

04/08/1997

City Hall takes it easy over delay in common ticketing system

Sager Ahmad

WHEN the first section of the Light Rail Transit system swung into operation on Dec 16 last year, hopes were high that it was the beginning of the end of Kuala Lumpur's eternal traffic woes.

But when the service - managed by Sistem Transit Aliran Ringan Sdn Bhd - was discussed in the Dewan Rakyat last week, a different picture emerged.

Despite being in service for seven months now, the LRT has consistently failed to reach its targeted daily passenger load of 220,000 and has only attracted between 40,000 and 45,000 commuters.

Why the huge discrepancy? Problems, according to Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Ibrahim Saad, when replying to a question from Barisan Nasional MP for Segambut Dr Tan Kee Kwong.

Problems like the public's unfamiliarity with the system, the perception among some that the fare is too high and the fact that the service has not been linked to other rail services yet.

Ibrahim appeared to have hit a few nails on the head but apparently missed several others in the process.

His misses: The fact that the Star-LRT system has been hampered by a poor feeder bus service, provided for in this case by Intrakota Consolidated Sdn Bhd.

Commuters have complained of long waits of up to one hour for the buses that ferry them to and from LRT stations, which obviously defeats the purpose of taking the LRT in the first place.

Intrakota has also been known not to service certain areas.

In addition, Star-LRT clarified that its passenger capacity had increased to 55,000 passengers a day. Nothing to shout about perhaps but it does promise better things to come.

But is the Star-LRT service as expensive as some commuters strongly feel?

Paying RM2.95 for a 25-minute ride over 12km between the Ampang and Sultan Ismail stations is more expensive than, say, a bus ride over the same distance.

But when one considers the ease of travel compared to a bus or taxi ride, both of which are usually held up by road congestion, the cost could be justified.

Star also has a case for charging the rates: it has to recover its RM3.5 billion investment. In short, commuters have to pay for a service that is efficient, reliable, punctual and safe.

While there have been several negative factors weighing against the LRT service, there are also encouraging developments.

Star-LRT has projected its 10 millionth passenger in the middle of this month. Another improvement is the reduction in arrival time interval from the present five minutes to four minutes from today

Mooted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who did not like the worsening traffic condition in the city, the LRT holds great promise for city commuters.

But like any other mega public project, there are bound to be hiccups in the operation of any transport system serving a city of Kuala Lumpur's size, especially if it stands alone without yet being linked up with other services planned for the future.

Kuala Lumpur's traffic after all is to be handled by an integrated public transport system made up of the KTM Kommuter, Putra LRT, monorail

system, and the express rail link.

Perhaps only after the successful implementation of the common ticketing system when these other services are in place, will the Star-LRT service be able to meet its targets - and promises.

A common body, acceptable by all in the same manner of a clearing house, is needed to evaluate, divide and dispense the amount due to each operator.

A consultant appointed to study the common ticketing system has yet to submit its report to City Hall, which is acting as the co-ordinating body.

City Hall should put its foot down and demand that the consultant buck up: the report is six months overdue.

The seven public transport companies in the Klang Valley which signed the memorandum of understanding on the common ticketing system should go all out to ensure an efficient service as soon as possible.

They are all major players in the field - KTM Bhd, Park May Berhad, Intrakota, Prokej Usahasama Transit Ringan Automatik Sdn Bhd and Star-LRT.

Express Rail Link Sdn Bhd, an express train to the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang from the Kuala Lumpur Sentral station in Brickfields and the People Mover Rapid Transit System, a monorail system which is part of the proposed Kuala Lumpur Linear City, are also in the group.

The common ticketing system is expected to be implemented before the 16th Commonwealth Games in September next year.

But till then, the traffic nightmare will still be the norm and not the exception in Kuala Lumpur.

(END)