All-in-one transit apps could become next disruptor: Janil

Users get to plan trips across transport modes and pay fares via single platform

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All-in-one transit apps could be the next disruptor in the land transport sector following the emergence of ride-hailing services, said Senior Minister of State for Transport Janil Puthucheary yesterday.

Such apps, dubbed Mobility as a Service (MaaS) – would benefit commuters by allowing them to plan their journeys and pay for different transport modes through a single platform.

Similar to journey planners such as Citymapper and Google Maps, MaaS platforms allow commuters to plan their journeys across a variety of transport modes, as well as pay their fares.

In some cases, users are able to pay a flat monthly fee through the app and get an unlimited number of rides on public transit – a subscription-based model similar to that of Netflix and Spotify.

Dr Janil was speaking at the 16th International Conference Series on Competition and Ownership in Land Passenger Transport, otherwise known as the Thredbo Conference, held at Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

He said the authorities are taking “as light a touch of regulation as possible” to this new development.

“Allowing space for innovation and competition to develop, allowing people to explore different models, is what we’re applying to this nascent development,” he added.

NTU transport economist Michael Li told reporters that MaaS could support Singapore’s car-lite vision by encouraging car owners to switch to alternative modes of transport.

At least two MaaS providers have expressed interest in the Singapore market.

In October last year, MaaS Global announced a collaboration with local transport giant ComfortDelGro to launch its Whim app in Singapore.

MaaS Global co-founder Kai Prytz told The Straits Times that the firm is targeting a launch here later this year and is currently working “in close connection” with the Land Transport Authority (LTA).

In April this year, local start-up mobilityX, a spin-off of transport operator SMRT, launched a trial of its Zipster app here.

Dr Janil said the authorities are sharing transit data with mobilityX – which has more than 6,000 users – to help it improve its product.

Even ride-hailing firm Grab has ventured into MaaS, offering a public transport journey planner as well as e-scooter rentals through its app.

He added that there will be an event dedicated to the concept of MaaS during the Intelligent Transport Systems World Congress in Singapore in October, which the LTA is co-organising.

But he noted that how MaaS works in Singapore depends on the context of the city – where there is already an existing “dense and effective” public transport network, other cities could be very different.

He suggested that two areas which MaaS providers can perhaps concentrate on are point-to-point transport options, such as taxis and private-hire car services, as well as active mobility modes such as bicycles and personal mobility devices.

Said Dr Janil: “My suspicion is that because of the nature of our city and our public transport network, solutions deployed here will have to be quite different from many other cities.”