

Newspaper: The Straits Times

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Title: POOR DESIGN OF NEW BUS MAKES THINGS WORSE

ANYONE who has taken a ride on the new SBS Transit buses (for example, service 72 or 147) may feel the same way I do: It has such a poor design. This is especially noticeable during peak hours.

Although the new bus design is nicer on the exterior, it has totally failed in the interior. Let's start at the rear of the interior.

At the rear, there is room for only a single passenger to stand. When someone wants to alight and tries to move out from a back row seat, the standing passenger in the middle of the aisle has difficulty moving aside to make way.

The aisle in the middle of the bus is narrow too, and has space for only a single line of standing passengers. The old design could accommodate double standing lines.

The ceiling is also too low. Taller passengers cannot stand in the aisle in the middle of the bus.

At the rear of the bus, there are two seats on either side facing each other. The design of these seats is questionable too. Very few passengers take them. Often, the whole bus is packed and these seats are left empty. They are a waste of space on board.

And the step up to the rear of the bus is too high, which makes it a safety hazard. This is bad for passengers, especially the elderly. I saw many of them having difficulty climbing up or down the step. Some did not notice it, or forgot it was there, and almost tripped.

Why design such a high step? Is it to discourage people from moving to the rear of the bus, or to discourage them from standing there?

Maybe because of all this, most passengers prefer to stand near the front exit, which is also the area for handicapped passengers. This area becomes packed as everyone squeezes in there and refuses to move to the rear.

Hence the new design is no improvement on the old one. In fact, it is worse.

Isn't the new design supposed to accommodate more passengers?

The driver likes to yell at passengers to move to the rear, but I guess he hardly looks at the rear himself. With so little space, how can passengers move to the rear? We commuters are really trying already.

I hope the next bus design will be better and able to accommodate more passengers in safety.

Hong Bao Kun

REPLY FROM SBS TRANSIT

New buses designed to be more 'elderly-friendly'

I REFER to the letter, 'Poor design of new buses makes things worse' (ST, May 19), by Mr Hong Bao Kun.

Since we rolled out our new wheelchair-accessible buses in June last year, we have received much feedback on the interior and exterior design of the bus. The large majority of these are compliments.

In cases where commuters are unhappy with the design, as is the case with Mr Hong, we will take their comments into consideration when acquiring our next batch of buses.

Let me explain the rationale behind some of the design changes. To cater to an ageing society, we have designed buses to be more 'elderly-friendly'. Hence, all new buses are 'zero-stepped'. This makes for easier boarding.

The trouble with zero-step buses is that the engines cannot be housed in the front portion of the bus, as is usually the case. The engine cavity is thus located at the rear, thus the need for a raised floorboard.

Knowing that the elderly will have problems getting to the back, we have earmarked more 'elderly seats' in the front of the bus. Unfortunately, many younger and more able-bodied passengers tend to take up these seats and do not offer them voluntarily to the elderly when they board.

We would like to encourage the less elderly to give up their seats in the front of the bus should older passengers come on board.

For safety reasons, the raised floorboard/step, which is 205mm high - and within the Land Transport Authority's guideline of 230mm - is marked with bright yellow strips on the edges. To further enhance passenger safety, we are increasing the width of the yellow strip.

Concerning the two pairs of seats facing the row of seats in the rear, this is a design

constraint as this is where the wheel arch is located. Although these seats cannot be front-facing, we have noticed that they are popular with students, families and groups of friends travelling together.

With regard to the width of the aisle and the ceiling height, these are comparable to those in our other bus models.

We will continue to seek the views of passengers when we order new buses as we are committed to serving our customers better.

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SBS Transit