



On your side Brian Martin
@KlangRed

The new go-to mode of transport

In its first week of operation, the MRT Sungai Buloh-Kajang line is already a winner. But there is still room for improvement.

THE challenge: Get to Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman for lunch at Kudu Bin Abdul Nasi Kandar. The catch: Use the MRT.

Challenge accepted! My colleague Rozaid Abdul Rahman, a true blue Penangite, has been singing the praises of Kudu, a legendary Penang Nasi Kandar that has operated at the same location since 1969. We finally got around to doing it, but we decided the best way to get to Kuala Lumpur during lunch time was via the MRT.

So, Wednesday was a day of two firsts for me. Eating in Kudu and trying out the newly launched MRT Sungai Buloh-Kajang (SBK) line. I have to say, both did not disappoint.

It's no surprise to me that ridership on the MRT has spiked almost overnight. I attribute this to two things – the novelty of using the service and also the convenience and cost.

At only RM1.60 for a one-way ride to the Bukit Bintang Station from the Phileo Damansara station, it is ridiculously cheap (there is a special 50% discount on ticket prices and this is set to be lifted after

It's a no-brainer, fast, efficient and cheap.

National Day). And it only took us 25 minutes to get to the heart of KL in Bukit Bintang.

The customer service staff at the Phileo station were courteous and knowledgeable. When told of our intended destination, they suggested the route and connections. The stations themselves are spacious and super clean, as were the trains.

The public service announcements in the stations and on the trains, in both Bahasa Malaysia and English, were particularly helpful.

On our trip, I noticed staff helping an old lady in a wheelchair onto the train. To my surprise, each carriage has special areas for wheelchairs and also lower handholds for handicapped commuters.

The 51km MRT line seems to have had an immediate impact on

commuters. I noticed a mixed group of passengers on my round trip – multi-racial, different age groups, blue collar and white collar. And this, I think is key if the SBK line's stated aim of taking 160,000 cars off the road is to come to fruition – the service has to appeal to commuters of all income groups.

In Bukit Bintang, there was a short walk to the monorail station to connect to Medan Tuanku. My only gripe here was that there was no covered walkway for commuters who were moving from one station to another.

There is a glaring difference between the MRT and monorail services. While the former is spanking new, the latter looks aged and due for a major overhaul. The two-car carriages are crammed with commuters and I can only imagine what it is like during peak hours.

In this respect, there isn't a seamless connectivity between the two services. The monorail connects most of the Golden Triangle area and thus is a vital public transportation tool, but passengers moving from the MRT to the monorail will

find the difference jarring.

The monorail's connectivity has to improve because its two-car carriages, already at peak capacity, will be grossly inadequate for the projected increase in ridership due to the MRT.

Ticket prices, though, are still low: RM1.10 for my ride to Medan Tuanku. Once there, Kudu Nasi Kandar was a leisurely 10 minutes stroll via a series of covered walkways that Kuala Lumpur City Hall has built and is continuing to build to make the city pedestrian-friendly.

My cost, then, for a return trip to Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman was a grand total of RM5.40. Taking a Grab or Uber for the same distance would have more than doubled it; catching a taxi would have tripled it. And if I had elected to drive, I reckon the round trip would have used about RM10 worth of petrol even before I factor in parking charges.

So, there you have it. My new go-to mode of transport, especially if I have to get to KL, will be the MRT.

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and cheap. And that's why I don't get some of the criticism thrown at the project. I've taken the subways and light rail transports in countries like New York, London, Paris, Bangkok and Singapore and our MRT is comparable and in some respects better than these countries.

Is there room for improvement? For sure. I've spoken to friends and colleagues who have told me about vandalism at some stations, dirty escalators, litter in station compounds and even the lengthy walk to get to other services at the Muzium Negara interchange, but bear in mind that it's only been a week since the SBK line has been operational.

Let's give the project's owner a little time to sort out the teething issues, because the MRT is truly world class and a mode of transport that all Malaysians should be proud of.

The writer is looking forward to two upcoming innovations on the MRT – free WiFi and an app that allows you to plan your journey and plot your route.