

Right on track

How a SBS Transit engineer keeps the public train system running smoothly

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Many of us take the train to work every day, but few of us stop to ponder what really goes on behind the scenes. Nor do we know much about the staff who do their utmost to ensure the rail system runs smoothly.

Technical support engineer Christopher Hon, 27, is one such person. An employee of SBS Transit, he has been working with the company for the last two years in the Rolling Stock Department.

Exciting sector

In his job, Mr Hon provides a technical evaluation of faults on the train line, while investigating and recommending solutions for them.

He also prepares specifications for manpower and equipment tenders, coordinates with the Land Transport Authority (LTA) for new and ongoing projects, and comes up with maintenance schedules.

If all this sounds challenging, it is. Mr Hon was drawn to the industry at the outset, after graduating from the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) School of Mechanical Engineering with a Bachelor of Engineering (Mechanical Engineering) degree in 2013.

"I chose to join this industry because the railway sector is a dynamic and

developing one. As you can see, many neighbouring countries are expanding their rail coverage, creating a vast network of rail transport.

"Such expansions would provide engineers like myself the perfect platform to excel. I may work in a niche industry due to my specialisation, but I am propelled by the passion I have for my profession," he said.

Tackling challenges head-on

The two years spent in his job so far have given Mr Hon a fairly accurate gauge of the constant demands of the industry.

Apart from having to deal with abrupt last-minute changes to plans, he also has to be adept at juggling operational priorities and maintenance requirements deftly – while simultaneously staying focused on multiple duties, prioritising important tasks, and making sound judgments despite mounting pressure.

What qualities would engineers aspiring to join the industry need to have?

"I would say the adaptability to handle last-minute changes and a level-headedness to tackle issues. Having people skills to manage both the contractors' constraints and the LTA's expectations in order to meet deadlines will also be a definite asset.

"It is also vital to possess a thirst and passion for knowledge on all aspects of the railway systems so as to achieve more than what the job calls for," he said.

Riding on fresh initiatives

The industry is in urgent need of fresh talent.

He said: "The industry is rapidly expanding with unlimited opportunities. There is a need to hire more people for succession planning and talent retention purposes. SBS Transit does its part by striving to do more for the public transport industry."

To Mr Hon, the company provides the right platform for fresh graduates to learn the ropes, and develop both technical and soft skills, which would put them in good stead to succeed in the corporate world – something that he discovered firsthand himself when he graduated two years ago.

With the slew of initiatives that aim to attract engineers to the sector, there is no better time to be joining the industry.

On May 29, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between the LTA, SBS Transit, SMRT, WDA and Institution of Engineers Singapore (IES), effectively aligning railway engineering industry standards with the IES chartered engineer (railway and transportation engineering) accreditation.

With the MOU, SBS Transit will support its engineers to be accredited as Chartered Engineers. For new engineers who join the company, this will be in four years as part of their progression up the three-level Engineering career development framework. This will professionalise engineers in the SBS



Transit rail business and industry at large.

Mr Hon said: "I see immense opportunities for me to grow with SBS Transit, especially with the company supporting its engineers to obtain certification as a Chartered Engineer. I feel the structured framework, and wide range of training and industrial exposure, would stand me in better stead as I work to progress to the senior management level.

"It is encouraging to see SBS Transit making the effort to recognise the expertise and professional qualifications of engineers in the rail industry. The move is in line with the government's SkillsFuture initiative to add on to workplace technical competencies."

Fulfilling job

So passionate is Mr Hon about his job that he has wasted no time in thinking ahead.

"My work is important because it is

what defines me. My long-term goal is to have a fulfilling career in this industry. I would like to hone my skills as a rolling stock engineer, be respected for my technical knowledge and stewardship, and eventually be at a level to assess and implement what is best for myself and for the company."

For now though, nothing makes him happier than completing his outstanding tasks, implementing the correct solutions for train faults, identifying crucial factors that may delay projects, meeting the expectations of the department, being ahead of timelines, and delivering quality work at all times.

Mr Hon encourages newcomers to work hard and be positive.

"It isn't always a bed of roses but what is? In this industry, you learn things and you learn them fast. You are always kept on your toes and you learn never to take things for granted," he said.