

BTS: Extension serves up new capital connections

The long-awaited extension to the BTS skytrain system offers a convenient and practical new way of crossing the Chao Phraya River to Thon Buri, providing benefits to residents and tourists alike.

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Bangkok's notorious traffic congestion has long been one of the city's major problems, causing headaches for consecutive governments as well as the traveling public.

The apparent lack of city planning and an ever-increasing number of vehicles on the capital's roads would suggest that the problem is unlikely to be solved any time soon, although the two most recent rail mass transit systems – the overhead BTS skytrain system, and the MRT subway system – have helped to ease the situation to some degree.

Prior to the launch of the skytrain in December 1999, most locals who did not have ownership or access to a car were forced to spend anything from two to three hours on the city's streets, perhaps changing buses, or from one form of transport to another to reach their destinations.

The subway system is currently celebrating its fifth anniversary of operations, while its 'over ground' counterpart has just celebrated its one-billionth passenger following 10 years of successful service. The two systems have certainly changed the way Bangkok residents commute and reduced their time spent on the road.

Across the Chao Phraya and beyond

The long awaited extension to the BTS system was launched on May 15, which coincided with the beginning of the rainy season and the reopening of the city's schools.

The extension starts from Saphan Taksin station, stretching 2.2 kilometers across the Chao Phraya River to Thon Buri. The line has two stations - Krung Thon Buri (S7) and Wongwian Yai (S8).

During the first three months of operation, the public can enjoy a free ride between these stations until the official opening, scheduled for August 12 (National Mother Day). After the official launch passengers will be charged at the current fare of 15-40 baht (about US\$0.40-1.20), depending on the distance traveled. The fare from Sala Daeng station, the nearby BTS station to interconnect with the MRT system, costs 25 baht to travel to the Thon Buri-based stations.

Early snags

Unfortunately, it would seem that the facilities with which to operate the extension at Saphan Taksin station seem rather inadequate since it can only accommodate one train at a time.

Due to this limitation, a Purple Zone has been created for passengers heading in the direction of Wongwian Yai, while a Green Zone services passengers heading in the direction of Siam. Several monitors provide passengers with basic travel information.

Unlike the first wave of skytrain stations, the new additions sit atop nine lanes of traffic. Each station has four exits, while there is a stairway that leads down to a landscaped central reservation area directly below, which separates the two stretches of road on either side.

Unlike the other stations, the Thon Buri stations have an all in one style roof rather than the gap down the center seen at other stations. Each platform has an elevator for use by people with disabilities.

Krung Thon Buri station

[View map](#)

Krong Thon Buri station is located between Soi Krung Thon Buri 3 and 5 near Soi Krung Thon Buri 8. It is the first BTS station on the Thon Buri side of the river and is 1.2-km away from Saphan Taksin station.

The name of the station was always going to be Krung Thon Buri station until it was changed to Charoen Nakhon based on its close proximity to a road of the same name. Eventually the original name prevailed.

Wongwian Yai station

[View map](#)

Located just 640 meters from Krung Thon Buri station, Wongwian Yai Station is located along Soi Krung Thon Buri 1 and 4.

Initially referred to as Yak Taksin (Taksin intersection) station due to its close proximity (about 400-m away), the name was later changed to Wongwian Yai, which represents the area's most important landmark. The large Wongwian Yai roundabout, just 800-m away, features a King Taksin monument.

Should the government approve a further extension to the Silom line, Wongwian Yai station would be the starting point for the Taksin Intersection-Bang Wa phase, which would see the line continuing for another 4.5 km. If the MRT purple line (Bang Yai-Bang Sue-Rajaburana) gets underway, Wongwian Yai would also act as an interchange station.

More connections to come

Bangkok residents can look forward to further mass transit developments over the coming years. The biggest certainty is the Suvarnabhumi International Airport Rail Link (SARL), which has already undergone several rounds of testing.

The latest update is that finishing work on the stations is currently being carried out and it is scheduled to officially open on December 5 (National Father's Day), which is when His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej celebrates his 82nd birthday.

The project features eight stations, including the main Makkasan station (City Air Terminal), which connects with MRT's Petchaburi station, as well as Phraya Thai station, which connects with the BTS system at Phraya Thai station.

A standard fare from Makkasan to the airport will be 150 baht (\$4.40) on the express service, which takes just 15 minutes. The local service operating in between express trains will have fare commensurate with the distance traveled.

The 5.25-km extension to the BTS' Sukhumvit Line is scheduled for completion in 2010. This line will extend from On Nut station and finish in Samut Prakarn province. Stations to be located along this route are Bang Chak (E10), Punnawithi (E11), Udom Suk (E12), Bang Na (E13) and Bearing (E14).

To access a unified (BTS and MRT) route map, please [click here](#) .

For further information on the BTS, [click here](#) .

For further information on the MRT, [click here](#) .

