

March 11, 2005

Smoother traffic around Ngee Ann City soon

\$2 million worth of roadworks start this month and are expected to last five months

By Goh Chin Lian

IN AN effort to ease the frequent traffic snarl-ups near Ngee Ann City shopping mall in Orchard Road, \$2 million worth of changes will be made to roads in the area.

The roadworks are part of an inter-agency effort to turn the shopping street into a more attractive tourist stop, an issue that was raised during the ongoing Budget debate.

To improve traffic flow along Orchard Link, that part of the road between Somerset Road and Orchard Boulevard will be turned into a one-way street, a part of Grange Road next to the skating park will be widened, and a stretch of Somerset Road next to Cineleisure Orchard mall will be closed.

The popular open-air 85-lot carpark next to the closed stretch of Somerset Road will be closed as well, possibly to make way for developments in an area earmarked for youth activities.

Last week, the chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Transport, Mr Ong Kian Min (Tampines GRC), described the roads in the Ngee Ann City area as a 'traffic nightmare' that could 'convince people to avoid the area'.

The Land Transport Authority said as much in its press release yesterday, pointing to Grange Road, Somerset Road (between Grange Road and Orchard Link), Orchard Link and Orchard Turn, and added that the situation there worsens during festive seasons.

Converting Orchard Link into a one-way street entirely and removing the traffic lights at the junction of that road and Orchard Turn would allow 'vehicles to travel through Orchard Link without having to stop at the junction', it said.

It added that it will keep the same number of lanes open to traffic during the roadworks, which start this month and are expected to take five months. The skating park frequented by teenagers will be closed during that period.

Motorists and Orchard Road businesses however are not too taken with the plans.

For instance, Mr Chan Chek Chuan, 43, a general manager who drives to Orchard Road every weekend, reckoned that the closure of the Somerset Road stretch will make it less convenient for him to get to Ngee Ann City as he will have to make a detour at Grange Road.

Motorists also suggested changing Orchard Turn, which serves Ngee Ann City and Wisma Atria, into a one-way street.

No, the LTA said, as it would force motorists to leave the Electronic Road Pricing zone when they came out from the shopping complexes there. It added that the benefit of making Orchard Turn one-way is 'not significant'.

Cathay Cineleisure conceded the changes may ease the traffic problem 'somewhat'.

'At least it's a start to addressing the situation,' said a spokesman for the development, but added that closing the carpark will only worsen the shortage of parking in the area.

The Urban Redevelopment Authority, which manages the carpark, said it will monitor the situation and provide replacement lots in phases if these are necessary.

The Straits Times understands that besides the road improvements, there are also plans to have clearer signage for underpasses in Orchard Road to prevent jaywalking.

The LTA has also awarded a \$493,800 contract to improve an underpass linking Lucky Plaza to Ngee Ann City.