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Post-mortem on NEL disruption

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IT SHOULD not happen again, said the Government Parliamentary Committee (GPC) for Transport after the 11-hour disruption on the North-East Line (NEL).

The GPC will be asking the transport operator for a report after they have conducted their post-mortem on the disruption, when NEL services between HarbourFront and Dhoby Ghaut came to a standstill at 12.57pm on Monday.

The disruption was one of the longest in the history of Singapore's underground train system.

Said the Public Transport Council's (PTC) vice-chairman and MP for Tampines Ong Kian Min: "Our main concern is that it should not recur. Much like power blackouts and gas disruptions, Singaporeans have grown quite accustomed to having our systems working well. So when something like this happens, we're concerned that it should not happen again."

The PTC, he said, will be working with the transport operators to help look at ways to prevent such an incident from happening again. For example, they will ascertain if additional safeguards can be put in place.

But while the company apologised for any inconvenience caused, it says there is no guarantee such a failure will not happen again. And if it does, commuters may face the same disruptions as there is no backup power supply.

"We will investigate what caused the wires to break and look at how we can prevent it in the future," said Mr Alex Goei, SBS Transit's director of rail operations.

"We certainly want to minimise train service disruptions which arose from something like what happened yesterday."

Seventy engineers and service crew worked overnight to get the entire system running smoothly again.

Full train services on the NEL resumed at 6am yesterday.

SBS Transit is still investigating the cause of Monday's breakdown, which affected about 60,000 commuters.

According to the company, at fault was a copper power cable that runs at the top of the tunnel and supplies the electricity that drives the train. The power cable is tensioned, or stretched like a rubber band. When it broke, it fragmented and pieces were scattered along the tunnel. Service crew had to first clear the debris before moving the trains and making repairs.

It was a thumbs-up, however, for the response of the commuters, and how the operators handled the incident. Said Mr Ong: "This was not an exercise, but a sudden incident. But operators and commuters responded well, and the back-up services were well put in place by the operators. There was no panic, and Singaporeans have accepted that such incidents will occur from time to time."