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Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY DR YEO NING HONG, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION AND SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE (POLICY), AT THE OPENING OF SECTION 4 OF THE MRT SYSTEM AT JURONG EAST STATION ON SATURDAY, 5 NOVEMBER 1988 AT 10.00 AM

I am happy to be here this morning together with my fellow MP's to officiate at the start-up of Phase II of the MRT system. The MRT is a national project. I am therefore particularly pleased that the many MP's of the constituencies, which the three stations of Jurong East, Chinese Garden, and Lakeside will serve, are able to be with us to jointly officiate the start-up of this section. Their constituents will be the principal beneficiaries of this extension. I welcome also the large number of community leaders from the neighbouring constituencies who are here with us this morning. On behalf of MRTTC and SMRT I would like to thank them for their contributions over the past four years as we grappled with the construction of this stage of the MRT. Their support and assistance have contributed to the earlier start-up of these three stations.

It has been a year since the MRT system was first opened to Singaporeans. We started off with only five stations and 6 km of track. Today, a year later, we begin operations of part of the second half of our MRT project. I congratulate the Board Members and staff of MRTTC. They have made a noteworthy achievement.

SMRT, the operator of the MRT, has also performed well in their first year with a total of 70 million passenger trips. Commuters have generally been positive.

As always, there is room for improvement and SMRT will be working towards providing an even better service in the coming years.

Recently SMRT commissioned and completed a survey involving interviews with 9,000 respondents at selected MRT stations. The results showed that broadly speaking, about one-third of the MRT commuters use the MRT to travel to and from work and for trips during the course of their work. Another one-third use the MRT to visit friends and relatives, and for shopping. And about one-fifth of commuters are students, going to and from schools.

Singaporeans place a high value on time. This is borne out by the survey. More than 80 per cent of commuters cited the fast speed of the MRT as the main reason for their taking the train.

Eighty per cent of the MRT commuters previously travelled by bus. Another 11 per cent of them used to walk. Now they use the MRT because it is both convenient and affordable. Only five per cent of MRT commuters used the car previously. And only about one per cent of commuters switched to the MRT from taxis. The figures bear out the experience of other cities. The MRT has little or no effect on demands for cars and taxis. These are more closely related to the state of the economy than to any other factor.

With two and a half million passenger trips per day on buses compared to the 220,000 on the MRT, buses continue to be the main means of transportation. The predominant role of buses will continue, even after the MRT is in full operation. Hence traffic must be kept free-flowing so that a million or so Singaporeans do not have to waste unnecessary travelling time each day, caught up in traffic jams caused by unrestrained growth, and usage of cars.

The Government is committed to this fundamental objective and has acted accordingly over the past two decades. An illustration of the importance of this objective is the price the Government is willing to pay to prevent severe traffic jams on our roads - \$5 billion on our MRT this far and the possibility of more billions in the coming years if other lines are deemed necessary. Our congestion-free roads contributes to our success as a nation in many different ways, such as our success as a major transit centre for air and sea movement of goods and passengers; our success as a total business centre and as a favoured manufacturing location for high value added products; and to our efficiency and productivity, and hence overall international competitiveness. Compared with many other cities, our traffic on our roads is still relatively free flowing. Let us keep it that way.

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