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SPEECH BY MR ONG TENG CHEONG, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND  
ACTING MINISTER FOR CULTURE, AT THE NTUC COMFORT ANNUAL  
GENERAL MEETING ON 5 SEPTEMBER '78 AT 12 NOON AT NTUC'S  
AUDITORIUM, 5TH FLOOR, TRADE UNION HOUSE, SHENTON WAY.

Since the beginning of the year NTUC Comfort has added 1,000 taxis to its fleet. By October it will have added another 400, bringing its fleet to 3,800 taxis. This number is nearly half of the total taxi fleet in Singapore. I would like to congratulate the management and staff of COMFCRT for their success in putting these taxis on the road as planned.

Although complaints of taxi shortage have been considerably reduced, there is still an acute shortage of taxis in the city centre, particularly in the Central Business District (CBD) during peak hours. To help ease this shortage, the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board is therefore organising a taxi company whose main function is to ensure that its taxis operate within the CBD during these hours.

Government last month approved a flat annual tax of \$1,100/- on each taxi in place of the old multiple stage fee. This has resulted in savings of between \$42/- to \$400/- for all taxi operators, depending on the size of the taxi.

Higher prices of taxis affect the economics of taxi operation. The new COMFCRT taxi operator under the ownership scheme has had to stretch his instalment payments into his normal savings period. Government has decided to reduce the additional registration fee from \$5,000/- to \$2,000/- for a new COMFCRT taxi registered on or after 1 January this year.

Government's policy on ownership and use of private cars continue to be as relevant as ever. Taxis must therefore increasingly take on the role of a readily available, efficient and therefore acceptable alternative to the private motor car as a form

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of personalised transport. Given the right kind of encouragement and incentives, I have every reason to expect this objective to be fulfilled in the near future.

As a case in point, air-conditioned taxis were introduced on a large scale by COMFORT about one year ago. A recent survey conducted by RGV showed that 89% of the 1,523 commuters interviewed preferred taxis to be air-conditioned despite the higher flag-down fares. In view of the overwhelming preference for air-conditioned taxis, Government has now decided to allow all taxis up to two years old to be air-conditioned provided the air-conditioners are new and of an approved brand.

The popularity of air-conditioned taxis is an object lesson in commuter attitudes. With rising demand and higher expectations, the standard of the taxi services must be further improved.

COMFORT should not hesitate to take the lead, for example, by introducing radio-telephones to the whole of its fleet. Besides improving the efficiency of the service you are already providing, such a facility pays for itself through cost savings for the taxi operator who can cut down on wasteful dead mileage chalked up when making vacant cruising trips.

The change that will put the final seal on the quality of the taxi service in Singapore must come willingly from the taxi operator. The Registrar of Vehicles received over 10,000 applications for taxi driver licences last year. Although he has already approved a third of these, the large number of applicants means he can afford to choose. You may be sure that he keeps a profile of the ideal taxi-driver in front of him in considering each applicant. In fact this is no big secret.

The successful applicant is likely to be above 30 years of age, married, has a minimum educational standard of Primary 6 and be able to speak some English, since he is likely to be a frequent guide to our guests from abroad. He must possess pleasant social manners and personal habits, though these may sometimes be a little difficult to gauge at the start. If these are found wanting, he need not fear that the Registrar of Vehicles will not hear about it soon enough. The RGV will not hesitate to revoke his licence if a complaint is justified. On the other hand, he will be rewarded for

outstanding courtesy and honesty. A certificate of commendation for special award to taxi-drivers will be introduced for this purpose.

This is a fit note on which to end what I have still to say. Recently, COMFORT bade farewell to its Chairman, Mr Loo Siew Poh. Through his hard work, ability and dedication, the organisation has been able to achieve its present eminent position today. The organisation is certainly indebted to Mr Loo for his contribution.

This is also a good opportunity to welcome Mr Lim Chee Onn who has replaced Mr Loo as Chairman. I am sure COMFORT will benefit greatly from the experience and expertise which Mr Lim brings with him. COMFORT can look forward to a new chapter of further expansion and growth in the future.

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