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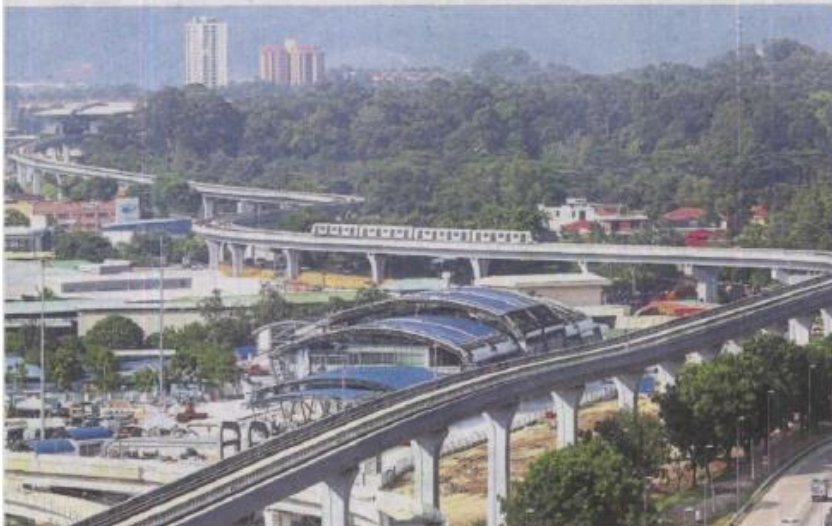


Walking on the edge Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai

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Big on providing better connectivity

The Government is providing more options, and more and more commuters are abandoning their cars in favour of these options.



Smooth ride: An MRT train from the Kampung Selamat station heading towards the Kwasa Damansara station.

A WELL-THOUGHT-OUT and executed urban public transport (UPT) system is key to moving a country forward. It provides greater efficiency in an economy, minimises traffic congestion in a city and more importantly, increases productivity.

Our journey to enhance our UPT began in 2009, aiming to decongest the central business district in the city, improve existing systems, and build new transport infrastructure that provides more convenience to commuters.

At that time, the challenge we had was not just catering to the growing urbanisation in the Greater Kuala Lumpur/Klang Valley (Greater KL/KV) region, but also the need to connect to areas far away from the city, where most commuters reside.

I am, however, pleased to say that we have been progressing well and sustainably.

Our public transport modal share (usage rate), for instance, has increased from 10% in 2009 to 20% at the end of 2015. We have also seen a great increase in the morning peak urban public transport

ridership in the Greater KL/KV area – from 236,412 in 2010 to 435,439 in 2016.

Most recently, in a Land Public Transport Commission poll conducted by an independent party, 84% of public transport users have voiced their satisfaction with the country's public transport services.

In view of the upcoming launch of the National Transport Plan 2016 Annual Report, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the key areas on which we have worked hard for the past year, and how they have positively contributed to our city.

Providing more and better options

With the population of the Greater KL/KV region expected to reach 10 million by 2020, we can expect increased traffic congestion in our city.

This causes not only inconvenience and frustration, but also results in huge economic losses.

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Govt's commitment on the right track

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Our first priority was to alleviate the problem by providing more and better options to commuters. I am proud to say that since 2016, we have successfully completed and launched several infrastructure projects involving the rail network that serves Greater KL/KV.

On Dec 15, 2016, phase one of the Klang Valley Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) Line 1, spanning from Sungai Buloh to Semantan, was officially launched. The completion of this phase represents a significant milestone in the public transportation scene in Malaysia, paving the way towards a world-class public transport system.

Phase two, which stretches from Semantan to Kajang, is expected to be operational by July. We are expecting daily ridership to be about 400,000 passengers, greatly benefiting the people living in the Greater KL/KV region and hopefully, taking a substantial number of cars off our roads!

Additionally, we have seen the completion of the LRT Line Extension Project in July last year, connecting Kelana Jaya and Sri Petaling to Putra Heights. With 13 new stations and 17.4km of new rail tracks added to the popular Kelana Jaya route, we are slowly seeing the uptick in ridership and expect it to increase to an additional 170,000 daily.

On Aug 24, 2016, the Light Rail Transit 3 project was launched. Spanning 37km in length and stretching from Bandar Utama to Kiang, the line is estimated to bene-



Gaining popularity: More people are now using the MRT and LRT to commute.

fit 500,000 commuters along the alignment when completed. It will also provide access to the country's busiest port - Port Klang - as well as pockets of industrial hubs in Shah Alam.

Creating better access to our new options

Another focus is to enhance the first- and last-mile connectivity. This is an effort to ensure sufficient transportation is present to allow commuters to travel from their homes to public transportation hubs (the first-mile connectivity) and from the public transportation hubs to their ultimate destinations (the last-mile connectivity).

In 2016, the BRT Sunway line, which serves 500,000 people in Bandar Sunway and Subang Jaya and connects them to KTM Komuter and LRT, entered its first full year of operations.

This 5.4-km stretch passing through seven stations recorded up to 6,000 commuters daily - 50% more than the previous year. A major contributing factor to the ridership growth was the commencement of the LRT extension in July 2016, which boosted the connectivity and take-up rate on public transport.

To further enhance the first- and last-mile connectivity, the Taxi Industry Transformation Pro-

gramme (TIIP) was introduced in August 2016 to improve the taxi industry in a comprehensive manner. The TIIP encompasses not only the existing fleet of registered taxis, but also the as-yet-unregulated ridesharing/e-hailing services.

Making sure our options are attractive

By far the most difficult area of our journey is to encourage road users to abandon their cars and take up our public transportation. This has been done through a series of initiatives designed to make our transportation options more attractive.

One of our initiatives is the intro-

duction of more "Park n' Ride" facilities along our rail network. In 2016, we witnessed a total of 1,547 new parking bays provided in Park n' Ride facilities at Taman Faramount, Taman Jaya, Taman Bahagia, UKM and Nilai.

Similarly, "Parkway Dropzones", aimed at encouraging car-sharing and acting as a transit facility for bus/taxi passengers to board rail services, were built. The first Parkway Dropzone was completed at Kampung Dato Harun on Sept 13, 2016.

With upcoming projects such as the MRT line two, which stretches from Sungai Buloh to Serdang to Putrajaya, the KL-Singapore High Speed Rail, KL-Klang BRT, etc, already in the pipeline, I am very confident that we will see more successes in 2017.

Change is never easy, and embracing it is even harder. Since 2009, the Government has made a commitment to initiate change in our urban public transport landscape.

We have created different dimensions in integrating our UPT system and creating new avenues (LRT line extensions, MRT, e-hailing services) to open up vantage points that will enable Malaysia to grow.

I believe the results are evident. We still have some way to go in comparison to our advanced neighbours, but we are on track.

Datuk Seri Liew Tiong Lai is the Transport Minister and MCA President. The views expressed here are entirely the writer's own.