

SPEECH BY MR KHAW BOON WAN, COORDINATING MINISTER FOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT, AT COMPLETION CEREMONY FOR THIRD RAIL REPLACEMENT WORKS ON THE NORTH-SOUTH AND EAST-WEST LINES, 12 SEPTEMBER 2017, 9.20AM, BISHAN DEPOT

Friends and colleagues,

1. Today marks the completion of the third rail replacement works on the North-South and East-West Lines. This is after two years of hard work! I thank all of you who are involved in this important project.

Third Rail Replacement Works

2. The third rail runs parallel to the running rails. It is crucial to train operations as it feeds electricity into passing trains to power the motors, air-conditioning and lights. Third rail replacement works require each and every steel conductor rail to be unbolted, removed, and a new conductor rail lowered in its place, before it is reconnected to the high-voltage electricity network. This is dangerous and backbreaking work. More than 400 dedicated workers laboured every night to overhaul 180 kilometres of track. With a newer and more robust design, power faults related to the third rail can be minimised and overall reliability of the North-South and East-West Lines will improve.

Comprehensive, Multi-Year Effort

3. The North-South and East-West Lines are 30 years old. The lines have served us well but have also aged considerably, affecting their reliability. Almost all the systems and components need to be replaced. The core systems are: (a) sleepers, (b) third rails, (c) signalling system, (d) power supply, (e) track circuits and (f) trains. Replacing all these core systems take years, with full completion by 2024. That is why I repeatedly said that enhancing the reliability of the North-South and East-West Lines is a multi-year effort. We cannot fix this problem overnight. But each time we replace a core system, we make significant progress on this long journey. We do not have to wait till 2024 to experience the improvements in reliability. If we keep on track,

commuters will be able to experience vast improvements in reliability by 2019. We are half-way there. The cup is half-full, and the data shows it. Next year, we will fill it up some more. I seek commuters' patience and understanding. We can fix this problem, we just need time.

4. The third rail replacement project is part of this asset renewal exercise. Today, we can tick this item off the to-do list. We have earlier also completed the replacement of the old sleepers and ticked them off the list. We are now in the midst of full-day testing for the new signalling system on the North-South Line. We should be able to tick this item off before December. And then, we can begin to test the new signalling system for the East-West Line. There will be some delays for East-West Line commuters when testing starts, please bear with us.

5. At the same time, we are also in the midst of renewing the other three core systems: power supply system, track circuits and the old trains. Of course, we wish we can complete this entire overhaul tomorrow. But works of such scale and complexity take years, especially because we have only three hours each night to do so many things.

6. Even as we focus on the North-South and East-West Lines, other lines are also crying for attention. We have already turned to the next oldest line, the Bukit Panjang LRT. It is also due for a renewal.

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Conclusion

7. Renewing and overhauling our rail network is an arduous job. We owe our public transport workers and engineers a debt of gratitude. I know first-hand how hard they are working to help improve rail reliability and capacity. Please give them your fullest support and encouragement!
