

Opening Speech

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Distinguished guests and delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Let me extend a warm welcome to all of you to this Forum, and especially to all our overseas friends and guests - a warm welcome to Singapore.
2. The Regional Environmentally Sustainable Transport (EST) Forum is a good platform for Government officials and experts to share best practices and experiences on practical as well as innovative approaches towards environmentally sustainable transport strategies. I am confident that the insights provided by experts and delegates in the course of your deliberations will be useful in helping you shape and formulate your respective national strategies, and also provide opportunities for networking, renewal of ties and friendships.
3. In Singapore, we have just completed our Land Transport Review. The review is really about developing a sustainable and commuter-centric transport system to serve the growing travel demands of our population within our land scarce city-state. This is important so that we can continue to enjoy a high quality urban living environment.
4. For a small country like Singapore, environmental sustainability can have a significant impact on the economy and our people. The pursuit of sustainable developments is certainly not confined to the transport sector alone. It is a national effort. Singapore's Prime Minister Mr Lee Hsien Loong announced at the recent World Economic Forum in Davos that Singapore is establishing an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development (IMCSD). The Committee is tasked to draw up a national framework and strategy to achieve a sustainable and high quality living environment, and to develop Singapore as a leading Eco-City. This is something that we believe in, as Singapore has been pursuing this long before environmental sustainability became a buzz word, for the simple reason that it is an absolute necessity for us to ensure Singapore remains a liveable city.

Public Transport – A Choice Mode

5. Land transport is central in our quest to be a thriving global city with a high quality living environment. Emissions from motorised vehicles, such as hydrocarbons and oxides of nitrogen and carbon, as well as particulate matters, are a significant source of air pollution. In 2005, the transport sector alone contributed 19% of Singapore's CO2 emissions. Therefore, a greater push towards using public transport, reducing car usage, and improving emissions and energy efficiency will contribute significantly towards a better living environment and a better quality of life for Singaporeans. Let me elaborate more on these.

6. First, what we seek to do is to make public transport a choice mode for all commuters, including car owners. With travel demand growing rapidly, and expected to go up by 60% in 2020, it is inevitable that a densely built-up city state like Singapore can only maintain a sustainable and high quality living environment if we make a decisive shift towards public transport. Therefore, Singapore is fine-tuning our policies and investing heavily to put in place initiatives and infrastructure that would promote and increase the mode share for public transport.

7. To do so, we will invest in both the quality and capacity of the public transport system. System unity is critical in our quest for a quality system. We will have the entire public transport system planned as a whole and not as separate parts. The planning is done through the eyes of commuters to best serve their needs. The outcome, quick and direct links to public transport hubs in our hub-and-spoke public transport system and transfers that are seamless. To better serve commuters, there will be integrated travel information and fares.

8. We will expand the Rapid Transit System (RTS) to meet our growing demand for travel in an efficient and sustainable manner. By 2020, we would have doubled our RTS network from 138km today to 278km. This will increase our RTS density from 31 to 51 km per million people, making it comparable to cities like New York and London.

9. Buses are also an integral part of our public transport system, serving locations not covered by the RTS. To improve bus services, we will put in place more initiatives to give buses greater priority on the roads, such as more bus lanes and priority at traffic light junctions, so that buses can travel unimpeded by other traffic. We will also increase the frequency of buses so that waiting times are shorter and buses less crowded, especially during the peak periods. More premium bus services will also be introduced to provide more travel options for those who are prepared to pay extra for comfort.

10. We will also reduce the physical effort of accessing our bus interchanges and MRT stations, especially in our local climate where humidity is high and rain showers can be sudden. We will provide more sheltered walkways to transport nodes and build more integrated public transport hubs where bus interchanges are fully integrated with RTS stations and commercial developments, turning them into lifestyle hubs like Raffles Exchange. This way, commuters making transfers within the integrated transport hubs can do so in greater comfort and with more convenience.

Managing Demand for Road Use To Reduce Congestion & Pollution

11. Besides vastly improving our public transport system, we also need to put in place measures to effectively address congestion that builds up on the roads. What we have realized is that building more roads to solve congestion problems is by itself not a sustainable solution. It merely postpones the problem as the desire to own and to drive cars will rapidly outstrip even the most ambitious road-building programme. Besides, we will simply run out of land to build roads, which is the case for Singapore as already 12% of our land is used for roads. Therefore, while we will continue to build more roads, we need to address the demand for road use. Otherwise, increasing congestion, eventually leading to gridlock, will be an inevitable outcome, exacting significant health and economic costs on society, leading to environmental pollution, loss of productive hours and wasted fuel.

12. In Singapore, we manage congestion using a two-pronged approach, through the Vehicle Quota System (VQS) to keep the growth in vehicle population in check, and through the Electronic Road Pricing (ERP) to price heavily-used roads and expressways so that we can keep them congestion-free. The Land Transport Authority will be sharing more on these in the course of this forum, and we also hope to learn from others their experience in managing road congestion.

Improving Emissions and Promoting Energy Efficient Vehicles

13. Maintaining good air quality is critical for a quality living environment. To do so, we need to improve the emissions from vehicles. This can be achieved through the adoption of more stringent emission standards, or encouraging the use of cleaner fuels, or both. Today, the ambient air in Singapore meets the standards set by the United States Environment Protection Agency (USEPA) and World Health Organization (WHO), except for particulate matters smaller than 2.5 micron (PM2.5) in size.

14. About 50% of the PM2.5 in the ambient air is contributed by diesel-driven vehicles. High levels of PM2.5 are associated with acute bronchitis, aggravated asthma and respiratory diseases, and therefore it needs to be kept in check. Therefore, it is our aim to meet the USEPA standards for PM2.5 by around 2014. To reduce PM emissions, Singapore introduced ultra low sulphur diesel in December 2005 and mandated that, from October 2006, all new diesel vehicles must be Euro IV compliant.

15. Besides promoting public transport which is far more environmentally-friendly and energy-efficient than cars, we also encourage the use of cleaner and more energy efficient vehicles like hybrid and CNG vehicles. Since 2001, we have introduced tax incentives like the Green Vehicle Rebate (GVR) to encourage motorists to consider buying green vehicles. The GVR was enhanced in 2006 to make it more attractive for motorists. We will continue to monitor developments in alternative fuel vehicles, and look into innovative ways to promote cleaner and more energy-efficient vehicles to improve our air quality.

Environmentally Sustainable Practices in Developing Land Transport

16. Singapore is also committed to adopting environmentally sustainable practices in the planning and development of transport infrastructure. When building roads and rail lines, the design and alignment of road and rail infrastructures are planned such that the natural environment is preserved wherever possible. Construction methods are chosen to minimise environmental impact and noise, and where possible, sustainable building materials and methods are used.

17. For example, in the construction of the 180-metre Fort Canning Tunnel, we adopted a special mining method, known as Sprayed Concrete Lining (SCL), for the first time in Singapore. This method was favoured over the conventional cut and cover method for tunnel construction as the latter would have involved felling of trees. By digging the tunnel through the hill, we saved some 35 trees, including an iconic 50 year old Terap tree, and have helped minimise the impact of the works on the existing landscape.

18. Cycling is an environmentally friendly form of transport. Thus we will be doing more to facilitate the growing interest in cycling in Singapore, both for recreational purposes as well as to get around the neighbourhood. To enable cyclists to get to nearby major transport nodes more easily, bicycle parking facilities at the MRT stations and bus interchanges in housing estates will be improved.

Conclusion

19. The overriding goal in our Land Transport Review is to make Singapore a liveable city. The strategies and measures that I have briefly highlighted are the results of more than a year of studies and deliberations. When brought to fruition, they will ensure that we have an environmentally sustainable transport system in a high quality living environment. The initiatives underscore Singapore's commitment towards EST and the various thematic areas spelled out in the Aichi Statement. We hope that by sharing our experiences, they can serve as a useful platform for discussions and deliberations, and delegates will find them useful and beneficial.

20. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the UN Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD), the Ministry of the Environment of the Government of Japan, the National Environment Agency (NEA) and the LTA Academy for successfully organising this forum and I wish all delegates a fruitful discussion and a pleasant stay here in Singapore.

Thank you.