NTU and CleanTech Park to serve as urban mobility testbed

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HOPPING onto an e-bike or driverless vehicle could be the new way to travel around Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and the nearby JTC CleanTech Park within a year, under an initiative in the Jurong Innovation District (JID).

The foundation for a Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) Lab was laid on Monday with the signing of a memorandum of understanding between transport operator SMRT, JTC Corporation and NTU.

When the initiative is launched, the NTU campus and CleanTech Park will serve as live testbeds for alternative transport options such as e-bikes, e-scooters and autonomous driverless vehicles.

Colin Lim, managing director of SMRT services, said that while MRT and bus services are thought of as the main modes of transport, the commuter’s “last mile” between train station and destination is often overlooked.

“With MaaS, we want to focus on the commuter,” he said. “Mobility projects so far have focused on one mode of transport. What we are looking at is the horizontal integration of all these different types of modes to enable the commuter to choose what best fits his need.”

He added that the target is to set up the testbed in 12 months; full application is expected to follow in the next few years.

Alternative transport options will be introduced to the testbed sites to help commuters cover the “last mile” of their journeys. They will also be used to commute within the campus and the business park.

A mobile application will help commuters plan their journeys and select preferred transport choices, while also allowing researchers to test pricing schemes and determine the feasibility of each mode.

Part of the JID, for which JTC is the master planner and developer, the two sites encompass about 250 hectares of land, with a daytime population of more than 50,000.

JTC group director Leow Thiam Seng said: “As we work on the master plan for JID, this provides a great window for us to incorporate such possibilities into the master plan. We do not want to leave urban mobility to the end as an afterthought, but rather as one of the first pieces in the plan.”

Mr Leow added that the open platform MaaS initiative will welcome other mobility solution providers to use the testbed for their trials.

NTU has served as a testbed in several mobility projects recently, with partnerships that have tested solutions such as autonomous shuttles and bike-sharing.

Last December, the university announced plans to deploy a driverless shuttle vehicle in three months; this will ferry up to 15 passengers at a time between CleanTech Park and the NTU campus.