

Headline:	\$70m to be pumped into R&D to devise urban solutions				
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\$70m to be pumped into R&D to devise urban solutions

In the face of existential threats such as climate change and rising sea levels, the Government will invest nearly \$70 million over the next two years to tackle urban challenges and devise solutions.

It has put out grant calls for research institutes, universities and companies to submit proposals for research and development (R&D) projects as part of its Cities of Tomorrow (CoT) research programme.

Launched in 2017, the \$150 million CoT programme charts out critical research areas to build a future city, such as advanced construction, resilient infrastructure and sustainability.

Minister for National Development Lawrence Wong said the Government wants to add more areas of research to the programme, including additive manufacturing or 3D printing for buildings and how buildings and spaces affect humans.

Speaking at the opening of the two-day Urban Sustainability R&D Congress yesterday, Mr Wong said he was glad that 75 per cent of the applications for projects under the programme were from the private sector. But he also noted that most of the research done under the CoT tends to be top-down and based on specific problems.

To get more companies to drive the process, Mr Wong said the Government has set up a membership platform to bring together industry players and catalyse more R&D – the Built Environment Technology Alliance, or Beta.

Beta, a joint effort by the Building and Construction Authority and National Research Foundation, is in line with the Construction Industry Transformation Map's aim to bring together companies to transform Singapore's infrastructure. "With Beta, we won't specify the problem statements. Instead, we will let companies drive the process and specify their needs and requirements," said Mr Wong.

A developer could bring a problem to Beta, which will link it up with research institutions.

Or if a company wants to deploy a new product, Beta can help it find potential partners willing to test-bed and commercialise the product.

"Beta will provide physical space, equipment and facilities... to reduce their upfront capital expenditure. There will also be funding support to help companies co-share the cost and risk of R&D," Mr Wong added.

While details are not yet available, companies such as CapitaLand, City Developments, Pan United, Sembcorp, Surbana Jurong, Tiong Seng and Woh Hup have expressed interest in joining the alliance.

Other companies are also optimistic about its potential to uncover new urban solutions.

"We believe Beta will help like-minded companies come together to jointly innovate solutions that benefit the development of our built environment," said Mr Joseph Gan, CEO and co-founder of Singapore digital security solutions provider V-Key.

Around 1,000 researchers, business representatives and public officials attended the opening of the conference at the Suntec Singapore Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Mr Wong also gave out five awards to recognise outstanding R&D efforts from the Ministry of National Development family and partners. These went to the Housing Board, National Environment Agency, Energy Market Authority and A*Star.