Helping commuters cope in a major MRT breakdown

Getting passengers home

Last Tuesday night, when SMRT had to shut down the two lines which are the backbone of the train system, thousands of commuters spilled out of the exits of 54 stations.

SMRT staff putting up a sign about the train disruption at the bus stop outside Braddell MRT. Fifty-four stations were affected by the shutdown of two MRT lines last Tuesday.

Experts agreed that additional buses that evening could have been better utilised to disperse the crowd. A more effective way would have been to arrange for buses to take commuters to transport nodes, including bus interchanges, where commuters will have more bus services to choose from.

These buses should take passengers to designated centres, but can also drop off commuters at other bus interchanges such as Bowen MRT, Jurong East or Tampines, said Mr. Danson Cheong from engineering consultancy Witteveen+Bos, which also specialises in urban transport management.

Another good way to deploy the buses is to have them run parallel to the train line, noted National University of Singapore transport researcher Lee Der Horng. “This means people can still use it in lieu of the MRT,” said Prof Lee.

Other experts, such as Professor Lau Hoong Chuin of the Singapore Management University (SMU), suggested using existing transit card data to understand commuters’ travel patterns at different stations and plan shuttle buses accordingly.