introduce courses to help bus technicians attain higher proficiency levels. Our bus engineers will also be able to have their competence and experience recognised through the Singapore Chartered Engineer registration programme.

9. With the new proficiency framework, we hope that operators will find it easier to hire industry-certified bus technicians and engineers from across the industry. The framework will also expand the range of opportunities available to bus technicians and engineers, especially for those who strive for higher levels of proficiency. Ultimately, the increased competition for talent and the incentives to up-skill will raise the overall quality of our bus workforce.

Conclusion

10. Next month, we celebrate the first anniversary of the Singapore Bus Academy. It is the culmination of collaborative efforts by LTA, e2i, the National Transport Workers Union and our Public Transport Operators. It is a key pillar of the Public Bus Industry Manpower Plan to professionalise our bus workforce. In just a year, 1300 bus captains have already benefitted from the Enhanced Vocational Licence Training Programme, the inaugural course offered by the Academy. More courses will be rolled out. It is a reminder of what the industry can accomplish together by forging partnerships. The MOU today represents another step forward in this journey.

11. Thank you.
