

news

# Bus services better after 'quiet revolution'

But fare and route changes needed to not overburden taxpayers, says minister

ZHAKI ABDULLAH, THE STRAITS TIMES

A "quiet revolution" in the bus industry has led to better service levels, from shorter waiting times to less crowded buses, over the recent years.

But these enhancements have come on the back of subsidies borne by taxpayers – subsidies that are set to grow, said Transport Minister Khaw Boon Wan yesterday.

To ensure that the burden on taxpayers does not become excessive, he said commuters have to understand the need for fare adjustments and regular optimisation of bus services, which may require services to be re-routed or merged.

Such measures are not popular among residents along routes that are being adjusted, he added, and the authorities are "constantly under pressure from residents" to retain bus services.

"Yet the need for rationalisation is important," Mr Khaw said, pointing out that bus services with low ridership would mean a waste of subsidies.

Over the past five years, he noted, the Government has spent \$1.1 billion to help bring in 1,000 new buses and 80 new services.

The next five years will see subsidies hit \$4 billion as the transition to the bus contracting model – where the Government owns all fixed and operating assets and operators are paid a fixed sum to ply services – is completed.

To meet the needs of a growing public bus sector, more than 1,100 bus technicians and engineers will be required here by 2030, said Mr Khaw.

Another quiet revolution is emerging through the use of more advanced technologies, said Mr Khaw, from Web-based diagnostic tools and predictive maintenance to ensure buses run smoothly, to the emergence of hybrid and electric buses.

These mean new maintenance challenges for bus technicians and engineers, he said at the signing of an agreement – between the Land Transport Authority (LTA), the four public bus operators and stakeholders such as the Institute of Engineers, Singapore (IES) – to raise the competencies of bus technicians, at the Devan Nair Institute for Employment and Employability in Jurong East.

A new certification for bus technicians, with industry-wide recognition, that is being

introduced will not only enhance their employability but also prepare them for emerging technologies and create industry-wide benchmarks for the proficiency of technicians.

By the middle of next year, bus technicians can be certified at three levels, depending on their competency.

The certification, to be jointly awarded by LTA and IES, will require candidates to pass a test of proficiency and understanding of areas such as the propulsion and pneumatic systems of buses.

By the middle of next year, two other initiatives will be introduced to raise the professional standing of bus technicians and engineers.

Automotive and bus engineers will be able to have their experience recognised through a charterhip, a form of professional accreditation, administered by IES.

The Singapore Bus Academy will also work with the Institute of Technical Education and bus operators here to develop a bridging course for ITE graduates who wish to become bus technicians.

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## Promoting mental wellness at work

ANG TIAN TIAN

Six in 10 of employees who say they have depression hide the condition from their employers, a survey by Silver Ribbon Singapore (SRS) shows.

Reasons include fear of putting jobs at risk (23.4 per cent) and feeling employers would not understand (12.8 per cent).

Dr Lee Cheng, president of SRS, a non-profit mental health advocacy organisation, said at the Silver Ribbon Workplace Emotional Health and Wellness Summit yesterday: "There is still a stigma in society and some degree of self-stigmatisation."

The stigma is amplified by the mental health query found on most job application forms, he told The New Paper.

The Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices state that job application forms should only ask for relevant information that assesses an applicant's suitability for the job.

Said Dr Lee: "When society becomes more accepting, (people with mental illnesses)

will be comfortable declaring their conditions on their own."

Speaker of Parliament Tan Chuan-Jin said at the event: "Employers need to invest in mental health promotion because the mental well-being of employees have a direct impact on the workplace."

He said a mental health-friendly workplace can raise morale, teamwork and communication, and reduce staff turnover and the cost of training and recruitment.

The event saw 32 organisations pledging to support workplace mental health.

Ms Low Wan Ve, 43, human resource director at National Council of Social Service, which employs people with mental illnesses, said it has support groups and counsellors to promote inclusiveness.

Ms Naama Ben-Yehoyada, 44, director of Bailey Balfour, a consultancy firm that took the pledge, said: "By being supportive, employers can... boost productivity and performance."

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## NEA: Chemical stench came from Johor

The chemical stench that cloaked the island on Monday came from Pasir Gudang in Johor, investigations have revealed.

The National Environment Agency (NEA) said yesterday that the Malaysian Department of Environment (DOE) had identified the source of the smell and would be taking action.

"The DOE has deployed resources in identifying the source of the smell. It has traced the source to an industrial facility in Pasir Gudang and is taking action against the operator," NEA said in a statement posted on its Facebook page. — THE STRAITS TIMES

## Age is no barrier to his athletic prowess

ARUL JOHN

He may be 78 but Mr Ng Song Piak still loves to walk and run.

The retired accountant is taking part in the National Steps Challenge Big Walk 2017 with his wife, Madam Yeo Get Tiang, 72.

Mr Ng has been a regular face at walking and running events for more than 30 years.

Some of the races he has joined include the Singapore Free Press Big Walk, the Malay Mail Walk as well as the Mobil Marathon.

A member of local running club Red Hawk Sports Club, Mr



Mr Ng Song Piak and Madam Yeo Get Tiang and some of the race awards they have won over the years. TNP PHOTO: ARULNATHAN JOHN

Ng has also taken part in about 50 marathons overseas, including the Christmas Island 50th Year Anniversary Half Marathon, races in Phuket, Khon Kaen and Hat Yai in Thailand, Mount Fuji in Japan and Mount Kinabalu in Malaysia.

Mr Ng said: "My wife and I began doing long walks and runs for health and fitness more

than 30 years ago. We were then living at Neptune Court, and there were many places for walks and runs.

"Then I started taking part in races outside Singapore too."

He added: "When I took part in the Standard Chartered Singapore Marathon (in 2013 and 2014), many of the younger runners started strong and fast, and



## National Steps Challenge

**WHEN** Sunday, Nov 26, 7am  
**WHERE** Starts at National Stadium, Singapore Sports Hub  
**HOW** Register online at [tnpbigwalk.sg](http://tnpbigwalk.sg)  
**REGISTRATION FEE** \$25 (Early-bird sign-ups enjoy a 25 per cent discount)  
**WIN** You stand to win lots of lucky draw prizes, including the grand prize of an Osim uLove Massage Chair (bespoke version) worth \$9,585

The National Steps Challenge, launched by the Health Promotion Board (HPB), will be back for a third campaign.

Download the Healthy 365 mobile app and sign up for National Steps Challenge Season 3. Find out how you can sign up and collect your free HPB steps tracker. Terms and conditions apply.

Visit [stepschallenge.sg](http://stepschallenge.sg) for more information.

I was left behind.

"Some of them later got tired and started walking, but I ran steadily and eventually overtook them."

Mr Ng said that he completed the Boston Marathon in "just under 5½ hours" in 2006.

A "credible time considering my age at the time", he said.

But he has had to put up his

running shoes since last October after he had a fall.

He is hoping that to get back into action with the Big Walk.

"My wife and I are confident that we can do the Big Walk," he said.

"We are aiming to enjoy the walk and the company."

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