

# Take a ride into the future

A GROUP of journalists was recently given a taste of the mass rapid transit service that will be opened to public tomorrow. Among them was *Malay Mail's* Ida Nadirah Ibrahim. Here, she takes readers along for the ride.

MY most recent memory of riding on a mass rapid transit abroad was back in 2011 in Hong Kong, where about 90 per cent of the population use public transportation.

For two months, I travelled across the small island on foot, by train, bus, and an occasional taxi, most of the time accompanied by my parents along with a buggy and my then three-month-old son.

What made the travel possible was the effectiveness of their railway system in terms of convenience and connectivity.

That said, I am looking forward to the opening of the Klang Valley Mass Rapid Transit (KVMRT) lines.

It is understood that Malaysia is much younger in rail transport, in comparison to Hong Kong's Mass Transit Railway, which has 37 years of experience with 218.2km of rail across the island.

But the effort of Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) Corp in planning the alignment of their lines inspires confidence in rail transport among Malaysians, especially within the Klang Valley.

As I stepped into the MRT station in Mutiara Damansara for the first time on Wednesday, the brightly lit station with light monotone finishing and natural lighting gave a warm welcome despite the gloomy and wet weather outside.

The wide concourse area will allow for a large group of people to move through the station with ease, especially during peak hours.

Every station is equipped with staircases, escalators and elevators. There was also adequate slim and sleek automatic fare collection gates.



Members of the media take a train ride from Mutiara Damansara Station to Samantan and back on SBK Line.

The MRT platform, is lit up with more natural light from the high ceiling, and a large and clear signage of the station's name, "Mutiara Damansara".

Each platform is installed with automatic platform gates which protect commuters from crossing over the rail track to avoid unnecessary hazards.

Entering the train, it was fascinating to find how spacious — both in width and height — they were with four cars able to fit up to 1,200 people.

The extended width not only gives more space for standing commuters, but also provide ample space for riders travelling with baby strollers or shopping carts.

Designed by BMW DesignWorks USA, the new MRT, much like the stations and platforms, brings forth an inviting, light and fresh environment with ergonomically designed seats with soothing shades of blue.

Safety is again given priority as the interior is equipped with CCTV cameras connected to the operation control centre. The train also provides designated areas for wheelchair users and priority seats.

Although MRT Corp project director for the SBK line Marcus Karakashian had pointed out stringent testing had been conducted for six months, he said teething problems could still occur.

The 17-minute ride from Mutiara Damansara to Semantan went quite smoothly.

The MRT travelled at a speed of only between 30 and 40 km/hr, but that still felt quite fast. I could never imagine driving from Mutiara Damansara to Semantan in less than 20 minutes.

Although there will be only 12 stations opened to the public tomorrow, the MRT can already be seen as a convenient mode of transportation, especially in the Damansara area where there was previously no train.

With the link between Mutiara Damansara and Bandar Utama stations, shoppers can simply board a train and jump to the next station at the cost of RM1.30



(From left) Feeder bus & infrastructure planning head Rudyanto Azhar, commercial & land management director Datuk Haris Fadzilah Hassan, Karakashian and strategic communications & stakeholder relations director Datuk Najmuddin Abdullah smile as they show their satisfaction on the new train of SBK Line. — Pictures by Ahmad Zamzahuri

The buses too are also installed with internal CCTV cameras for safety of passengers. The buses will run at a frequency of between 10 and 15 minutes and will operate daily from 5.30am, ready to fetch riders for their first train ride at 6am.

As MRT Corp has also admitted, it is a challenge convincing Malaysians to use public transportation as they are concerned about the level of convenience but hopefully, MRT will change their mind.

According to the 2015 World Bank study "Malaysian Economic Monitor, Transforming Urban Transport", only 17 per cent of commuters in Kuala Lumpur use public transportation, as compared to 62 per cent in Singapore and 89 per cent in Hong Kong.

But traffic congestion in the city centre has also resulted in

250 million hours a year or 1 million wasted hours daily being stuck in traffic, adding up to RM20 billion/year or RM64 million/day in economic loss and up to RM2 billion worth of extra petrol wasted.

Other hidden personal and societal costs includes more than 50 per cent of the population becoming physically inactive, and higher stress levels.

Malaysia is far from being at the global level in terms of public transportation, but it does not need to take that long provided we are given options in terms of routes and convenience.

The mindset of the public also needs to change to see that public transportation in Klang Valley fares better than driving as it will bring beneficial impact in terms of a cleaner environment, economy, time, as well as health.

per trip without having to move their vehicle from one venue to the next.

Currently, there is no direct link from One Utama shopping mall and the MRT Bandar Utama station, but Karakashian said construction was underway to connect the two to ease access for commuters.

He said, similarly, the Curve Mutiara Damansara mall would in the future be linked to the station to encourage the public to use their vehicles less when visiting places of interest and in turn ease traffic congestion.

MRT Corp has also provided a total of 112 feeder buses operating on 25 routes from the 12 stations in Phase 1.