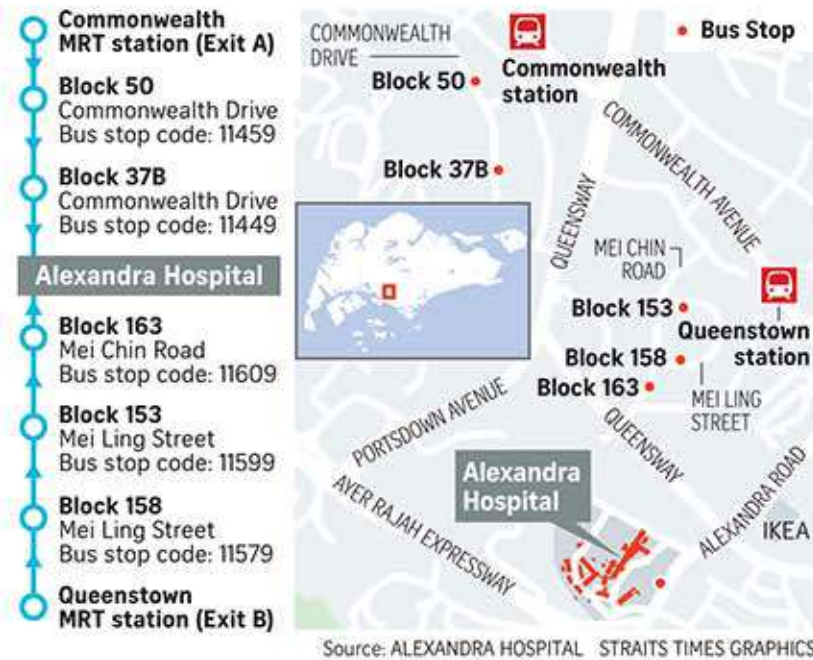


Heartland to hospital and back



Alexandra Hospital rolls out free shuttle for patients in nearby estates

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Alexandra Hospital has engaged SMRT to run free shuttle bus services for its patients living in the nearby housing estates.

The first such serving the heartland, the shuttles are provided by SMRT's subsidiary, Strides Transportation, for an undisclosed sum over three years.

The service, which started this month, has four 23-seater buses ply-

ing two routes covering areas such as Queenstown and Commonwealth MRT stations, Mei Chin Road, Mei Ling Street and Commonwealth Drive.

They run at a 10-minute frequency during peak hours and 20 minutes off-peak, starting at 6.40am and ending at 8.25pm on weekdays. During weekends and public holidays, the service operates between 10am and 7.40pm.

The free shuttles will serve those who do not have easy access to regular public transport and the less mobile, who might find it a challenge

to walk from the bus stop to the hospital building, which sits on a 12ha site.

In designing the routes, Alexandra Hospital chief operating officer Grace Chiang said priority was given to the most needy within the community, with bus stops sited nearest to one-room rental flats in the area.

"We hope more people will get to know of this service and use it," she said, adding that average daily ridership currently hovers around 640.

According to the hospital, plans are now under way for a similar ser-



An elderly man boards the new shuttle bus service to Alexandra Hospital by SMRT's Strides. The free buses ply two routes covering areas such as Mei Ling Street and Commonwealth Drive, saving residents from having to go to a nearby MRT station, the usual location for shuttle buses to hospitals. ST PHOTO: SYAMIL SAPARI

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Number of 23-seater buses plying two routes covering areas such as Queenstown and Commonwealth MRT stations, Mei Chin Road, Mei Ling Street and Commonwealth Drive.

vice to connect Alexandra Hospital and National University Hospital (NUH), to serve patients and referrals from NUH.

While other hospitals also provide a shuttle service, they do not go directly into housing estates.

Telok Blangah resident Susan Yeoh, 65, who takes a train to Queenstown MRT, said the new service "is convenient when I collect medication for my husband".

MP for Tanjong Pagar GRC Chia Shi-Lu said Alexandra Hospital's initiative will be a boon to the elderly and their caregivers.

"Queenstown is the oldest housing estate, and close to 20 per cent of its population are seniors aged 65 years and above. Many of them live with multiple chronic illnesses," said Dr Chia, who heads the Government Parliamentary Committee for Health.

Alexandra Hospital, built in 1938, serves the 100,000 Queenstown population. It is now running 176 beds, with a capacity to run up to 326. A masterplan for its redevelopment is being drawn up.

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