

# A boy and a driver share their love for buses



[Photo: SGTRANSPORT.]

*A boy who loves buses grabbed the chance to talk to a bus driver who was on his way to work. ZACHARY JOHN writes about the warm exchange.*

Twelve-year-old Theodore Tan loves buses. When he boarded a Downtown Line train with his father, he did not realise the journey to Tampines would be a dream come true. Theodore sat down next to a man in an SMRT uniform. Theodore asked him, “Do you drive trains?” The man, Shandran Shederen Raman, 53, told him he was a bus driver. Mr Shandran was on his way to Tampines Bus Interchange to start work. Neither of them realised they were about to get famous.

Theodore, a student of Pathlight School, immediately had tons of questions for Mr Shandran. “What bus service do you usually drive? Is your bus new or old? How do you feel about the buses now compared to older ones?”

Mr Shandran answered all of the boy’s questions, even the more difficult ones about pollution standards. The pair had a lengthy discussion. Mr Shandran told Theodore about the differences between buses from long ago and buses today. He even showed Theodore pictures he had on his phone of the different buses he had driven during his career as a bus driver in Singapore and Malaysia.

Mr Shandran later told Channel News Asia that while some members of the public smiled or greeted him when they saw him in his SMRT uniform, they had never asked him what he thought or how he felt about his job. “It was so nice of him,” Mr Shandran said of Theodore.



Bus captain Mr Shandran sharing his insights as a bus driver with schoolboy and bus enthusiast Theodore. [Photo: Kelvin Ang.]

### Gone viral

Another passenger, who was on the way home, happened to be sitting within earshot of the pair’s discussion. The passenger, Kelvin Ang, took a picture of the newfound friends, deep in conversation. Mr Ang uploaded the picture to his Facebook page, writing that he was touched to see the interaction between Mr Shandran and Theodore. He praised Mr Shandran for taking the time to answer Theodore’s questions and was in awe of Theodore’s **expansive** knowledge on buses.

“He could mumble about technical specifications like Euro 5, Euro 6, and he knows what they mean!” Mr Ang wrote in his post. Euro 5 and Euro 6 refer to European Union regulations on how much pollution vehicles are allowed to produce.

Mr Ang’s post went viral on social media before Mr Shandran even got to work. When he reached his workplace, his colleagues teased him about his picture being online. Mr Ang concluded his post by calling Mr Shandran an “amazing human being”. Mr Ang also **commended** Pathlight School, as he was impressed by how Theodore conducted himself. Pathlight is a special school for children with autism who are able to function well academically.

Mr Shandran enjoyed reading the kind comments from netizens on Mr Ang’s post. “They really touched my heart,” he said.

Many of the comments echoed a similar sentiment — that the post was a welcome burst of positivity amidst **trying** times. As a Malaysian working in Singapore, Mr Shandran was going through a difficult time himself. He had not seen his wife or children for the three weeks since Malaysia closed its land links with Singapore due to the coronavirus.

Theodore's father, Ernest, told Channel News Asia that while children with special needs may seem socially awkward to some, "there is always a reason for the behaviour". Mr Shandran, meanwhile, said he had no idea Theodore had special needs — instead, he was impressed by the boy's expert knowledge on buses. Mr Shandran, who has been a bus driver for more than a decade, had a wealth of experience to share with Theodore.

Mr Tan revealed that Theodore knows so much about buses because he enjoys reading up about them on the internet. Such is Theodore's enthusiasm that sometimes, he memorises bus licence plate numbers for fun. Naturally, he was excited to have a chance to talk to a bus driver. In an email to Channel News Asia, Mr Tan said, "Thank you, Mr Shandran, for being so kind and patient with my son and for engaging him in his interest."

## *Malaysian workers in Singapore*

Due to COVID-19, Singapore's border with Malaysia was effectively closed, with very few people allowed to travel between the two countries. This meant many Malaysians who worked in Singapore had been forced to choose between staying here for work or returning home to be with their families. On the day Mr Shandran met Theodore, he had not seen his family in Johor Bahru for three weeks. Mr Shandran told Channel News Asia that his interaction with Theodore brightened his day — it even made him feel better about being away from his 17-year-old son and his 24-year-old daughter, a medical student.

SMRT had booked hotel rooms for all their Malaysian drivers who were unable to go home. Mr Shandran said that while he was grateful for his employer's support, he missed home. While he understood that the border closures were in the interest of public safety, Mr Shandran said he was worried about how much longer his separation from his family would last. He said, "If you ask me to go home tomorrow, I'll go."



**BUS FACTS AND FIGURES**

There are 22 bus models on Singapore roads today. Below are the three newest buses and the three oldest buses still operating today.

**NEW ARRIVALS**



LTA

**BYD K9 (Gemilang), SBS Transit, since 2020**  
**Features:** 82 passengers; Fully electric  
**Emissions standards:** Zero emissions



**Mercedes-Benz Citaro Hybrid, SBS, since 2020**  
**Features:** 93 passengers; Diesel and electric hybrid  
**Emissions standards:** Euro 6



LANDTRANSPORTGURU

**Yutong E12, SMRT Buses, since 2020**  
**Features:** 80 passengers; Fully electric  
**Emissions standards:** Zero emissions

**STILL GOING STRONG**



JERIEL LIM

**Mercedes-Benz O405G (Hispano Habit), SMRT, since 1996. Features:** 149 passengers; "Bendy" bus  
**Emissions standards:** Euro 1 or Euro 2



**Volvo B10TL, SBS Transit, since 1999**  
**Features:** 125 passengers; Double-decker  
**Emissions standards:** Euro 2



ALAN NEO

**Scania K230UB, SBS Transit, since 2007**  
**Features:** 87 passengers; Wheelchair accessible, low entry. **Emissions standards:** Euro 4

SOURCE: landtransportguru.net

**VOCAB BUILDER**

**expansive** (say "eks-pan-siv"; adjective) = wide-ranging, broad.

**commended** (say "ko-men-ded"; verb) = praised.

**trying** (say "tra-i-ying"; adjective) = difficult.