

Background

The transfer of the KTM terminus to Woodlands and redevelopment of railway land were announced in 2010, more than a century after the start of Singapore's railway history. Since then, thousands have developed an interest in, as well as concern about, the railway's buildings, bridges, route and natural areas. They have trekked and toured, photographed and videoed, blogged and tweeted. Many wonder what will happen to all the land, nature, structures, lifestyles and indeed history. Very quickly, individuals and groups began to advocate protecting elements of value.

Recognising this energy, the government is engaging these parties and trying to address some of their concerns. In April 2011, the government gazetted Tanjong Pagar Railway Station as a National Monument, and Bukit Timah Station for conservation. In June, Minister of State (National Development) Tan Chuan-Jin invited academics, green groups, rail corridor activists and the Singapore Heritage Society to participate in a 'Rail Corridor Consultation Group'. This aims to promote dialogue between the authorities and relevant experts and interest groups, as well as to engage the wider public through civil society. The government is also working with experts and groups to study and document various aspects of the corridor. As part of this, the Singapore Heritage Society conducting a broad survey of the history and cultural heritage of this site.

SHS Research and Documentation Project

SHS believes this research and documentation project could be a rich resource that could be incorporated into the future Rail Corridor competition brief, to help ensure, as well as inspire, sensitive and engaging designs. The research is being conducted along the following proposed focus areas:

1. Built Heritage Conservation Survey + Photo-documentation

Coordinators: Ho Weng Hin, Tan Kar Lin, Jeremy San Tzer Ning

A systematic photo-documentation of the railway line is critical to capture its intact extent and the immediate surrounds as much as possible. While there has been ad hoc photography of the railway, a systematic documentation of the entire line has yet to be undertaken. This fieldwork will establish a baseline visual record and inventory of the railway line and ancillary fixtures at this point in time. The proposed conservation survey is a material heritage fieldwork research centred on built structures as both historic artefact and a rich source of information. From iconography, architectural finish, spatial design, to signs of use, renovations, patina of age and deterioration, layers of histories embedded in the structures' material existence can only be uncovered through a material heritage conservation survey. The reading and analysis of findings, including material deterioration behaviour, would lay the foundation for sensitive design intervention, and provide a solid basis for deriving maintenance guidelines in the interim and long term. The information could also eventually be incorporated as part of the conservation guidelines.

2. Cartographic Studies

Coordinator: Lim Chen Sian

This is a study of the transformation of the railway land and its surrounds through comparison and

interpretation of maps, archival documents and relevant literature. These may range from topographical to cadastral maps produced at different points in time. The exercise will demonstrate the strategic importance of the railway in terms of Singapore's urban growth and expansion of economic activities such as industrial development.