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SPEECH BY MR ONG TENG CHEONG, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS,
AT KIM KEAT NATIONAL DAY DINNER, KIM KEAT COMMUNITY CENTRE
ON THURSDAY, 21 AUGUST 1980 AT 7.30 PM

I would like to dwell a little on the subject of the MRT, which is being followed with more than just passing interest by our citizens. In my view, this is a good sign as it reflects our people's awareness of the impact the MRT will have on our city, our lifestyles, and our future.

But whilst most of us are aware of the enormous financial investment that have to be made, I would like to stress that the considerations that go to make a case for or against the MRT are much more complex and diverse, and merit careful thought and evaluation.

You may well ask what these considerations are. One of these concerns the kind of city we want in the future not only for ourselves but also for future generations to come. Certainly, the MRT can contribute to the growth and vitality of a city and allow for more intensive development and better economies of scale. New York, London or Tokyo would not be able to support the amount of urban and economic activity that they do today without their subway systems.

Apart from its mass transportation capability, MRT would also represent a quantum leap in the quality of public transport. The comfort, efficiency and reliability of MRT would make urban travel less burdensome, and enable us to make more meaningful use of our time.

It would, in short, represent an altogether new dimension in urban mobility that would revolutionalise living habits and lifestyles in much the same way as the aeroplane which has added a new dimension in international travel.

But, as I have said earlier, it would be more prudent for us to stretch our bus system, if we can do so, and wait until the MRT becomes more a necessity and less of a luxury - and in the meantime boost the quality of our bus system.

The Harvard Review Team is finalising its study and will be presenting its report to the Government in about a month's time. I believe that many of their recommendations, which we will make public, will be at variance with the findings of previous studies concluded that an MRT is inevitable. Whilst some of these differences can perhaps be settled by quantitative analysis, others will have to remain as differences of opinion and judgment.

While counter-proposals of the kind that the erudite Harvard Professors are offering are useful in that it makes us rethink old issues, we must not forget that ultimately we will have to evaluate the risks and make the final decision. If we make the right decision we and our future generations will be the beneficiaries. Should we err, we will have to face the consequences. No consultant can carry this burden for us.

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