



Aerial view of Former Bukit Timah Railway Station node
Photo Credit: MND

The Singapore Rail Corridor: Transforming a Former Railway Line into an Extraordinary Community Space

By See Nin Tan

Singapore is an island city-state with a land area of about 720 sq. kilometers (just over 275 sq. miles) and a population of 5.5 million. While the country has earned its name as a “City in a Garden”, the need to set aside green community spaces for relief and recreation is increasingly important in the years ahead as the country continues to progress and develop.

The Rail Corridor was part of the former Keretapi Tanah

Melayu (KTM) railway line that linked Singapore to Malaysia. It is twenty-four kilometers long (nearly fifteen miles), stretching across the entire island from Woodlands Town in the north to the old Tanjong Pagar Railway Station in the south. Since the railway ceased operations in 2011, the Rail Corridor became an informal public space popular with nature lovers, trail runners and cyclists. To the people who use it, it is a delightful “green corridor” characterized by the un-manicured natural landscapes

throughout its length. Vestiges of railway history such as the black painted steel truss bridges and a small country-style railway station are retained and conserved as heritage structures. The Rail Corridor with its green biophilic experience and historical setting contrasts sharply with the rest of modern urban Singapore.

The extraordinary length of the Rail Corridor and the diversified character of its surrounding neighbourhoods make it truly unique. An estimated one

million people live within one kilometer of the Corridor. There are also many workplaces and community facilities nearby that include offices, retail areas, industrial and business parks, a hospital and more than fifty educational institutions ranging from primary schools to a polytechnic. Where the former KTM line physically divided communities, there is now the opportunity to transform the Rail Corridor into an inclusive and extraordinary community space that connects neighbourhoods and links communities.

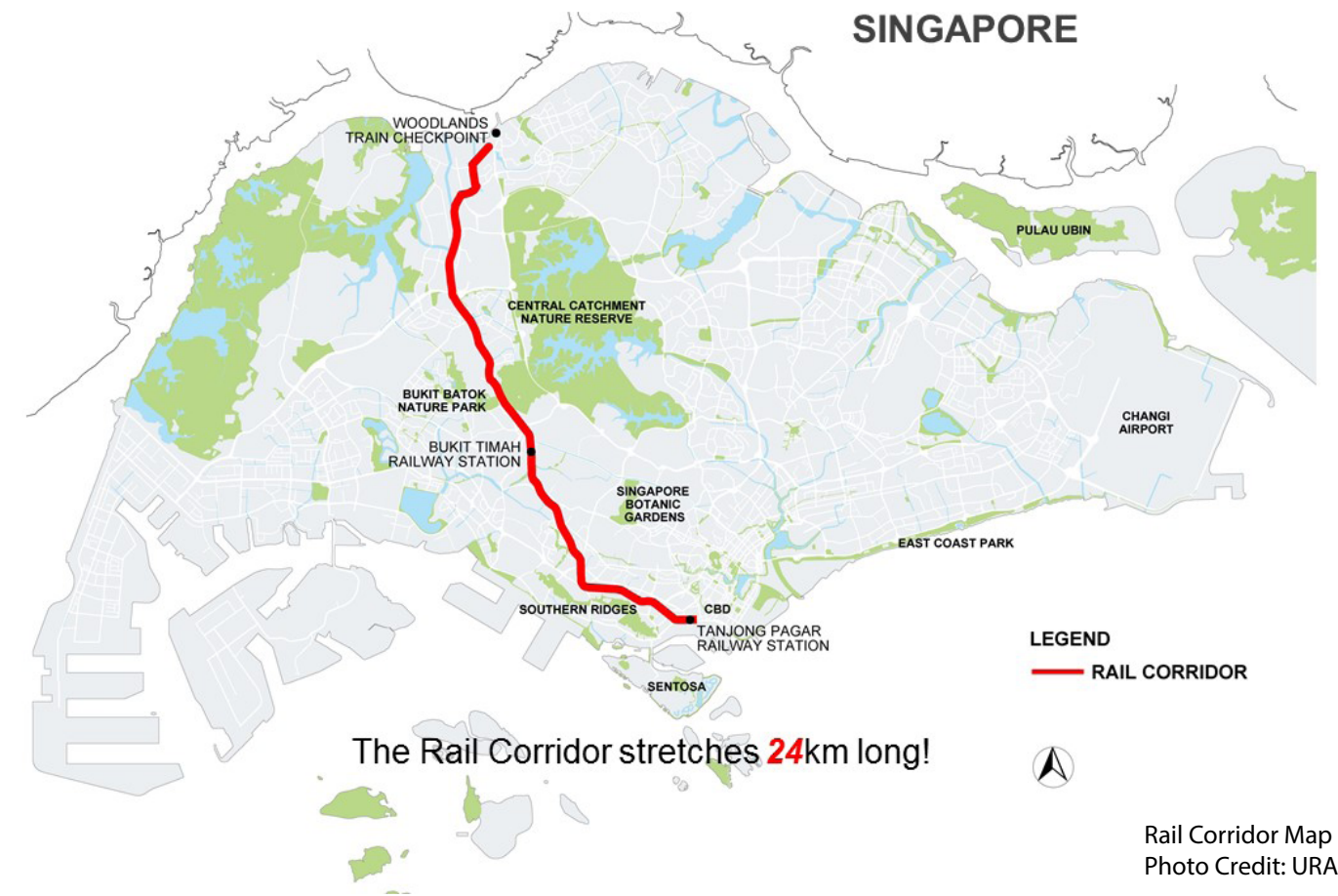
A Request for Proposals (RFP) to develop a Concept Master Plan for the Rail Corridor was awarded to a multidisciplinary team led by Nikken Sekkei in late 2015. The Concept Master Plan aims to achieve the following planning and design goals established by the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) after extensive public engagement with various stakeholders, interest groups and the wider community:

1) Reinforce its unique identity as a “green corridor.”

- 2) Retain its sense of place and celebrate its railway heritage.
- 3) Re-establish a seamless connectivity along the entire twenty-four-kilometer route for pedestrian use and cycling.
- 4) Enhance its biodiversity and function as an ecological corridor through improved landscaping.
- 5) Create an inclusive, safe and inviting public space that encourages the spirit of exploration and discovery.



Artist Impression - Station Master Quarters re-purposed as Cafe
Photo Credit: URA



6) Promote its use as a leisure corridor for sports, arts, education and various community activities.

7) Pilot community ownership and stewardship in accordance with local residents' interests and needs.

8) Create opportunities for promotion of a healthy lifestyle.

9) Propose innovative and sensitive design solutions with possibilities for urban integration with the Corridor.

The first phase of detailed design and implementation will commence in 2018 and will address a four-kilometer "signature stretch" of the Rail

Corridor. The rest of the Rail Corridor will be developed in stages with a basic trail in place for most parts of the Corridor by 2021.

The Rail Corridor project won URA and the Nikken Sekkei Design Team the 2017 Landscape Design and Master Planning, and the 2017 International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) Asia Pacific Region "Outstanding Award" for Analysis and Master Planning.

See Nin Tan is Senior Director of Physical Planning at Singapore's Urban Redevelopment Authority.

Resources:

Urban Redevelopment Authority. Singapore. Rail Corridor. <https://www.ura.gov.sg/ms/rail-corridor/overview>.



Artist Impression - Forest Valley stretch of the Rail Corridor
Photo Credit: URA