

Rail failures: Kampung spirit can help

But no recovery plan is enough in cases of very severe disruptions, says Khaw

Danson Cheong

No recovery plan, however comprehensive, can adequately deal with the chaos that immediately follows a very severe train disruption – the only solution is preventing such disruptions in the first place.

Having said that, service staff in train stations could be roped in to help deal with the fall-out in the critical first hour of less severe incidents, wrote Transport Minister Khaw Boon Wan yesterday in his

blog. “Even if it is simply to help guide the commuters to the right bus stop or to the right queue, it will be a great help to reduce confusion amongst commuters,” he wrote.

His comments come in the wake of an unprecedented rail failure on July 7 that crippled the North-South and East-West lines, affecting more than 400,000 passengers. Operator SMRT was fined a record \$5.4 million for the incident, which arose because of inadequate maintenance.

Since December 2011, there have been at least 35 and 22 major disruptions on the MRT and LRT networks, respectively.

Mr Khaw pointed out that no amount of service recovery could deal with a disruption on the scale of the July incident – so prevention is the only way. “Assuming train intervals of 2.5 minutes, we will need at least 24 double-decker buses every five minutes,” he wrote.

But he added that “less severe” disruptions would continue to happen in future, and while contingency plans would be put in place, “mobilised resources” would need time to get to the affected stations.

Citing the recent crash-landing emergency exercise at Changi Airport, Mr Khaw said he observed how various stakeholders at the air-

port worked together as one family. “This is the kampung spirit that we must inculcate in every MRT station,” said Mr Khaw, adding that Senior Minister of State for Transport Josephine Teo had suggested involving shopkeepers working in the station, so they can play a part in contingency plans.

“Such ‘family-ness’ will be important not just when there is a technical breakdown, but (will be) even more critical if there is a terrorist-led sabotage to our rail system,” he said. He added that he has asked the Land Transport Authority and transport operators to consider the suggestion.

Mrs Teo told The Sunday Times that she had observed many com-

muters shopping at shops near the stations before their bus and train journeys. “It’s quite natural for them to interact with service staff. If these service staff also know what local measures are being taken, they can help advise the commuters, who can in turn advise other commuters,” she said.

Ms Karen Tan, 30, who works at a nail parlour at Tampines MRT station, does not mind getting involved. She said she was herself affected by a train disruption earlier this year and had to figure out how to get home on her own.

“If we can all help each other, that would be so much better,” she said.

OFFER HELP TO COMMUTERS

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TRANSPORT MINISTER KHAW BOON WAN, on how service staff can be roped in to help in the first hour after a train disruption

Group to share joys of parenthood with younger S’poreans

Seow Bei Yi

With fewer young people thinking it important to have children by the age of 30, a group called I Love Children (ILC) hopes to reach out to a younger crowd to tell them about the benefits of having children.

The voluntary welfare organisation (VWO), which turns 10 this year, launched a new work plan yesterday to target Singaporeans from the age of 19, instead of 21, for the next two years.

“At 19 years, they are mature enough to think about love, to think about dating, and future marriages,” said ILC president Joni Ong, who has five children aged 19 to 25.

The VWO has, in recent years, come across more people who do not see it as a priority to have children by the time they turn 30, and has already started to reach out to tertiary students through dialogues in schools.

Besides launching the work plan, the group also shared findings from its fifth parenthood survey at its roadshow at United Square shopping mall’s atrium yesterday.

Conducted in February, the survey polled over 600 respondents, of whom 67 per cent said they wanted to have children.

The ideal age most people wanted to have their first child was 29.7 years, which has increased by 0.4 years on average since 2010.

Among those who did not want children, the top reasons given were the cost, a greater priority placed on careers and a lack of time. Compared with two years ago, fewer cited their workplace environment and lack of childcare support.

While 16 per cent of the respondents said there was a lack of quality affordable childcare support in the group’s 2013 survey, only 6 per cent did so this time round.

Similarly, 18 per cent of respondents in 2013 said that an uncondemned work environment was a reason for not wanting children. This has dropped to 4 per cent this year.

“The entire community and society has, over time, made changes to address various concerns of those

considering having children or more children,” said Mrs Ong.

For instance, a week’s paternity leave, paid for by the Government, was introduced in 2013.

Minister for Social and Family Development Tan Chuan-jin, the guest of honour at the event, said childcare is an important factor for those considering parenthood.

He added that the Government has been doing more to ensure that there are affordable, accessible and quality childcare options. “I don’t think people have children because of the incentives alone, but it’s to help alleviate the cost that comes with having children,” he said.

The physical and financial incentives, in terms of the accessibility of housing and subsidies, will make it easier for young couples to factor children into their plans, he added.

The parenthood survey results this year also showed that risks associated with late pregnancies would not affect most people’s decisions on when to have children.

Said Mr Tan: “I think, intuitively, all of us know that as we get older, it gets a bit more difficult (to have a child).”

He added: “It’s about encouraging greater awareness at an earlier age, for people to start thinking about what are things that really matter to them.”

byseow@sph.com.sg



Minister for Social and Family Development Tan Chuan-jin (standing, far right), who was the guest of honour at the I Love Children roadshow at United Square shopping mall yesterday, with the voluntary welfare organisation’s president Joni Ong (kneeling, far right) and other ILC ambassadors. PHOTO: I LOVE CHILDREN

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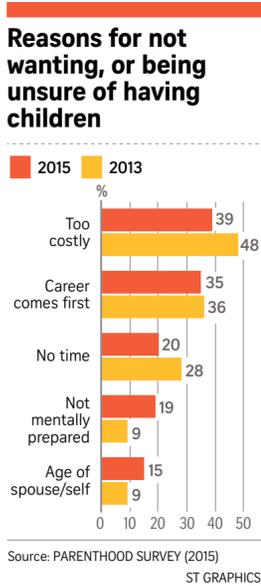
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