‘Nature corridor’ proposal for railway land

Nature Society’s idea incorporates cycling paths, recreational areas

By Jeremy Au Yong

THE Nature Society of Singapore is close to finishing a proposal to convert the 40km stretch of Malayrailway land into a green corridor. It would contain cycling paths connecting different neighborhoods to the city center and might also be home to many of Singapore’s native plants and animals.

The proposal seeks to preserve the railway tracks, which the society regards as an important part of Singapore’s history.

But some property analysts say the proposal will be a hard sell. And even if it is approved, a nature corridor can at best last for a decade or two. The railway corridor remains a vital lens through which to view the diversity of local wildlife.

The idea of such eco-passages is not new to Singapore. In May, the Land Transport Authority called for tenders to convert about 12km of railway land, from Bukit Panjang to Woodlands, into a nature corridor.

The Nature Society, however, plans for a bigger stretch. The railway land would serve as a sort of Central Expressway for plants and animals. It would allow the movement of species previously cut off from each other, thus increasing the genetic diversity of local wildlife.

The four-year-old raptor was found with a broken left leg by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) near the tarmac of Changi Airport. The SPCA took it to the Jurong Bird Park’s Avian Hospital for treatment.

Throughout the procedure, as staff castigated its reaction on film, it watched quietly, only the glitter in its eye a testament to its will to live – and fly.

“The eagle has landed,” said Leong, Nature Society vice-president. “To the SPCA, a day like this is a dream come true.”

Should the idea be approved, the bird would be released back into the wild.

The Malayrailway line was at one point a vital belt of greenery. Itoccasionally organises walks there.

“The proposal is due to be submitted to the authorities in the next two weeks,” Mr Howard Shaw, executive director of the Singapore Environment Council, told The Straits Times. “But it’s so much better than nothing.”

He pointed out that there were a few successful examples of eco-passages in different parts of the world.

The railway corridor would allow tourism activities of all kinds, and would have a significant economic impact.

A few days after the announcement, Nature Society vice-president Leong Kekk Pang wrote to us. The Straits Times Forum page suggesting that the land be converted into a nature corridor.

Since then, others have written in, with similar ideas. One suggested converting Tanglin Pagar station into a transport hub for those walking or cycling into the city. He suggested having bike lock-up, and shower and locker facilities at the station.

The proposal is due to be submitted to the authorities in the next two weeks.

Mr Howard Shaw, executive director of the Singapore Environment Council, told The Straits Times he supported the idea. Though he noted the need to consider the opportunity cost of not developing the land otherwise, he said, “It would not seem like a waste of money.”

“Eagles usually get such injuries by attacks by other eagles or have had difficulty moving the Tanjong Pagar Station,” Mr Leong said.

The Malaysian KTM rail line would be a kind of “expressway” for plants and animals and under the society’s proposal, ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN.

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