The Land Transport Authority (LTA) clarified yesterday the Eastern Region Line (ERL), which is still under study, will not provide an MRT link to the planned Changi Airport Terminal 4 (T4).

Instead, a spokesman for the authority said, the ERL is “meant to serve developments in Changi, including future airport developments”. She did not elaborate, reiterating that plans have not been finalised.

LTA director of rail services Melvyn Thong had said during a railway conference on Wednesday that there were plans to extend the ERL to T4. Despite LTA ruling out the link to T4, observers believe a second MRT link to Changi Airport, if found feasible, could be sited at Terminal 5 (T5), which will be ready some time in the next decade.

T5 will be located on a 1,080ha plot of reclaimed land separated from the airport by Changi Coast Road.

National University of Singapore transport researcher Lee Der Horng said a direct and more convenient rail service to and from Changi is needed to further assure its position as a leading airport in the world.

Currently, commuters taking the MRT to the airport have to board a shuttle train at Tanah Merah on the East-West Line.

Dr Lee noted that two of Changi’s major competitors, Hong Kong and Incheon, have direct train services to the city. “Since we have more and more passengers arriving, we cannot have the mentality of just getting them to take the taxi,” he said.

There is also a growing trend of backpackers who are sensitive to travel cost and more public transport options should be made available to them, he added.

Dr Lee said one issue that should be carefully considered is how to connect a future MRT station in Changi to various terminals. One option is for the airport to have a transport hub with bus services to the terminals.

A circular skytrain service to all terminals that does not require transfers should also be studied, he said, noting that the Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport provides such an option.

Dr Park Byung Joon, head of the urban transport management programme at SIM University, said “it is not a bad idea” to have another MRT line serving the airport as travel demand expands.

A limitation of the current MRT link on the East-West Line is that passengers taking the train during peak hours have to join a huge crowd. This is inconvenient for transfers, he said.

Some travellers have grumbled about the additional time involved in transferring from the East-West Line to the Changi Airport extension at Tanah Mera. Some of them have even said: “The transfer from Tanah Merah to the airport is bothersome because the time interval between the trains can go up to six or seven minutes.”

Meanwhile, former MP Teo Chong Tee, who pushed for the MRT extension from Tanah Merah to Changi Airport, would like to see the ERL extended to serve the growing numbers of workers in the engineering areas, where there are thousands of workers.

No Terminal 4 link on Eastern Region Line

Despite LTA clarification, observers see need for direct rail service to and from airport