

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

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SPEECH OF MR. YONG NYUK LIN, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS,
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE QUEENSTOWN DRIVING TEST
CENTRE, COMMONWEALTH AVENUE, ON SUNDAY, 23RD FEBRUARY,
1969 AT 2000 HOURS.

(e)

Our Road Transport problem
can be improved, step-by-step.

It is my pleasure and privilege to welcome you tonight,
on the occasion of the official opening of this \$285,000
Queenstown Driving Test Centre, which has been in operation
since December 1968, or 2 months ago.

Thank C.C.C.

2. First of all, may I say how much I appreciate the kind
words expressed in the speech of Mr. Soh Kim Kang, Chairman of
the C.C.C. of City South District, which District covers a very
large part of Singapore, namely, the constituencies of Alexandra,
Bukit Ho Swee, Bukit Merah, Delta, Pasir Panjang, Queenstown,
Telok Blangah and Tiong Bahru. I have always found the C.C.C.
most helpful and co-operative in the work of whichever Ministry
I happen to be. For example, in my last Ministry, that of Health,
the CCC went out of their way to assist me to ensure the success
of the registration and re-siting of Pasar Malams, throughout
Singapore. In my own constituency of Geylang West, my CCC were
the first, to resolve the re-siting of Hawkers in any one
constituency.

Now that I have taken over the Ministry of Communications,
8 CCCs have kindly come forward to grace this occasion and I am
most grateful to them for their strong support and also to thank
them for their generosity in bearing the expenses for the
refreshments for tonight, too.

Transport problem can be improved,
step-by-step.

3. We are all aware that the Road Transport problem in
Singapore is one of considerable magnitude which affects the
day-to-day life of almost everyone in Singapore. There are

unfortunately, complaints from all sides. He would be a brave man indeed, if he dares to say that he can solve this problem! There are transport problems in every town and city, some bad, some even worse than ours, but that does not mean that we cannot try to improve the situation and that is exactly what we intend to do, step-by-step.

Queenstown Driving Test Centre is the first successful step forward.

4. I am pleased to say that this new Driving Test Centre is one such positive step which is an improvement on the past. Although there are only 7 testers or $\frac{1}{3}$ of the total number of testers on the establishment of 22, and this Centre has been operating for only 2 months, it is already carrying 50% of the work load from the main Driving Test Centre at Maxwell Road. Congestion at Maxwell Road Driving Test Centre has accordingly been relieved and the large number of Provisional Driving Licence holders are being spared much inconvenience.

There is no doubt that with our Government's mammoth Urban renewal scheme in progress, Maxwell Road Driving Test Centre cannot remain long where it is and it is our intention to close this down, as soon as a suitable site can be found on the eastern side of Singapore.

Improved procedures for Driving Tests with effect from April 1969.

5. Although Singapore streets are already heavily congested with motor vehicles, the clamour for a driving licence continues to be very high. In fact, there are as many as 112,000 holders of Provisional Driving Licences in Singapore, today.

As those who qualify for Driving Licences are required to pass 2 tests, one the Highway Code and second the driving test proper and each Tester can, at most, personally conduct 20 tests per day and there are only 22 Testers on the approved establishment, it is clear that the back-log will never be cleared, if the present system of testing continues, without change.

One ready answer for change, would be to employ more Testers. Most problems, in fact, can be resolved, if there is the money to do it. As you know in the recent Budget for 15 months (January 1969/March 1970) of over £1,000 million, the sum of £250 million or one-quarter of budget has been allocated for the Ministry of Defence! We will increase the number of Testers but there is always a limit to the number that can be employed and recruited.

There is another though more difficult way to resolve the matter and that is how to re-organise and simplify procedure and to overcome bottlenecks, without asking for more money from Treasury.

Failure rate is over 70% - which is too high!

6. It may not be generally known except to the thousands of frustrated holders of Provisional Driving Licences that the average failure rate is over 70%, which is too high! Let me assure you, however, that we do not intend to lower standards of testing - oh no, we will maintain high standards, if only for the safety of our people, but we can ensure that the present high failure rate is brought down, by easing congestion, eradicating bottlenecks and informing Provisional Driving Licence holders where their defects are, so that they can rectify them early and gain their Driving Licences, without repeated failures for want of a guiding hand.

Written test for Highway Code to be introduced, as an alternative.

7. At present, the Highway Code ^{test} has to be done orally. As only one candidate can be examined orally by one Tester, the time factor involved coupled with limited number of Testers available means that thousands who can take and pass the Highway Code test are being forced to wait, for months, for an appointment.

Why not a written test, as an alternative, so that hundreds can take the test, at one sitting? This we will offer, as from April this year. The oral test will, of course, continue to be given, if the candidate asks for it.

Failures in driving tests will be told, where they go wrong.

8. At present, for some mysterious reason, those who fail their practical driving tests are not told where they went wrong. This does not help the poor candidate, at all. Surely, it helps the poor candidate to be told where his defects are, so that he can concentrate in improving and correcting his particular weakness, before taking the next test.

Well, we have decided to list out 10 major faults and 20 minor faults as per list attached. Those who commit 1 major fault or 5 minor faults will have to appear for another practical driving test.

With the above 2 innovations, we hope to see a better percentage of passes instead of the present 30%. Last year, only 20,000 new Driving Licences were issued. We believe this figure will improve, by the end of this year.

Renewal of Driving Licences at 15 Post Offices, a success too.

9. As you know, with effect from 1st February or 3 weeks ago, Driving Licence holders could renew their licences at 15 Post Offices instead of only at Registry of Vehicles, Middle Road. This decentralisation has greatly reduced congestion at Middle Road and I am glad to say the public is responding well, to the new scheme. The trend of collection has been so favourable that we expect a 50% increase in revenue from this source for this year, as compared with 1968.

Transport Advisory Board

10. In conclusion, I wish to disclose that at the end of last month (3 weeks ago) I received an interim report from the Transport Advisory Board which was formed in August 1968. The TAB has submitted a number of recommendations on the following subjects:-

- (1) queueing at Bus stops,
- (ii) Printing of schedules showing Bus routes, service intervals, etc.,
- (iii) Compulsory wearing of crash helmets,
- (iv) Special Taxis.

I am now studying these recommendations and will make a suitable announcement as soon as I am able to decide how much and how far their recommendations can be accepted and when they will be implemented.

It is now my pleasure to declare this Centre officially open.

FEBRUARY 23, 1969.

(Time issued: 1600 hours)