

SPEECH BY MR KHAW BOON WAN, COORDINATING MINISTER FOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT, AT THE GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY OF THE THOMSON-EAST COAST LINE (EAST COAST STRETCH), 21 JULY 2016, 9.10 AM, MARINE PARADE STATION PROJECT SITE

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Welcome to the ground-breaking of the East Coast stretch of our sixth MRT line, the Thomson-East Coast Line. This event also marks the start of works for two other major projects: the East Coast Integrated Depot, and the Downtown Line 3 Extension to Sungei Bedok.

New Rail Lines are Game Changers

2. We are rapidly expanding the rail network. Last December, we opened Downtown Line 2, or DTL2. About 80% of public transport commuters using DTL have benefited from shorter journey times, with 15% enjoying time savings of more than 10 minutes. It is no surprise then that DTL's ridership has tripled from 83,000 in October 2015, prior to the opening of DTL2, to 250,000 in May 2016.

3. After DTL2, we can look forward to the Tuas West Extension, which adds four more stations to the East-West Line. This will connect the industrial areas in Tuas directly to our rail network, and will greatly benefit Singaporeans working there.

4. Next year, DTL3 will open, adding another line in the eastern part of Singapore. With that, DTL will be complete. Residents of Bedok, Tampines and other eastern towns along DTL3 will find it to be a game changer, as DTL2 residents have experienced. DTL3 will connect them to employment areas like Ubi, Kaki Bukit and Changi Business Park, and make it easier for their friends and relatives across the island to visit them. These new extensions, along with more in the pipeline, will further reduce our dependency on private transport and help realise our car-lite vision for Singapore.

Extension of TEL to Changi Airport

5. After DTL, we can look forward to the Thomson-East Coast Line, or TEL, as well as the DTL3 Extension. Construction for the northern Thomson stretch is in full swing. Today, we break ground for the East Coast stretch, which will serve residents in Katong, Marine Parade, and Bedok. It will link up with the Thomson stretch all the way to Woodlands North Station near Republic Polytechnic. There, the TEL will eventually interchange with the Rapid Transit System Link to Johor. At the eastern end, the TEL will also benefit from the DTL3 Extension, which will add another two stations to DTL3 and link it up with the East-West Line and TEL. This will further improve accessibility to the Changi Business Park and Expo areas.

6. When the full TEL is completed, it will be our third longest MRT line in Singapore at 43km. It will carry half a million passengers every day. It will strengthen our MRT network as the backbone of our public transport system, and make public transport a mode of choice for even more Singaporeans.

7. We had earlier announced that TEL would open in five stages, from 2019 to 2024. We are assessing the feasibility of extending TEL further. Such an extension would connect TEL to our future Changi Airport Terminal 5, as well as the existing Changi Airport MRT station serving Terminals 1 to 4. It would provide a direct connection from the airport to the city. This would benefit travellers and airport staff. We are also assessing the feasibility of bringing the Cross Island Line (CRL) to Terminal 5 and the new industrial zone serving the airport. Together, these options enable many commuters who use the MRT network to get from all parts of the island to the airport with no more than one transfer. More details will be announced after the completion of the engineering feasibility studies for the TEL and CRL.

TEL Enhances Resilience of Our MRT Network

8. A more extensive rail network will enhance network resilience. Commuters will have more options to get to their destinations. In older cities with much longer histories and development like New York and Tokyo, there is often more than one route you can take from one train station to another.

9. We will reap two key benefits from the improved resilience which TEL will bring. First, when we need longer engineering hours for maintenance and repair, we can close some of our lines earlier, or open them later, while ensuring that most commuters still have alternative MRT routes to get to their destination. The London Tube, for instance, even closes segments and lines for the entire weekend for maintenance. These maintenance works may cause some inconvenience to commuters, but they are crucial to achieving our reliability goals.

10. Second, when there is a disruption on one line, more commuters will be able to get to their destination via an alternative rail route, and not have to rely on the bus network. But the ideal, of course, is to minimise train disruptions in the first place. We are working very hard on this.

World's First 4-in-1 Depot

11. The TEL will feature the world's first 4-in-1 depot. We call it "4-in-1" because we will be stacking the depots of the EWL, DTL and TEL one on top of the other, and also co-locating a bus depot with them. This is a massive engineering challenge. To our knowledge, it has not been done before.

12. We are doing so not to achieve world records, but because stacking these train depots will allow us to save a lot of precious land. The 4-in-1 depot will save 44 hectares, or 60 football fields. Putting the train depots together also allows us to share common facilities and systems, and reap economies of scale.

13. We also intend to fit out the depot with state-of-the-art technology. Recently, LTA visited London to study some of their depots. We found some of their innovations quite interesting. For instance, they have an automatic train inspection facility that uses visual, impact and temperature sensors to determine the condition of train components as trains return to the depot after service hours. They have also installed electrical sensors on their track circuits, so that they can monitor both the tracks, as well as the trains that pass through. The operators then analyse and act on the data collected, to pick up and follow up on symptoms of failure before the failure actually happens. These are useful innovations and we will see what we can adapt for Singapore.

Thanking the Public

14. As with any major infrastructure project, the construction will cause some inconvenience to residents and other stakeholders – noise, dust, road diversions. There was such unhappiness when we were building DTL. But now that DTL is built, the residents are very happy with the stations at their doorstep. To bring the MRT network closer to your home, we cannot avoid some short term inconvenience. We will do our best to minimise the inconvenience. Please bear with us.

15. I am glad to see many members of the community joining us today. Many of you took part in LTA's public poll on the station names last year. These names have been finalised based on your votes, and will be released today. One name stood out for me - the DTL3 Extension station which will be named Xilin, after Kok Sek Lim. Mr Kok Sek Lim was a Peranakan pioneer who was known as the "King of Coconut", and he owned many plantations in the area. I am happy to see a strong sense of heritage in the community.

16. I thank the residents and community for your support and understanding. Together, we shall look forward to the opening of the first TEL East Coast stretch stations in 2023.

17. Thank you.

National Archives of Singapore