

PRESS RELEASE

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**SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG
AT THE OPENING OF WOODLANDS MRT LINE
ON SATURDAY, 10 FEBRUARY 1996 AT 10.00 AM**

Introduction

The growth of the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system demonstrates the Government's commitment to develop a top-rate public transport system for the benefit of our people.

Hundreds of thousands of Singaporeans now live better because of the MRT. I was very pleased to see on TV so many happy faces of Woodlands residents visiting the new interchange. No wonder. Now they too can enjoy the high quality service provided by the MRT. The Woodlands MRT line will whisk them to Orchard Road in 35 minutes, almost halving the time of travel by bus.

Advertisements have already appeared on the trains beckoning Woodlands residents to shop at Tampines Mall. This shows what business expects from a better transport system.

The Government will continue to invest in transport infrastructure. But the pace of such investment will depend on the funds available from economic growth.

The Woodlands line was built at a cost of \$1.2 billion. The North-East (NE) line, 20 km long, only 4 km longer than this line, will cost \$5 billion. The Government has to choose between alternatives in spending the \$5 billion. It could build a series of underground road tunnels to ease traffic congestion and allow more cars on the road, or it could build another existing Woodlands New Town to provide flats more quickly for those on the Housing and Development Board (HDB) queue. The willingness of many people living in the North-East area to pay a slightly higher fare helped us to decide to build the NE line now instead of four years later.

Regional electric train service

This is the right decision. In six to seven years' time, Hougang will be linked by MRT. When that happens, it may be possible to get from Hougang or any other part of Singapore to Kuala Lumpur in under three hours by MRT and the Malayan Railway. This is because Malaysia is planning a fast electric train service between Singapore and Kuala Lumpur (KL).

Dr Mahathir has sought Singapore's co-operation to build this high-speed inter-city electric train service. He explained his vision of linking the main Asian cities by fast rail - Singapore to KL, KL to Bangkok, Bangkok to Vientiane and Kunming. There would also be lines to Ho Chi Minh City and Yangon. This is an exciting vision.

In future, when the electric train is linked to our MRT network, you can hop onto an MRT train near your HDB flat and go by the fast train all the way to Kuala Lumpur to visit friends or do business, have dinner, and return

home the same day without being exhausted. A new Customs, Immigration and Quarantine Checkpoint for the Malayan Railway will be built at Woodlands. Passengers can catch the train there or they can do so at Tanjong Pagar as Malayan Railway intends to retain its main station there.

I am excited by Dr Mahathir's electric-train proposal. So are other Asian leaders. I have discussed Dr Mahathir's proposal with Thai, Chinese and Vietnamese leaders. They support the idea. They already have a national train network which can be integrated to form a pan-Asian system.

Europe has long recognised that good transport linkages can bring people living in different countries closer together, promote trade, and strengthen economic, social, political and cultural ties. Europe is now developing a high speed electric train system by the year 2010. They will refurbish some existing rail lines and build new lines, including the Channel Tunnel that now links the United Kingdom (UK) with Continental Europe.

We in Asia can learn from the European model. By linking our cities, we will promote more inter-city travel, greater understanding between our peoples and more avenues and opportunities to work together to create a more prosperous Asia. I believe that if the Asian governments work at it, Dr Mahathir's vision of an Asian fast-train network can be realised in 30 to 40 years' time.

Bukit Panjang Light Railway Transit (LRT)

That is the future. To meet our more immediate domestic transport needs, we will build up our rail-based public transport infrastructure. Not only

will our MRT network be extended over time, we will also build Light Rail to serve as feeders to the MRT network.

The Land Transport Authority has recently completed its studies of two Light Railway Transit (LRT) systems, the Buona Vista LRT and the Bukit Panjang LRT. Based on the tender proposals, the Buona Vista LRT is not at all feasible, even with the new generous financing arrangement.

There is also some financial risk with the Bukit Panjang LRT, but the system is potentially-viable. I am pleased to announce that the Government has decided to build the Bukit Panjang LRT. It will cost at least \$300 million. In three years' time, residents in Bukit Panjang will be able to hop onto the LRT and walk into the MRT for one smooth ride around Singapore.

This will be the first LRT system in Singapore. If it is well accepted, we will implement similar systems in other housing estates where there are sufficient passenger loads to make them viable.

Conclusion

Achieving a world class land transport system takes time. Whether we can do so or not does not depend on the Government alone. It depends on all of us. If the people and the Government continue to work together, as we have done in the past, we will produce the economic growth and budget surpluses to build, not just a world-class transport system, but also the most attractive Singapore for our children to grow up in in the 21st Century.

It is now my pleasure to declare open the Woodlands MRT Line.

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