

NEWTON TUNNEL FIRE

Fire likely due to 'insulation issues'

Transport Minister says lab findings will indicate if SMRT's incident management plans need to be improved

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SINGAPORE – Last month's fire in a tunnel near Newton MRT Station was caused by a short circuit, which was most likely due to cable insulation is-



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Mr Lui Tuck Yew
TRANSPORT MINISTER

sues, Transport Minister Lui Tuck Yew said in Parliament yesterday.

While this will be confirmed by laboratory tests which should conclude in the "next few weeks", Mr Lui assured the House that cables at the affected stretch have been replaced.

Operator SMRT has also conducted a complete insulation test of all underground traction cables and stepped up insulation checks on similar installations in all tunnels, he said.

Mr Lui was responding to a parliamentary question from Nominated Member of Parliament Eugene Tan, who had asked for the Transport Ministry's assessment of the emergency response by the SMRT and the Singapore Civil Defence Force.

Asst Prof Tan also questioned whether the inspection, maintenance and operations requirements of the rail network can be made more robust for the protection of commuters and station staff.

In response, Mr Lui said he was awaiting the findings of the investigations into the fire to gauge if improvements to incident management plans are needed.

Both SMRT and the Land Transport Authority will be looking at preventive measures, he added.

"I have made clear to both agencies that I expect a thorough investigation, to find out the root cause of the fire, and to learn useful lessons on how we can better manage similar incidents in the future, to better ensure passenger safety," Mr Lui said.

Asst Prof Tan also expressed concern about commuters who were milling around the platform and taking photographs during the incident. He asked if this was allowed.

"The passengers, in this case, were ushered as quickly as possible out of the station, contrary to impressions that they were allowed to mill around," Mr Lui explained.