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Radios to take the digital road in two years

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IMAGINE this: no more crackling sounds from the radio when you are driving.

Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) promises this improvement, as well as early warning — in text and diagrams on a screen — of road accidents or traffic jams ahead.

All this, and crystal-clear music too.

DAB, touted as the radio of the future, will make this possible here in about two years' time, if all goes well.

It will be able to offer text, graphics, video and Internet information, and information storage.

Conventional FM or AM broadcasts are subject to interference, especially in moving vehicles.

Not so with DAB, which also delivers CD-quality sound under all conditions.

DAB receivers, which are special-purpose computers, can be put in cars like regular



car radios.

A receiver can also be fixed to a personal computer to receive digital broadcasts.

Britain and Sweden began DAB services in 1995.

But the new radios will go

on sale only by the middle of this year.

Most other European countries, and Canada, Mexico and Australia are trying out the DAB system, while countries like China, India, Japan

and South Korea are still studying the technology.

The Land Transport Authority's manager of transport technology, Mr Sing Mong Kee, said that the LTA could use DAB to send traffic infor-

mation to motorists on the road.

DAB would help deliver the information gathered by the LTA's integrated transport management system, which monitored and reported

on traffic conditions in real time.

"Our objective is to let everyone have the traffic information, to know about driving conditions, so that they can make a decision," he said,

while attending a seminar on DAB at the Merchant Court Hotel yesterday.

The LTA would look into how DAB sets could be fitted into vehicles, so that the driver could get the traffic infor-

DIGITAL AUDIO BROADCASTING IS VERSATILE

DAB receivers can have a screen or monitor for pictures or diagrams and text, or just a small display for text. A receiver can also be connected to a personal computer with a special card that slots into the computer.

HOW IT WORKS:

Conventional AM and FM broadcasting uses analog technology, which is prone to interference and distortion. DAB sends out digital signals which are not affected by static or noise.

ADVANTAGES:

- CD-quality, interference-free sound even under poor conditions.
- Text, graphics, and even video and Internet information.
- Access to stored information. For

example, commuters can retrieve the latest traffic information.

- No tuning is needed, listeners can select programmes by pressing a button.

DAB CAN ALSO:

- Show traffic jams, accident spots and alternative routes.
- Be programmed to tell the driver where the nearest petrol kiosk or ATM is, or whether carparks are full.
- Transmit stock market information, weather reports and even live news.
- Let passengers on buses enjoy karaoke on the journey.
- Allow listeners to "buy" live broadcasts of concerts and performances overseas, much like video-on-demand.

mation safely at a glance.

The Singapore Broadcasting Authority has started work with broadcasters, a transmission company, research institutes and the Telecommunication Authority of Singapore to work out an implementation plan here.

Safra Radio and the Radio Corporation of Singapore have already started DAB trials.

Representatives of the two broadcasters said that results had been promising so far.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Singapore Broadcasting Authority, Mr Lim Hock Chuan, yesterday said that SBA would also hold talks with bus and taxi-fleet operators on the possibility of putting receivers in their vehicles or at the bus-stops.

The cheaper receiver would cost more than \$1,000 now, he said, but added: "As with all new technology, the price will be higher initially, but it will drop rapidly once this takes off."