

By DHARSHINI CHANDRAN

# On track to advancement

AFTER nine months, the effects of the new MRT project on the South-East Kuala Lumpur region comprising Balakong, Kajang and Semenyih have made their ways to the surface and birthed dramatic changes.

From previous observations, when connectivity to mature neighbourhoods are improved or heightened, property prices move upwards and continue doing so, as evident in areas such as Kelana Jaya and Taman Bahagia.

In Kuala Lumpur, the implications of heightened public transport accessibility simply mean less driving and consequently, less time being stuck in traffic jams as well as less money spent on tolls.

For residents of this dense city, this offer would appear attractive.

## Growth promoting growth

As was the case with the opening of the Sri Rampai LRT station, new property developments start popping up around public transport stations as soon as construction is confirmed.

“The first thing that happens is that developers use MRT stations as their main selling point. We can see them mentioned in almost every property advertisement nowadays,” says MNP Auctioneers (Central) Sdn Bhd chief operating officer and kopianproperty.com’s executive editor Charles Tan, referring to the developments blooming along the newly opened Kajang-Sungai Buloh MRT line.

Residents of South-East Kuala Lumpur who have been driving to work for years before the operations of the MRT, now face a choice in lifestyle change.

In Tan’s opinion, not many new buyers would want to uproot and purchase property in an area without good connectivity, regardless of whether the connectivity stems from public train lines or expressways.

Parking spaces at these new stations are a concern however, especially during weekdays.

The lack of shuttle buses between these stations and their surrounding neighbourhoods shows residents in the vicinity have to drive to the stations and only a few have sufficient parking bays.

Walkability in these areas have not been developed yet and even short distances are not walkable or bikeable. Fortunately, an easy solution exists in the form of ride-hailing services, though they are limited in availability in far-flung areas.

Tan also surmises that the MRT



stations in South-East Kuala Lumpur may not necessarily be the main attraction point for new homebuyers.

“I think it is far more important to look at all other aspects and not just connectivity. For example, taking the MRT to work could still take a longer travel time. However, if it outweighs the stress from driving through traffic jams then, it is worth buying a home in the area.

“Another example would be the availability of nurseries and schools in the area especially for those with toddlers or children. Regardless of how well-connected the MRT line is, I do not think many parents are ready to allow their kids to take it to school yet,” says Tan.

The MRT line may just take a little more getting used to for parents in this region, as it would be more convenient to let their children hop on the train to school

and not drive to two or three different places in the morning to drop children off.

Schoolchildren in public and private school uniforms are a common sight on the LRTs in and around central Kuala Lumpur.

Tan also cautions against purchasing a home around an MRT station just because it is the new trend.

According to him, high connectivity is a good reason to buy a home but homebuyers should note the relevance of this benefit to themselves and consider other aspects as well.

As the South-East Kuala Lumpur MRT stations are still green, we can still look forward to changes they spark in surrounding neighbourhoods.

## Too much of a good thing?

Predictable complaints regarding the MRT project include concerns

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such as noise level, waste management, human traffic and security of surrounding neighbourhoods.

Besides that, secondary areas, which are not within the new routes could lose some of their attractiveness and ultimately lead to a drop-in property value.

As someone who rides the MRT from the area a few times weekly, Tan observes that the ridership is not too high yet.

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“It will take a little time because the alternative travelling options to the MRT is not that prohibitive yet as they are in more advanced nations with urban public trains.

The cost of not utilising public trains in places such as New York City are extremely prohibitive,

which made the people transition to using trains much faster,” says Tan.

Evidently, people do not flock to residential developments around new MRT stations and buy new homes simply due to heightened connectivity. Some buyers and upscale areas in the region will not even be affected by the MRT stations.

As for those still riding motorcycles to work from South-East Kuala Lumpur to other ends of the city, maintaining their current mode of transport is still the cheaper option.

## More towns, more people

There is no doubt that the new MRT line makes areas further out from the Kuala Lumpur city centre more attractive, especially to homebuyers who want more affordable homes than property in the city, which usually makes them focus their attention on the south-east as the west is fast becoming densely populated.

Tan believes that developer brand names are also a major attraction point for homebuyers in the region, with bigger brand names fetching premium property prices regardless of whether or not there is an MRT line nearby.

Looking at results so far, the MRT line will definitely bring about a degree of advancement to South-East Kuala Lumpur but it is only one piece of the whole puzzle. “As long as there is population growth due to urbanisation, property prices in mature areas are certain to rise.

“When we look around today, areas that were once invisible among potential choices have now started to appear as viable options,” says Tan, implying the growth of other older, less developed towns in Greater Kuala Lumpur.

