

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
SINGAPORE
OFFICIAL REPORT
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RESOLUTION OF SIGNALLING PROBLEMS ALONG CIRCLE LINE

20 **Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong** asked the Minister for Transport in respect of the recent signalling problems with the Circle Line caused by signal interference, what measures will be taken to ensure that commuters are not inconvenienced by the same signalling problems again.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: The signalling problem experienced on the Circle Line was caused by a hardware malfunction on one of the trains. The faulty component has been replaced and the train has since been returned to service under close supervision. The Land Transport Authority (LTA) is working with the signalling equipment manufacturer ALSTOM to determine why the component failed, and whether the problem extends to the entire batch of components manufactured. If so, LTA will require ALSTOM to replace all of them.

Based on the findings, LTA will also develop targeted measures to prevent an occurrence of similar problems on both the Circle Line and North-East Line, which use older signalling systems. LTA is also exploring ways to improve the general resilience of these systems. This includes shielding the signalling antenna against spurious signals, incorporating a feature for a backup antenna if the primary one encounters interference, and improving the signal transmission protocol.

The newer signalling systems used for the Downtown Line, and to be installed for the North-South and East-West Lines and the Thomson-East Coast Line, would not be affected by the signalling problem experienced by the Circle Line as they have enhanced redundancy features to guard against signal interference.

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FEEDBACK FROM IMPLEMENTATION OF COURTESY CROSSING UNDER SILVER ZONE INITIATIVE

21 **Mr Png Eng Huat** asked the Minister for Transport (a) what are the positive and negative experience and feedback gathered on the implementation of the "Courtesy Crossing" under the Silver Zone initiative; and (b) what is the number of Silver Zones with public bus stops but with no bus lay-by.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: The feedback on the courtesy crossing has been mostly positive.

We have also received some feedback from users who are unsure about how to use these crossings. We will continue to publicise and educate pedestrians and motorists on how to use these crossings.

Eight of our nine Silver Zones today contain public bus stops with no bus lay-by. The majority of these bus stops are on two-lane roads. For those that are on one lane roads, the Land Transport Authority (LTA) has assessed that the impediment to traffic is only momentary, even with the Silver Zone measures.

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SIMPLER LANGUAGE IN SKILLS TRAINING COURSE MATERIALS TO CATER TO OLDER WORKERS

22 **Dr Tan Wu Meng** asked the Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) whether skills training course materials are vetted for plain and simple language so as to keep courses as open as possible to older workers with limited language skills.

Mr Ong Ye Kung: SSG has a quality assurance system in place to ensure that the development and delivery of WSQ courses and the assessment of trainees meet required standards. SSG also conducts regular audits to ensure that the accredited training providers continue to have robust systems in place to deliver quality training.

Having said that, while SSG regulates the skills standards, how the lessons are conducted and what training materials to use, are the responsibility of training providers. Such an approach allows more scope for innovation and differentiation in training products, and more market competition. Some methods that training providers have employed include the use of simple phrases in the course materials, oral assessments, pictures, videos and/or demonstrations to illustrate certain concepts. Training providers are also encouraged to contextualise their courses to meet their learners' needs.

In addition, given that basic literacy and numeracy skills are critical for employability, SSG has worked with training providers to develop the Workplace Literacy and Workplace Numeracy programmes under the WSQ system. Workers who face language barriers can better equip themselves through such training to undertake the wider range of training opportunities, and better apply their skills in the workplace.

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DURATION OF GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS FOR CLEAN, GREEN AND SAFE SECTORS

24 **Mr Zainal Sapari** asked the Minister for Finance (a) what is the average length of Government agencies' contracts for procurement services in the three traditionally outsourced clean, green and safe sectors; (b) what has been the shortest and longest contracts that have been given out by the Government; and (c) how does the Government determine the appropriate length for each of the contracts.

Mr Heng Swee Keat: Contract periods vary depending on factors such as the needs of the buyer agency, the scale or complexity of the contract and industry acceptance.

Among the three sectors, the shortest contract in the past three years was a transitional cleaning contract. It was for a period of six months and is an exception as the agency was to be relocated after that. The longest contract awarded was for seven years, as the Government agency had assessed that a longer contract was needed to enable the service provider to recoup the high capital investments needed for the contract.

While longer contracts allow service providers more time to get familiar with the contractual requirements, and justify investments in equipment or technology, contracts that are too long can introduce business risks for service providers and can be unattractive to them. So a balance needs to be struck. The vast majority of contracts in the cleaning, security and landscaping sectors have a base period of between two to five years, with an average duration of about 2.7 years. In addition, many contracts also come with options to extend for a pre-determined duration if the service provider has done well, and the needs of the agency have not changed. For instance, a cleaning contract can have a base period of three years, with an option to extend for another two years.

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AGE LIMIT FOR CLINICAL TRIAL FOR PRE-IMPLANTATION GENETIC SCREENING

25 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for Health (a) what are the reasons for setting the criteria disallowing women below the age of 35 to take part in the three-year clinical trial for Pre-Implantation Genetic Screening (PGS); (b) whether the Ministry will consider

lowering this age limit for women; and (c) whether the Ministry will consider allowing women below the age of 35 to take part on a case-by-case basis.

Mr Gan Kim Yong: Pre-Implantation Genetic Screening (PGS) is a test for chromosomal abnormalities in embryos created through in vitro fertilisation (IVF), before the embryos are implanted into the uterus. MOH recently approved a three-year pilot for PGS. This will commence at the National University Hospital (NUH) in 2017.

Under the pilot programme, patients who fulfil at least one of the following clinical criteria will be eligible:

- a. Age 35 years old and above, regardless of prognosis
- b. Two or more recurrent implantation failures, regardless of age
- c. Two or more recurrent pregnancy losses, regardless of age

In other words, women of any age can participate in the pilot if they have had two or more recurrent implantation failures or pregnancy losses. For those without recurrent implantation failures or pregnancy losses, the minimum age is set at 35 years. This is because literature evidence and overseas experience have shown that the chance of a baby born with chromosomal abnormalities for mothers aged 35 and above is significantly higher¹. Countries such as the UK² and Canada³ have similarly recommended that PGS be made available to women aged 35 years and above, regardless of prognosis.

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NUMBER OF FOREIGN DOMESTIC WORKERS WHO HAVE UNDERGONE BASIC ELDERCARE COURSE

National Archives of Singapore

26 **Assoc Prof Daniel Goh Pei Siong** asked the Minister for Health (a) how many foreign domestic workers (FDWs) have undergone the Agency for Integrated Care's Basic Eldercare Course; (b) what percentage of FDWs subsidised by the FDW grant and who are caring for elderly Singaporeans have undergone the course; and (c) how many FDWs have been trained

¹Hook EB, Cross PK, Schreinemachers DM. (1983) *Chromosomal abnormality rates at amniocentesis and in live-born infants*. The Journal of the American Medical Association, 249(15):2034-8

Hook EB. (1981) *Rates of chromosomal abnormalities at different maternal ages*. Obstetrics & Gynaecology, 58(3):282-5.

²The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), UK

³The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada

under the eldercarer training scheme and have been deployed.

Mr Gan Kim Yong: The Government has several schemes to support households with seniors with caregiving needs. For example, the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) administers the Caregiver's Training Grant (CTG), which has been in place since 2007. This provides caregivers, including Foreign Domestic Workers (FDW), with up to \$200 each year to attend suitable training courses on useful caregiving skills. To date, about 37,000 caregivers, including around 20,000 FDWs, have benefited from the CTG.

The FDW Grant (FDWG), which was introduced in 2012, supports lower and middle income families who need to hire a FDW to care for frail seniors and persons with moderate disabilities with a monthly grant of \$120. 6,800 households caring for seniors are currently receiving the FDWG and all of them have either attended a CTG-approved course, or have received training at the hospitals. Of these, 4,400 tapped on the CTG for the training.

The Basic Eldercare Course is one of the courses supported under the CTG. It is a relatively new course that was started in late 2015. Since then, 167 FDWs have attended the course. Of these, 52 were employed by households also receiving the FDWG.

Leveraging on the Basic Eldercare Course, MOH and AIC started the Eldercarer FDW Scheme in November 2016. This enables households to employ FDWs who have been pre-trained in eldercare prior to placements with the families. Over two months, about 30 FDWs have been trained under the scheme, of which 25 have been placed with families. MOH and AIC are working with employment agencies, and healthcare and social service organisations to raise awareness of this new scheme so that we can serve more families with eldercare needs.

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GOVERNMENT MEASURES TO SUPPORT BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY SLOWDOWN

29 **Mr Gan Thiam Poh** asked the Minister for National Development what measures will the Government take to support the building and construction industry which is facing challenging times in the face of an economic slowdown.

Mr Lawrence Wong: We understand the concerns about the slowdown in construction demand in 2016. At \$26 billion, the quantum of building and civil engineering contracts in 2016

was \$1 billion less than 2015. The contraction came from reduced private sector demand. But this was partially offset by strong public sector demand.

Total construction demand this year is projected to be between \$28 to \$35 billion. This is more than 2016. However, private sector demand is expected to remain subdued. The Government will help offset this shortfall by pushing out a pipeline of public sector projects. In doing so, public sector demand may increase to almost 70% of total construction demand this year. Significant public sector projects that we will roll out include phase 2 of the Deep Tunnel Sewerage System, the North-South Corridor, Changi Airport Terminal 5, and new MRT lines.

In tandem, we will continue to assist firms through various funding support schemes to help them adopt productive technologies and upgrade their workforce capabilities. Almost \$800 million has been made available to firms through the Construction Productivity and Capability Fund (CPCF). As of November 2016, more than \$420 million has been committed to fund projects by more than 8,600 firms in the built environment sector. Around 90% of these companies are small and medium-sized firms.

We will also do more to help our firms venture overseas. In the past three years, Singapore contractors managed to clinch an average of \$1.7 billion per year in overseas projects. This is very encouraging but there is potential for even more growth given the increasing regional demand for quality housing and infrastructure. Internationalisation will be one of the focus areas for the Industry Transformation Map (ITM) for the construction sector that MND and BCA are currently developing with our industry.

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REVIEW WIDTH OF FOOTPATHS GIVEN SHARED USAGE BY PEDESTRIANS, CYCLISTS AND USERS OF PERSONAL MOBILITY DEVICES

31 **Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong** asked the Minister for Transport given that bicycles and personal mobility devices (PMDs) will share the use of footpaths together with pedestrians (a) what are the criteria used to determine whether an existing footpath will be widened; (b) what is the recommended minimum width for footpaths to ensure safe shared usage between cyclists and pedestrians; and (c) whether Ministry will conduct an islandwide review to ensure that existing footpaths which are often used by cyclists and PMD users are widened in accordance with this minimum width.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: Today, most of our footpaths are at least 1.5 metres wide. Footpaths near town centres and MRT stations are generally wider, between 2.4 metres and 3.6 metres, to accommodate more pedestrians and cyclists. It is not always possible to widen footpaths, due to site constraints like existing trees and utilities. LTA also builds dedicated cycling lanes, which are generally 2 metres wide. More of such lanes will be built as part of our plans to have a cycling path network in every HDB town by 2030.

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PAYMENT FOR FAILED ERP DEDUCTIONS WITHOUT INCURRING ADMINISTRATIVE FEE

32 **Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap** asked the Minister for Transport whether he will consider allowing motorists to make payments for failed ERP deductions electronically within a reasonable period of time after the failed deduction without incurring the administrative fee or incurring a less punitive fee.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: Motorists who make good their failed ERP deductions within two weeks of the date of the letter from LTA are required to pay an administrative fee to cover the cost of processing the ERP violation, notification and payment. This fee is \$10 if they make their payment through cash or cheque, and \$8 if they make the payment electronically as the administrative cost incurred is lower. It will not be fair for taxpayers to bear these costs on the motorists' behalf.

To avoid incurring such costs for failed ERP deductions, motorists should sign up to payment services such as Motorpay, vCashCard or EZ-Pay. Using such services, motorists do not need to insert a cash-card into their car's in-vehicle unit before they pass under an ERP gantry. ERP charges are automatically charged to their credit card based on the ERP system's identification of the in-vehicle unit.

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