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100 HDB blocks to get lift upgrade on town council funds

Govt approval given for blocks as part of Town Council Lift Upgrading Programme

By Daryl Loo

FAST track lift upgrading is coming to about 100 HDB blocks - with their respective town councils footing most of the bill.

This follows the Government's approval of the blocks nominated by the town councils, which was announced by National Development Minister Mah Bow Tan yesterday.

The Straits Times reported earlier this month that 12 of the 16 town councils had nominated at least 124 blocks for lift upgrading under the Town Council Lift Upgrading Programme.

The scheme, approved in July, allows town councils to tap up to 10 per cent of their own sinking fund for lift upgrading, and is designed to speed up the rate at which Singapore's rapidly ageing population gets direct lift access.

About 3,800 HDB blocks here still do not have lifts that stop on every floor, and the Government aims to spend some \$5 billion so almost every block will have this feature by 2015.

To that end, it has picked 64 precincts this year for the HDB-run lift upgrading programme, said Mr Mah, up from 46 precincts last year. This will cost about \$600 million.

The 100 blocks that will undergo the Town Council Lift Upgrading Programme are in addition to these 64 precincts. Town councils can nominate blocks that need the new lifts, but have not yet been announced under the HDB upgrading programme.

However, a block is eligible only if it does not exceed the cost of \$5,000 for each unit that benefits from the upgrade.

As with the HDB-run lift upgrading programme, residents will have to co-pay up to 12.5 per cent of the cost. And at least 75 per cent of residents will have to vote for it before it can proceed.

Speaking at the unveiling of a new five-year renewal plan for Tampines GRC, Mr Mah declined to say which town council nominations have been approved. He said he will leave it to the town councils themselves to announce the details.

Tampines Town Council chairman Ong Kian Min said 14 of the blocks it nominated have been approved.

Its engineers are still working out the exact costs, 'but we expect to start polling our residents in the first quarter of next year', he said.

Hong Kah Town Council chairman Ang Mong Seng said he has yet to be told if the more than 10 blocks it nominated have been approved. But the town council has set aside about \$2 million to upgrade these blocks if they are approved, he said.

The four town councils that have not nominated any blocks for the programme are East Coast, Jalan Besar, and the two opposition-run wards, Potong Pasir and Hougang.

East Coast has yet to nominate any as its eligible blocks are spread too widely apart, while the blocks in Jalan Besar are too expensive to be upgraded.

Potong Pasir chairman Chiam See Tong told The Straits Times earlier his town council was still studying its options for lift upgrading.

Hougang MP Low Thia Kiang could not be reached yesterday for comment.

He had argued in Parliament in July that the scheme was unfair as much of a town council's sinking fund comes from conservancy fees paid by residents, and he felt this meant residents will end up footing most of the lift upgrading costs.

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WHAT'S THE SCHEME ABOUT

The Town Council Lift Upgrading Programme gives the green light to councils to use up to 10 per cent of their sinking funds for lift upgrading. Such a fast-track scheme aims to quicken the pace at which the Republic's rapidly ageing population gets access to lifts on every floor.