



The Singapore experience goes global: Building on two decades of excellence in the rail industry

How ComfortDelGro is progressing in the rail industry and delivering value to customers worldwide

It has been 21 years this June since Singapore's North East Line (NEL), opened its doors as the world's first fully automated and driverless underground heavy metro system. For ComfortDelGro and its subsidiary SBS Transit, this milestone marked the start of a journey in the rail sector, driven by a commitment to operational excellence and continuous improvement.

ComfortDelGro has recently won metro tenders in Paris and Stockholm, expanding its network to more than 300 kilometres globally by the end of 2025. The Group is also pursuing further growth opportunities for new rail projects in Singapore, London, Sydney and several European cities.

A crucial factor of this journey has been the reliability of the company's Singapore metro and light rail operations. In 2019, the NEL became the first metro line in Singapore to achieve the global benchmark of over 1 million 'mean kilometres between failure' (MKBF), a widely used industry measure of the reliability of rail operations. This was further improved to 2 million by 2020. The Singapore Downtown Line (DTL), which opened in three stages between 2013 and 2017, achieved a stellar 8.124 million MKBF in 2023. This result doubled the 4.05 million MKBF that the DTL attained in 2022, enabling the DTL to retain its position as Singapore's leading metro line for the third year in a row.

The 'Singapore experience' is now being shared with other countries, offering the same Operations

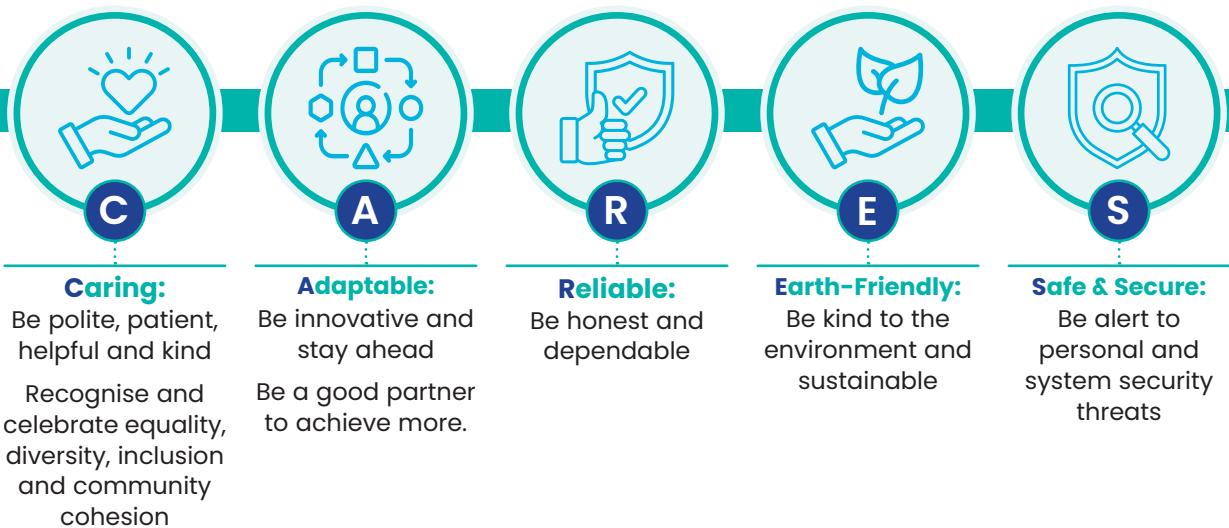
and Maintenance (O&M) capabilities and genuine care for passengers that has been developed in Singapore, explains **Peter Lodge, ComfortDelGro's Group Chief Business Development Officer (Bus and Rail)**. "Our priority is to ensure that the networks we operate are reliable, not only serve the needs of our clients but also to meet the expectations of our end customers as well," he said.

Operational quantum leap

One of the key areas of focus has been the intelligent management and maintenance of assets. "We use data where possible to predict trends and detect even the smallest possible failure that one can foresee," Lodge said.

Various components are playing a fundamental part. The Grade of Automation (GoA) 4 fully driverless metro operation primarily relies on an Operational Control Centre (OCC) that makes sure the traffic flows smoothly and intervenes if a need arises. SBS Transit also implemented a Maintenance and Engineering Centre (MEC) which serves as a centralised hub to aggregate and monitor data from a suite of condition monitoring sources installed across the different assets. 4sight, a proprietary software, synchronises and diagnoses the incoming data to enable better decision-making. "Our strategy is to optimise maintenance to make our assets as reliable as possible," said Lodge.

With the accumulated expertise, the team has developed solutions that address challenges that the Original Equipment Manufacturing partners might not anticipate, Lodge added. "Beyond just being an operator, we have developed deep



experience as tech integrators," he says. "We place emphasis on maintenance R&D and data-driven asset management methodology. We can retrofit and implement enhancements to make things better and cost-effective for our clients, making innovation at the core of what we do."

Forging strategic partnerships

Internationally, ComfortDelGro collaborates with renowned rail partners to bring local expertise and resources to its operations. Its international partners have a strong understanding of the countries and cities they are active in. That helps the firm to ensure its railway operations truly benefit the local

partners, employees, communities, focusing on care for passengers, reliability, safety and environmental responsibility.

More than just a philosophy, CARES also includes a world-class customer experience methodology, built over 20 years of serving railway passengers both in Singapore and globally. It enables customer-centricity across all processes and systems, through cutting-edge delivery of customer information and communications using digital tools, as well as many inclusivity enhancements and programmes for persons with various disabilities to travel easily and seamlessly on the network.

"Localisation is a very intricate and important part of how we run our operations, safeguarding the well-being of our local employees and the wider communities. We want everyone to flourish."

Peter Lodge, Group Chief Business Development Officer (Bus and Rail), ComfortDelGro

communities they serve. "We are involved in the local labour markets, economies, and communities," Lodge points out. "Localisation is a very intricate and important part of how we run our operations, safeguarding the well-being of our local employees and the wider communities. We want everyone to flourish."

The mutual trust and open communication between the stakeholders allow all parties to thrive. It has also become a fundamental part of the company's holistic corporate responsibility approach.

A philosophy of care

At the heart of it, ComfortDelGro's CARES philosophy expresses a genuine commitment to customers and



The company's customer service is also yielding positive feedback. "We have exceeded expectations when it comes to customer service," says Lodge. "Our ability to bring our CARES philosophy to meet the unique needs of our local customers, making sure we generate real improvements in customer satisfaction, are aspects that our clients deeply appreciate and care about."

Growing the global network

The first-generation NEL trains have now been refurbished with new features that include condition monitoring systems to further minimise breakdowns and to alert on potential problems. Upgraded interiors and newer air-conditioning and ventilation

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Bertrand Laude, Head of Bids, SBS Transit Mobility

systems enhance passenger comfort.

In Singapore, SBS Transit now operates a network of 83 kilometres with 78 stations and a fleet of 192 trains. This equates to 30.6% of market share in the local metro industry and an average daily ridership of 1.21 million in 2023. The company is also bidding for the upcoming Jurong Region Line and Cross Island Line expected to be awarded by end-2024.

"Our goal is to spearhead the future of what world-class rail operations can be", explains Bertrand Laude, Head of Bids, SBS Transit Mobility. The close partnership between ComfortDelGro and SBS Transit Mobility has been an important factor in the Group's railway journey towards success. "We are excited to be creating a new global network of railway capabilities, sharing bespoke best practices between SBS Transit's operations in Singapore and ComfortDelGro's expanding rail portfolio globally," says Laude.

Since January 2022, ComfortDelGro's joint venture with the Australian company UGL Rail has been operating the Auckland metropolitan rail service, the largest in New Zealand with four lines adding up to 94 kilometres, for an initial term of eight years. This represented the first time that a Singapore-owned company had operated passenger rail services abroad.

In Paris, ComfortDelGro's consortium with French-owned transport providers RATP and Alstom secured a six-year deal to operate the new Grand Paris Express Line 15 in July last year. The contract includes operations and maintenance across 16 stations, covering a distance of more than 33 kilometres. Passenger services are expected to start at the end of 2025.

Connecting Stockholm is a joint-venture between ComfortDelGro and the UK-based Go-Ahead Group that was awarded a contract in January 2024 to operate and maintain the Stockholm Metro for a term of 11 years from 2025. The underground rail system in the Swedish capital comprises seven lines with 100 stations, six depots and 107 kilometres of track.

"Our strategic direction is to build scale and deepen expertise, to bring the Singapore experience to other parts of the world," said Lodge. "This is an exciting time for the ComfortDelGro team as we continue to grow and evolve in the global rail industry." ▶



This article is part of a multi-part series on
ComfortDelGro's rail operations.

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