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Steps to ease Orchard Road jam

- **Bus lane hours extended to off-peak periods from Oct**
- **ERP till 8pm and on Saturdays too**

By Goh Chin Lian

THE bus lane along Orchard Road will be off-limits to motorists not only during peak hours but also off-peak hours, from October.

The Land Transport Authority (LTA) said it is trying out the scheme to allow buses to travel faster for six months, in the hope it will persuade more people to take them instead of driving into the shopping belt.

It announced the change yesterday, together with its plan to reintroduce Electronic Road Pricing (ERP) along the shopping street on Saturdays and extend the hours when it levies the toll to 8pm, as part of efforts to ease traffic jams there.

Motorists caught for using the lane between Paterson Road and Dhoby Ghaut from 7.30am to 8pm, Monday to Saturday, can get four demerit points and be fined \$130.

If the scheme works, the LTA may introduce it elsewhere.

It said traffic along Orchard Road slows to less than 20kmh after noon on weekdays and Saturdays 'till as late as 8pm'.

Motorist Glen Lim, 34, a senior sales manager, criticised the plan, saying: 'People want the convenience of driving in, so they don't have to carry their shopping bags. The parking situation is already ridiculous, and now you're basically telling people not to go to Orchard Road to shop.'

The extension of the ERP to deal with congestion also drew criticism from MP Ong Kian Min, who chairs the Government Parliamentary Committee for Transport. He described it as 'taking the easy way out'.

The real problem is the poorly-designed traffic system, which cannot cope with the huge amount of vehicle traffic, he said. There are just too many traffic lights and too many pedestrians crossing the road.

He also sees imposing the ERP on the Central Expressway (CTE) between 6pm and 8pm on weekdays as unnecessary.

Motorists who want to avoid getting stuck there already know they should take an alternative route or travel at a different time, he said.

Lawyer Satwant Singh, 41, is upset about the upcoming change.

'I'm extremely disappointed. It's like a punishment for buying a house in the north. I pass through two gantries on the CTE in the morning to work, and pay \$3.50. Now I'll have to pay another \$1 to

get home,' he said.

The LTA offered a glimmer of hope for motorists like him when it said yesterday that a second expressway, running almost parallel to the CTE, is in the planning stage.

The so-called North-South Expressway is expected to relieve the CTE's peak load of 9,500 vehicles per hour - three times the volume recorded when it opened in 1991, when the population in the northern part of the island was relatively small.

But LTA chief executive Yam Ah Mee said the focus now is to complete the Kallang-Paya Lebar Expressway (KPE), which is also seen as helping to alleviate the CTE's congestion.

The 12km expressway stretches from East Coast Parkway in the south to the Tampines Expressway in the north-east.

Its southern portion will be ready by end-2007, and the northern part by early 2008.

The Government now collects about \$77 million a year in road tolls. It used to be \$100 million in the days of the area-licensing scheme.