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SPEECH BY DR YEO NING HONG, AG MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS
AND MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENCE, AT THE INAUGURAL CEREMONY
OF THE MASS RAPID TRANSIT CORPORATION AT THE WORLD TRADE
CENTRE AUDITORIUM ON SATURDAY, 22 OCTOBER 1983 AT 11.00 AM

I am pleased to be here today to participate in the official inauguration of the Mass Rapid Transit Corporation. This is a very special day for those associated with the MRT. They have worked hard on the project, first to conceive the plan and then to implement it. I congratulate them for their vision and effort that they have put in to see the MRT project to this stage. I would like to pay special tribute to Mr Ong Teng Cheong. His first association with the MRT was way back in 1967 when he participated in the Singapore Concept Plan Study, which proposed a 32 km mass rapid transit system to be operational by 1992. And his leadership and direction of the PMRTA has made possible the smooth and rapid implementation of the plan, immediately after the Government has approved the project after very careful study and thorough public discussion. This fast response has enabled us to capitalise on the present worldwide recession in the heavy engineering and construction industry and will ensure that our MRT will be built at very competitive cost.

The MRT is our best long-term solution to the problem of urban transport. It is a well-developed, tried and tested method of moving large numbers of people quickly and comfortably in a densely populated city. However, let me emphasize that the MRT alone, will not miraculously solve all our transport problems. Many cities in the world with

extensive urban-railed systems are still plagued by severe and crippling traffic congestion. Obviously technological solutions like the MRT must go hand in hand with other traffic management measures if we are to avoid the paralysis that afflicts other large cities.

The real solution lies in how we organise and manage public and private transportation so as to strike the best balance between the two. Unfortunately this balance is not what most people would personally prefer, as individuals want what is best for himself without taking into account the consequences on others. The motorcar represents a classic example of the case where the price of the commodity, in this case the factory price of a car represents only a minute fraction of the true cost of car ownership. This true cost includes the cost of land set aside for roads and car parks, time lost by all other road users (including non-car owners) resulting from traffic jams, and the harmful effects of excessive pollution. In land-scarce Singapore, the demand for roads and car parks generated by excessive car growth will be at the expense of homes for all our citizens and factories and offices providing jobs for our people. Today, more than one-fifth of land in the central area has been used up already for roads, car parks and other traffic-related use. For the whole of Singapore one-seventh of our land area has been taken up for cars and other vehicles. If we allow cars to increase without restraint, we must give up even more land. We can either have cars for everybody or homes for everybody. We cannot have both. Singaporeans have always been realistic. They have come to terms with high density living, and have accepted it as a way of life. We must do likewise with high density transportation. Otherwise, we condemn our younger brothers and sisters and our children to a homeless future.

The MRT will provide a fast, convenient, congestion-free alternative form of transportation for all. It will also use land far more efficiently than cars and even

buses. Indeed it may even provide many other social benefits such as acting as a catalyst for better development and utilization of land all over the island.

I have spent time talking about cars, roads and land on this occasion of the inauguration ceremony of the MRT Corporation because it is important for us to view the MRT as an integral part of our overall urban transportation system.

For the MRT Corporation, the work has only just begun. Its job is to build the best possible system within the \$5,000 million budget and have the first train running by 1988. This is Singapore's largest single construction project to date. Many of the technical capabilities in construction, especially in tunnelling, will be new to local engineers and technicians. But I am confident the MRT Corporation will be more than equal to the task ahead.

Just as we have chosen tried and tested technology for the MRT, our approach to the project is also based upon a tried and tested philosophy. In deciding whom to award contracts to, the Corporation will open its doors to all bidders, both international and local, bearing in mind the importance of acquisition of the best technology at the most competitive price and fruitful and meaningful transfer of technology to local joint venture companies.

Finally, I am happy to announce that plans for Phase II of the construction programme have been finalised. It will extend the MRT Line from City Hall to Pasir Ris in the east, from Raffles Place to Marina Bay in the south, from Yio Chu Kang to Yishun in the north and from Clementi to Boon Lay in the west, with a north western spur from Jurong Town to Bukit Panjang. When completed in 1992, the entire MRT will help serve our transportation needs well into the 21st century.

This morning's ceremony marks our confidence that the investment we put into our MRT will bring many rewarding returns to our nation and our citizens in the future. I wish the MRT Corporation every success in its new undertaking.

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