

**Cross-Border Railways Bill Second Reading –
Opening Speech
Minister for Education (Schools) and Second Minister for
Transport Ng Chee Meng**

1. Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move, “That the Bill be now read a second time.”

Background

2. Connectivity is key to Singapore’s economic future. Better connectivity, for people, goods, information and capital, allows us to attract new ideas, talent and investments and opens up new markets for Singapore firms.

3. As we expand Singapore’s connections to the rest of the world via our air and sea ports, it is equally important to strengthen our links closer to home. Current connectivity with our nearest neighbour, Malaysia is good. More than S\$80 billion of goods and 200 million people traverse between our two countries each year. The Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High Speed Rail, or HSR, and the Johor-Singapore Rapid Transit System, or RTS Link, will take this connectivity to a new level. The Prime Ministers of the two countries have called these “game changers”. They will draw our peoples and countries closer together, with a greater stake in each other’s continued growth and success.

4. The HSR, scheduled to be operational in 2026, will provide a 90-minute, city-to-city connection between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. It can be more convenient than flying and will be much faster than driving. It will be possible to go to KL for a day trip or business meeting, have lunch there, and still get home in good time for dinner.

5. The RTS Link will be operating from 2024 and has the capacity to move up to 10,000 passengers per hour in each direction, about two-thirds of the peak-hour travel between Johor and Singapore. It will ease traffic volume along the Causeway and Second Link, freeing up capacity for more goods to flow.

6. Implementation of the HSR is already well under way.

a. Both countries signed the HSR Bilateral Agreement in 2016. Since then, officials from both countries have been working closely to develop detailed plans for the construction, operation and regulation of the HSR.

b. The two Infrastructure Companies from both countries are preparing to call a joint tender for the HSR Assets Company, or “AssetsCo”, by the end of the year. We have received strong indications of interest from key players from different countries and we look forward to meeting this key project milestone.

7. As for the RTS Link, we are completing our joint advanced engineering studies. We expect to move swiftly into implementation after the signing of the Bilateral Agreement at the end of this year.

8. It will be an exciting few years ahead, as we work alongside our counterparts in Malaysia to gear up not just for one, but two cross-border railway projects.

9. The Ministry of Transport proposes to enact the new Cross-Border Railways Bill to enable the construction, operation, and regulation of the HSR and RTS Link within Singapore borders. Malaysia will likewise consider how best to implement these terms in their domestic legislation.

10. The Bill will serve two key purposes:

- a. Firstly, it will support the planning and construction of our upcoming cross-border railways; and
- b. Secondly, it will put in place the necessary regulatory framework to ensure safe and secure cross-border railway operations.

11. Let me now explain the key provisions in the Bill.

Supporting the Planning and Construction of Cross-Border Railways in Singapore

12. The first part of the Bill pertains to the planning and construction of cross-border railways within Singapore.

13. Clauses 4 to 6 set out the process to develop and finalise plans and maps for the construction of cross-border railways.

- a. This ensures transparency and accountability in the planning of cross-border railways, even as we strive to meet our ambitious timelines for completion.

- b. Plans clearly showing the railway area and any land affected by construction of cross-border railways must be approved by the Chief Planner and made available to the public for inspection, just as we do today for the construction of domestic MRT lines.

- c. Detailed plans for both the HSR and RTS Link are being developed and we expect to finalise them in accordance with these provisions in the coming year or so.

14. In line with the approach for constructing MRT and LRT lines under the Rapid Transit Systems Act today, Clauses 7 to 16 will enable LTA to access land for the purposes of constructing, operating and maintaining cross-border railways.

- a. As per current practice, notice will be given to affected landowners of any works.
- b. Should landowners suffer any damages to their land or structures on the land, they will be eligible for compensation under the Fourth Schedule of the Land Transport Authority of Singapore Act, similar to other Acts under LTA's purview today.

15. In September, LTA has incorporated a wholly-owned subsidiary, SG HSR Pte Ltd, to be Singapore's Infrastructure Company, or InfraCo, for the HSR project. This arrangement allows us to dedicate resources to the development of the HSR, while allowing LTA to maintain its focus on domestic priorities.

- a. Accordingly, Clauses 18 to 20 allow the Minister for Transport to give effect to an arrangement where an entity other than LTA is appointed as Singapore's InfraCo to build, fund, own and maintain the cross-border railway infrastructure within Singapore.
- b. This allows SG HSR Pte Ltd to exercise the powers at Clauses 7 to 16 in place of LTA, where necessary, to fulfil its responsibilities in the cross-border railway project.

16. Taken together, these provisions enable LTA to co-ordinate the planning and construction of cross-border railways expeditiously, to meet the target completion of the RTS Link by end-2024, and the HSR by end-2026.

Implementing a Regulatory Framework to Ensure Safe and Secure Cross-Border Railway Operations

17. The second part of the Bill sets out a framework to give effect to the regulatory approach for our cross-border railway projects, which will focus on safety and security of operations.

18. Commercial arrangements such as the performance standards for the HSR and RTS Link services will not be stipulated in legislation. Instead, they will be specified separately in contractual agreements signed between the respective commercial entities.

19. To facilitate such an approach, Clauses 21 to 29 set out the contractual arrangements that define two key functions in cross-border railway operations. Specifically, Clauses 25 and 29 require any entity performing either of these functions to obtain a licence before it can provide services for passenger train operations.

- a. First, the entity providing and maintaining railway assets for operation of cross-border passenger train services, referred to in the Bill as the “**Railway Assets Operator**”;
- b. Second, the entity operating cross-border passenger train services, referred to as the “**Train Service Operator**”.

20. LTA will regulate these functions for each cross-border railway through the general licensing provisions set out at Clauses 30 to 44:

- a. This includes provisions that empower LTA to issue codes of practice, directions and provisional orders to ensure safe and secure cross-border railway operations;
- b. In the event of non-compliance, Clause 39 empowers LTA to suspend or cancel a licence, or to impose a

financial penalty of up to 1 million Singapore dollars or 10% of the licensee's annual revenue, whichever is higher.

21. To ensure the safety and security of cross-border railway operations, this Bill includes provisions to empower authorised officers to inspect, investigate and enforce regulatory requirements.

22. Clauses 51 to 53 set out the investigation and enforcement powers available to officers appointed by LTA as railway safety inspectors and independent safety auditors. Any person who obstructs the railway safety inspector or independent safety auditor in carrying out his or her duties shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding \$5,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months.

23. Clause 58 empowers the Minister for Transport to appoint a cross-border railway security agency to co-ordinate security matters for cross-border railways.

a. The cross-border railway security agency will work closely with the Ministry of Home Affairs and Home Team departments to issue and enforce security requirements for cross-border railways. This includes passenger checks required at the station, and standard procedures for responding to security incidents.

b. Given LTA's experience in ensuring the security of the public transport system in Singapore, we intend to appoint LTA as the cross-border railway security agency under this Bill. This will facilitate coordination of security measures and requirements across domestic public transport and cross-border railway operations.

24. To implement the regulatory framework proposed in this Bill, we will also be making related amendments to other Acts.

- a. In particular, the Land Transport Authority of Singapore Act will be amended to broaden LTA's functions to cover cross-border railway construction, operation and regulation. The compensation framework in the LTA Act will also be broadened to cover compensation that affected landowners may be eligible for under this Bill.
- b. The Railways Act and Rapid Transit Systems Act will be amended to clarify their scope. In particular, the Rapid Transit Systems Act applies only to domestic MRTs and LRTs. The Railways Act does not apply to any MRT or LRT that comes under the Rapid Transit Systems Act nor the HSR and RTS Link, which will come under the CBR Bill.
- c. The Arms and Explosives Act will also be amended to extend powers to enforcement officers under this Bill to arrest without warrant persons committing dangerous offences, to enforce security of the cross-border railway at all times.

25. As a whole, the regulatory framework in the new Bill largely takes reference from our domestic railway experience, but is adapted to suit the unique commercial and regulatory requirements of the HSR and RTS Link Projects.

Conclusion

26. Mr Speaker, Sir, the HSR and the RTS Link will bring exciting opportunities for Singapore and for Singaporeans. There will be new business opportunities, greater access to resources and more travel options to the Malaysian hinterland.

27. With that, Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

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