

**SPEECH BY COORDINATING MINISTER FOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND
MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT KHAW BOON WAN
AT THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT WORKERS' APPRECIATION DAY,
14 NOVEMBER 2017 AT 1.40PM AT BEDOK TOWN SQUARE**

Leaders from our Public Transport Operators,

NTWU Brother and Sisters,

Colleagues from the Public Transport Industry,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Last week, Parliament had an intense discussion on the Oct 7 tunnel flooding incident. I assume you all had watched it. Oct 7 was not a proud moment for SMRT. A small group of SMRT workers had negated the good work of the other SMRT workers, and brought disrepute to other transport workers. They have tarnished the reputation of Singapore and Singaporeans.

2. Oct 7 was a day of shame for SMRT. We cannot change the past. But let it be the turning point for SMRT, especially in its journey towards transforming its corporate culture. Let it be the turning point after which all SMRT staff dedicate their 100% to their public responsibility to make SMRT train services reliable again. This requires an all-out effort. This requires everyone in SMRT to play their part, from CEO down to the rank-and-file. SMRT will find support, from NTUC, from other agencies, from other fellow transport workers. The heavy lifting must be done by SMRT staff. The others will cheer you on, and lend you support. I am sure commuters will too!

3. Hands up, SMRT staff who are here today. Let's cheer them on!

4. Oct 7 happened to SMRT. Oct 7 could happen to other organisations too. In every large organisation, there will be some black sheep. Our job is to identify them, counsel them, give them opportunities to shape up, and if they cannot, get them to part company. What we should not do is to turn a blind eye to their act, or worse, follow them!

5. You have joined a noble profession. Every day, 66% of Singaporeans take public transport. You are among the 22,000 workers who work day and night to operate and maintain our buses and trains. The vast majority of you are honest, hardworking and dedicated to your responsibilities. You deserve our respect and applause! That is why we launched this inaugural Public Transport Workers' Appreciation Day for us to show you our appreciation. This is a meaningful tripartite initiative by the Land Transport Authority, the National Transport Workers' Union and the public transport operators. I am grateful for this opportunity in thanking all of you!

Rising Above Challenges

6. Our public transport network serves more commuters now than ever before. In 5 years, daily bus and rail rides have increased by 30% to nearly 8 million daily. We have added 1000 new buses, and many new trains too. As our public transport system expands, it also means more facilities and equipment to operate and maintain. I have met many of you in the depots, above ground, underground, at different times of the day and night. I could not help you in your work in the trenches, but I thought my presence could help lift your spirits. Along the way, I made new friends, like maintenance staff Abdul Majid Bin Daud, Mohammed Yahya Bin Haron and many more. They are exemplary in their diligence, skills and conscientiousness and have even contributed to solving problems while off duty.

7. I visit all transport operators, not just SMRT. I must have been to SBS Transit's Gali Batu Depot half a dozen times, to know you, to share durians with you, to cheer you on. I have also visited bus interchanges and had nasi lemak with bus captains in your canteens. Your work has increased, I know, with many new demands. You now need to coordinate with service controllers to pace your buses, to reduce bunching and allow buses to arrive with greater punctuality. It is stressful, I know. But it means better service for our commuters, and that is important. Technology helps. For example, some buses now use sensors and Anti-Collision Warning Systems. It is safer for you and your commuters.

8. You have risen above these challenges year after year. You deserve our respect and gratitude.

9. We are committed to improving working conditions and training opportunities for you. New and upgraded bus depots and interchanges will have more comfortable and dedicated staff canteens, lounges and toilets. To up-skill our public transport workforce and uplift their careers, the Singapore Rail Academy and the Singapore Bus Academy were established. More than 1600 workers have benefited from their courses to date. Work is also ongoing to develop an Industry Transformation Map for the Land Transport sector which will outline plans to prepare our public transport workers for jobs of the future.

Conclusion

10. Before I conclude, let me introduce a special person amongst us today. He is Mr Chua Cheng Chuah, one of our longest serving bus captain and public transport

worker. He started when he was just 19 years old and has been with SBST for 48 years! His regular passengers have become an extension to his family and he has watched some of them grow from kids to adults. He told me that when he fell sick and did not report to work, his passengers would ask after him. In fact, there were a few who bought medicine for him. Over the years, these passengers have grown to become friends to bus captain Chua. This is how it should be.

11. Today is a good opportunity for commuters to remind ourselves to be grateful to the silent, every day heroes who make our daily trips on public transport possible. Like the passengers who have become friends to bus captain Chua, I encourage our commuters to take active steps in showing appreciation to all these hardworking individuals every day – not just today. Even a simple smile can make a big difference.

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