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Security cameras on most buses, trains soon

Video surveillance system may be in place as early as next year, says LTA

By Christopher Tan
SENIOR CORRESPONDENT

COMMUTERS can expect the majority of buses and trains here to be outfitted with surveillance cameras as early as next year, the Land Transport Authority (LTA) indicated yesterday.

Most of the fleet of 3,500 buses will have these closed-circuit cameras - which will record and store video images - in 'one or two years' time', said LTA chief executive Yam Ah Mee.

Cameras are already on board the 25 trains on the driverless North-East Line and the authority is looking to do the same for trains on the rest of the network to complement the 2,300 cameras at MRT and LRT stations today.

'The cameras on board MRT trains today are for operational purposes,' Mr Yam said. 'But we are looking to see if we can modify the system for security.'

Mr Yam said there would be between five and nine cameras onboard each bus, 'depending on... whether it is a double-decker or single-decker'.

The roll-out plan comes after Transport Minister Yeo Cheow Tong told Parliament that security along the public transport system will be beefed up in the wake of the attacks on London's transport system last July.

Several major cities have cameras installed in their public transport systems to deter crime and to allow authorities to act swiftly in emergencies.

British authorities had used images captured by a network of 500,000 cameras to track down perpetrators of the July 2005 attacks. London has also just completed a five-year project to fit all its 8,000 public buses with closed-circuit cameras.

And since the Sept 11 attacks in the US, transport operators in America have invested over US\$2 billion (S\$3.4 billion) on security measures, and are asking Washington to help fund a further US\$6 billion.

Mr Yam was speaking at yesterday's signing of a memorandum of cooperation between the LTA and Transport for London, its equivalent in London. The two sides will exchange expertise and views on ticketing systems, congestion pricing, integrated transport systems, traveller information and security.

The chief executive did not have details on the camera plans, but The Straits Times understands the authority had already asked for estimates from system suppliers.

Informed sources reckon equipping the 3,500 buses could cost between \$10.5 million and \$105 million, depending on the complexity and durability of the system. It excludes the cost of a central

control where images are downloaded to computer servers.

The question of who would foot the bill is still up in the air, but chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee on Transport, Mr Ong Kian Min, thinks it should be borne by both the Government and the transport companies.

'The Government, because public security, crime prevention and anti-terrorist measures are national issues. The transport companies, because they are in the business of providing a service and need to give customers a sense of security... as well as to safeguard their own assets.'

He said companies were likely to pass on the cost to commuters but reckons the impact on fares will be minimal.

Housewife Margaret Wong, 42, who wrote to The Straits Times Forum last December suggesting cameras be installed after noticing unattended suitcases on the train she was on, was pleased with the news.

'They will not only monitor unattended bags, but can also monitor any mischief or crime,' she added.

Last month, SBS Transit unveiled the prototype of its wheelchair-accessible double-decker bus - which comes with the cameras. It will have 150 such buses this year, starting next month. Its spokesman declined to say more about the camera system, except that it was 'one possible configuration that we could consider'.

christan@sph.com.sg