Glitches common on Bukit Panjang LRT

It has had over 150 incidents since its Nov 1999 opening

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Bukit Panjang LRT has been plagued by various incidents. On Sunday, a train stalled, forcing 11 passengers to use a track walkway. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

PREVIOUS CASES

- Sunday: A train broke down on the Bukit Panjang LRT, leading to a 2½-hour delay in service.
- Oct 12, 2008: SMRT hired a team to help fix faults that had been occurring on the LRT tracks. They were hired to work on the tracks for six to seven minutes before stopping. The system was down for about five days.

Operator SMRT had been fined $10,000 twice, once for an incident where three passengers were injured when a moving train came to a stationary one. In 2010, an SMRT technician died after he was hit by an LRT train. He was supposedly on a walkway to get to a station. He later died.

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SMRT's other LRT system in Toa Payoh-Punggol is run by SBS Transit. Built by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries in 2003 before the two systems were fully developed, it has been less problematic.

Regarding Sunday’s LRT breakdown, SMRT said yesterday that it was still investigating the cause of the fault that affected services for 2½ hours. While the disruption was relatively minor, it came amid a high-profile rail incident programme to revamp the LRT system to make it more reliable.

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SMRT’s trouble continued to spread in the midst of a $3.2 million project to revamp the LRT system. On Saturday, a train broke down on the Bukit Panjang LRT, leading to a five-day shutdown. In 2002, a wheel fell off, leading to a five-day shutdown.

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According to SMRT’s annual report, the LRT system has improved by nearly 10 per cent to 10.5 million since it opened.

SMRT rail disruption has more than doubled to over two million over the same period.

This has led some observers to question the viability of the $285 million system – which has had by far the most glitches per kilometre of track among all rail projects here – and whether buses should cater to the relatively small volume of commuter needs.

Dr Park Byung Joon, programme leader of the Master of Science programme in urban transport management at SIM University, said: “The system is being discontinued in terms of reliability and ridership. There must be a thorough review, with the possibility of rebuilding the whole system or burning it down.”

Mr Woon Seng Hock, an economics transport group fellow at NUS, agreed that SMRT needed to find ways to reduce the number of LRT breakdowns.

“We have to find a way to do better,” he said. “If I can’t be there in the next 24 hours, the system can’t be there in the next 24 hours.”

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