

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MR LIM CHEE OHN, MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO AND
MP FOR BUKIT MERAH ON THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE
BUKIT MERAH INTERCHANGE ON SATURDAY, 14 FEBRUARY '81 AT 9.00 AM

The opening of this Bukit Merah Interchange signals the third and final stage of the new Bus Plan designed to improve the grade of services offered to residents in Telok Blangah, Radin Mas, Bukit Merah and other neighbouring constituencies. The Plan was set in motion in December 1979 with the rationalisation of some of the services plying in the vicinity of these constituencies. Stage Two was implemented last September following a two-week long exhibition organised by SBS at the Radin Mas Community Centre and the Bukit Merah Community Hall to publicise the details of the route changes.

Prior to the implementation of the Plan, views and suggestions were sought from the various Members of Parliament and community leaders of the constituencies affected. Quite a number of residents also offered suggestions some of which have been incorporated into the Plan. I must commend SBS for their effort to establish a close working relationship with MPs, community leaders and residents when contemplating changes and improvements to their routes and services. And so they should for commuters' requirements should be reflected in SBS' plans as far as they are practicable and economical.

Stage Three is the final stage of the New Bus Plan and will be implemented tomorrow with the following changes:

- (i) the introduction of Ring Service 270
- (ii) the introduction of Service 187 to
Shenton Way and
- (iii) the /2.

- (iii) the re-routing of Services 16, 63, 125 and 184.

The New Bus Plan will provide residents with a better bus network coverage compared to what was available before the rationalisation. Previously, commuters could depend only on one or two services. Now by making one transfer on a feeder service, they have a choice of nine trunk services from this Interchange.

Much thought has been given to the layout and design of this \$1.25 million Interchange. Buses can get into and out of the station smoothly and this improved traffic flow will increase passenger throughput and reduce travel time. The nine colour-coded berths will help passengers immensely to identify the services they wish to take. Route details displayed on information boards at the Interchange will assist commuters who are uncertain of their routes. I am also happy to note that in the design of the Interchange, the Management has included a rest area cum canteen for bus crew.

These improvements, like the others either already implemented or being planned by SBS to raise the overall grade of public transport service, while desirable and necessary, are costly. For example, purchases of new and better buses to replace older vehicles and to increase the operating fleet will cost SBS more than \$250 million over the next three years (FY 1981 - 83). Development of depots and interchanges in the new towns and older housing estates will require a capital commitment of over \$77 million during this same period.

These substantial expenditures have to be incurred if the grade of our bus services is to be further improved. If these costs are to be met without excessive fare increases, management will have to do their utmost to improve operational efficiency. In this respect, greater route rationalisation, more extensive use of OMO services and better utilisation of buses and manpower will continue to be priority areas for management to explore. Increases in efficiency will help to reduce cost but certain components of operating expenditure will inevitably rise over the years.

Wage cost forms the bulk of SBS' operating expenditure. It is expected to reach \$151 million in 1981, some 48 per cent of the total operating expenditure. The wage bill will increase with every implementation of the NWC wage recommendation. This is inevitable as there is no reason why bus crews should not enjoy NWC increases like their fellow workers elsewhere. In return, bus workers are expected to carry out their duties responsibly, courteously and efficiently; helping to improve the standard of service even further. It is therefore only fair to commuters if bus crews who are found malingering and are recalcitrant are weeded out. At the same time depot managers and ticket inspectors are expected to be fair and objective in their assessment of workers' performance, particularly with the implementation of the second tier NWC award for above-average performers. To help create an efficient and disciplined workforce, SILO and SBS, in consultation with NTUC, are exploring the setting up of a Working Committee to examine ways and means of improving productivity. This joint consultation will create a climate in which managers and workers will be motivated to cooperate and work together even harder thereby improving further the grade of bus service.

Higher productivity becomes even more crucial with every increase in the price of fuel oil. The cost of diesel oil takes up some 17 per cent of SBS' annual operating expenditure. Based on the present bus fleet and route structure, every one per cent increase in the price of crude oil will increase SBS' fuel bill by nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ million. With increasing operating cost and commuters' expectation of a higher grade of service, bus workers' performance will be expected to rise even higher to justify the inevitable fare increases. With the impending formation of the industrial union to serve transport workers more effectively, I am confident that bus crews will be able to rise to the occasion and take on their heavier responsibilities.

On its part, I hope that SBS will monitor closely the level of service they are providing island-wide. Improvements and modifications should be made promptly so that our commuters can look forward to a bus network which is being upgraded continually.

I now have the pleasure of declaring this Interchange open.