

**SPEECH BY LUI TUCK YEW, MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT, AT THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON THE POPULATION WHITE PAPER,
5 FEB 2013, 6:30PM**

1. Madam Speaker, please let me share on our land transport plans to support a high quality living environment. I will touch briefly on the transport plans for a possible population of 6.9 million in 2030, but I think it is more important to spend time to talk about the near term plans to improve the situation we face today.

2. I try to ride on various parts of the rail network on a regular basis to get a first-hand update on the situation on the ground. I understand that my experience may be different as I am not constrained with getting to my destination by a certain time. But I think it is worth sharing nonetheless. First, during the morning peak hours, outside of the school holiday periods, it is very congested. I can understand why commuters are frustrated because this is their daily experience. Second, many commuters have to take a feeder to reach an MRT station, or from the station to their destination. This adds to their total journey time. Third, the variable waiting times and crowdedness on buses mean that the journey is less predictable; it can fluctuate from day to day and this adds to the stress they face. Fourth, the occasional train disruption can wreck

their plans for the day. Therefore, in speaking about our long and short term plans, I hope to address and improve on these areas.

2030 Transport Plan

3. By 2030, we will double the current length of our rail network to about 360 kilometres. We would have completed five more lines across the island – the Downtown Line, Thomson Line, Eastern Region Line, Cross Island Line and Jurong Region Line to join the four that we already have. And perhaps we may have even more new lines under construction by then.

4. We will have a much expanded public transport network, added new capacity, and I believe that the travel experience will improve significantly as commuters are distributed over a larger network. By 2030, eight in 10 households will be within a 10-minute walk from a train station. 90% of buildings in the CBD where many commuters work will be within a five-minute walk. The rail network will bring us to almost all the key parts of Singapore and many can be less dependent on bus feeders to reach their destinations.

5. However, the 2030 vision of a very convenient and high-quality public transport system is not so easy for many Singaporeans to

visualise. What we have experienced in public transport in the last few years has affected how we view the future. We should have invested more in building new lines and buying new trains in the early years of the last decade. As the Prime Minister had explained, this was because we had very challenging economic circumstances, and we also had the difficult experience of the North East Line opening in 2003 and operating for a number of years with ridership well below what was planned for. Because we were too prudent and conservative in public transport infrastructure investment during the early years of the last decade, we now find ourselves doing a lot of catching up.

6. I therefore fully understand the scepticism and unhappiness from the public when the 6.9 million population figure was released in the White Paper. Seen through the prism of the current situation, I can appreciate how unthinkable it may seem that we can accommodate a population by 2030 that is up to 30% higher than today, even though we have firm plans to double the rail network over the same period.

7. But I do believe that we will begin to see a gradual but noticeable and perceptible improvement over the next five years. Why do I say this?

Capacity Enhancement

8. Capacity in our rail and bus network will grow over the next five years. Between now and 2017, the Downtown Line will open in phases and this will add significant new capacity to the east-west corridor. People living around the Choa Chu Kang and Bukit Panjang areas will have a new and faster route to the city centre by 2015. This will help to relieve congestion at Jurong East and along the East-West Line. And likewise, people in Tampines will have a choice of two MRT lines to get to the city centre while others along Bedok Reservoir and along Ubi will no longer need to rely on the East-West Line.

9. For the existing North-South and East-West Lines, we will complete the re-signalling work to increase capacity during the peak hours by 20%. And we will also add about 70% more total capacity to the northeast corridor, and 60% more capacity to the Circle Line with the delivery of new trains by 2015.

10. And so in total, what this all means is that during the busiest one hour in the morning, our assessment is that we will have the capacity to carry 70% more passengers into the CBD in five years' time compared to what we have today. However, I do not expect such a sharp increase

in ridership. Hence, what this implies is that for most commuters taking the train into the city, the journey will be less crowded by then.

11. During off-peak hours and weekends, commuters can also expect trains to arrive more frequently. I have already announced that during the off-peak hours, no commuter will have to wait more than five minutes for a train, except very early in the morning and very late at night. We are targeting to apply this requirement to the North-South and East-West Lines this year, and we will extend it to the other MRT lines by around 2015.

Further Improving the Bus Service Enhancement Programme

12. For buses, we have made good progress in rolling out the Bus Service Enhancement Programme, or BSEP for short. Since its launch last September, we have added about 90 buses, improved over 50 bus services, and implemented 5 new routes. Feedback has been positive.

Recruitment of drivers permitting, I aim to accelerate the BSEP. This year, we will add another 190 buses, which means that half of the 550 buses promised under the five-year programme will be on our roads by the end of this year. This will allow us to roll out more new routes, and improvements to more bus services across the island. Commuters can

therefore experience tangible improvements in shorter waiting times, less crowding, and better connectivity.

13. I have also asked LTA to see how we can tap on the resources of private bus operators in specific areas to accelerate this programme. LTA will be tendering some of the new BSEP routes, and I invite private operators to respond. We will contract out more City Direct-type bus services which run during the morning peak hours along the expressways into the city, and we will also work with operators to see if it is possible to extend such contracting arrangements to other new, shorter services, for instance, localised routes in estates that feed to MRT stations. If successful, this will allow us to scale up the BSEP beyond the 550 buses that the two public bus operators are committed to implement, and give us the resources to implement more new routes and other service improvements.

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Improving Service Reliability

Bus Reliability and Priority Measures

14. But even with the BSEP, commuters tell me that waiting times for buses at their bus stops are irregular. Sometimes, they wait a long time for their bus, and then two or three buses come together, especially during peak hours.

15. Therefore, even as we operate more buses, we will need to work with bus operators to improve the reliability of their buses en-route, so that commuters experience more regular waiting times. There are a number of examples, like in London and Seoul, of how they have implemented a framework and worked with the operators to achieve this. They shared with me how they have managed, with difficulty to improve bus reliability over a number of years through an incentive and penalty system based on commuters' expected waiting times at the bus stop. Their bus operators have to adopt a new mindset, invest substantially in fleet management capabilities to monitor their buses, and make the appropriate interventions so buses arrive at more regular intervals along the entire route. This is something that I am keen to try out and LTA will begin to trial this scheme on some services in the second half of this year.

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16. To derive the full benefits of measures I have mentioned, we must also give more priority to buses on our roads. Today, we have about 180 kilometres of bus lanes and the Mandatory Give-Way to Buses scheme at over 200 locations. Over the next two years, we will spend close to \$50 million to improve bus reliability, such as adding about 30 kilometres of bus lanes, increasing the Mandatory Give-Way scheme by another

150 bus stops, and quadrupling the number of bus hubs from 10 to 40 so that more buses can pick up passengers at the same time. We will also step up bus lane enforcement as infringements will result in delays for buses.

Train Reliability

17. We will also improve train reliability. A train that has to be withdrawn from service leads to ripple effects like overcrowding and delays throughout the rail network and inconveniences commuters greatly. The LTA-SMRT Joint Team has achieved some success over the past six months. Train withdrawals on the North-South and East-West Lines have decreased sharply. Today, we experience about one train withdrawal for every 1,000 trips and we aim to improve this by another 20% by the end of this year. We will improve further in subsequent years, and aim to halve the withdrawal rate to one train withdrawal every 2,000 trips as we upgrade the trains and place more attention on preventive maintenance.

Managing Travel Demand

18. Besides supply-side measures, we also want to encourage commuters to spread out their travel to outside the peak hours, and we have introduced several incentive schemes to do so. Commuters who

are able and willing to travel off-peak on the SMRT network today can already save up to 50 cents off their rail fare if they exit at the designated stations in the CBD before 7:45am. The scheme has seen some initial success, and we have seen about 3 to 4% of commuters move their travel out of the peak period. We will continue to see how it can be made even more effective, and will consider further improvements possibly later this year. Besides this SMRT scheme which gives an immediate discount, we also have a scheme for off-peak commuters to accumulate points for more sizeable rewards, of up to \$200, when they travel off-peak. This is the “Incentives for Singapore’s Commuters” scheme, or INSINC for short, and it has been quite popular, especially among the younger, tech-savvy commuters. We have seen its membership growing from 35,000 last October to 60,000 today. Our analysis suggests that almost 10% of this group has shifted from peak to off-peak travel.

19. We expect the effect of these schemes to continue to grow, as

commuters take time to make arrangements to adjust their travel behaviour, and we will certainly continue to review them for greater effectiveness. In the mean time, we are also working with major employers and institutions, especially in the CBD, to inject more flexibility in their working hours, and to help them understand the travel needs of their employees. This will enable them to implement the

necessary workplace practices to facilitate their employees to travel off-peak.

Conclusion

20. Madam Speaker, let me conclude by drawing us back to the longer-term plans for public transport. A possible 6.9 million population by 2030 is the parameter that we are using for our land transport infrastructure. We have sized the doubling of the rail network so that there is sufficient buffer for the projected or possible 30% population increase as well as change in travel behaviours. I know that commuters should find travelling more convenient with this expanded network and their journey a more predictable and comfortable one.

21. But we do not need to wait till 2030 for this to happen. Over the next five years, we will significantly increase capacity with additional trains, we will open a new MRT segment every year, and we will work hard to improve reliability for train and bus services. You have my assurance that I will do my utmost to improve our public transport system. I am confident that we will deliver an enhanced and higher quality transport system for Singaporeans in the years to come. Thank you.