

FX Insight

SGD: Could See Boost of >1% if MAS Re-centers

SGD NEER Largely Remained in Our Projection Range Recently

Back in late Jan (see here), we had maintained a modest bullish bias on SGD NEER, on account of Singapore's first-mover status in policy normalization, resilient manufacturing and trade outcomes, rising inflation risks etc., and cited "+1.5% to +2.0%" above par as a potential trading range for SGD NEER in lead-up to MAS Apr policy. Aside from a brief two-week period from late Feb to early March (escalation in Russia-Ukraine conflict) when SGD NEER dipped, our projected trading range largely held. For the past 3 weeks, SGD NEER has been testing the upper bound of the band, by our estimates.

MAS Could Re-center the Policy Band in April

House view is for the MAS to re-center the policy band to the prevailing level in mid-April, given elevated inflation pressures and supply bottlenecks. This tightening will provide more room near-term for the SGD NEER to appreciate and contain imported inflation. (See our economist team's note here). We see potential for 1.0% or larger boost to SGD NEER if a re-centering takes place (see table below). Risk is if MAS prefers to wait-and-see on global oil developments and avoid the more impactful re-centering option, perhaps choosing to steepen slope instead. In this scenario, given that hawkish MAS bias is somewhat priced, boost to SGD could be much less discernible.

Maintain Net Bullish Bias on SGD Basket

One downside risk to SGD is if the Ukraine war and ongoing additions to sanctions on Russia weigh on global growth to a larger extent than markets expect. But historically, if military conflict is short-lived, sentiment drags on AxJ FX tend to be reversed over several weeks or months. Threat of double Fed tightening (balance sheet run-off and rate hikes) at faster pace also needs to be monitored. But while not immune, AxJ FX have shown some resilience to recent bouts of UST yield upswings. Back in Singapore, further easing in Covid curbs are supportive of SGD. On net, considering these factors as well as historical SGD NEER performance, if a re-centering materializes, a tentative trading range post-announcement could be +0.5% to +1.5% above the new (higher) policy mid-point.

For USDSGD, a MAS re-centering has the potential to lead to an adhoc dip in 2Q. Dips in 2H could be more gradual, but bias for the USDSGD pair could remain to the downside if pandemic/war drags remain contained and USD softens a tad into end-year.

Past Episodes of Re-centering (Upwards) & Impact on SGD

	1-Day		1-Week (5 Trading Days)		1-Month (21 Trading Days)	
Past Episodes of Recentering Higher	Chg in SGD NEER (%)	Chg in USDSGD (%)	Chg in SGD NEER (%)	Chg in USDSGD (%)	Chg in SGD NEER (%)	Chg in USDSGD (%)
Apr-11*	0.7	-0.8	1	-1.5	0.9	-1.4
Apr-10	1.2	-1.4	1.3	-1.3	2.1	-0.9
Apr-08	1.3	-1.4	1.6	-1.8	1.4	-0.3

^{*} Re-centred below prevailing level of the SGD NEER.

Note: Changes are estimated versus SGD NEER or USDSGD levels just before the policy shift. Source: Bloomberg, Maybank FX Research & Strategy Estimates

Saktiandi Supaat (65) 6320 1379 saktiandi@maybank.com.sg

Analysts

Tan Yanxi (65) 6320 1378 tanyx@maybank.com.sg

Christopher Wong (65) 6320 1347 wongkl@maybank.com.sg

Fiona Lim (65) 6320 1374 fionalim@maybank.com.sg



SGD NEER Largely Near Top of Policy Band in Recent Months, In Line with Earlier Assessment

In Oct 2021, MAS raised slightly the slope of the SGD NEER policy band (estimated at +0.5% p.a.), from 0% previously. Headline inflation was still quite far from the 2%-handle but showed a clear rising trend then, from a mild negative y/y reading in Jan 2021 to 1.2%y/y by Sep.

Fast forward to early 2022, and MAS announced a surprise off-cycle decision on 25 Jan, raising "slightly" the slope of the SGD NEER band (likely another +0.5% p.a. increment). After the two rounds of slope steepening, we estimate that the policy slope is now at 1.0% p.a.

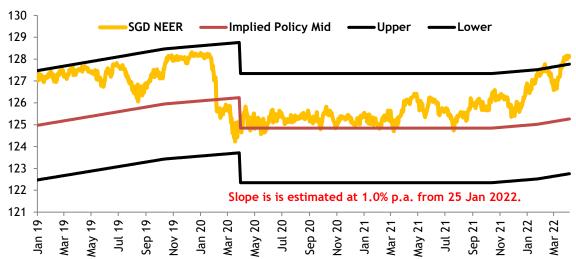
The Jan off-cycle decision was likely premised again on larger-thanexpected inflation risks, with MAS citing "rapidly accumulating external and domestic cost pressures", amid "confluence of recovering global demand and persistent supply-side frictions". In particular, inflation risks may also be to the upside given impact of Covid and geopolitical shocks on supply chains. While still looking for external supply constraints to ease in 2H, MAS noted that tightening in the domestic labor market could also lead to strengthened wage pressures.

On net, the policy move should be largely seen as a continuation of the strategy that MAS has embarked on since last Oct, i.e., pre-emptively adjusting policy parameters in calibrated steps as assessment of inflation risks swing to the upside.

On hindsight, MAS was probably right to have conducted the Jan off-cycle to stem momentum in imported price pressures. In late Feb, Russia invaded Ukraine, and subsequent bout of severe sanctions on Russia by US and EU had led to shocks in energy and commodity markets, exacerbating global supply disruptions and adding to ongoing waves of price pressures.

Back in our 25 Jan note (see here), we had maintained a modest bullish bias on SGD NEER, on account of Singapore's first-mover status in policy normalization, resilient manufacturing and trade outcomes, rising inflation risks etc., and cited "+1.5% to +2.0%" above par as a potential trading range for SGD NEER in the lead-up to MAS Apr policy decision.

SGD NEER Testing Upper Bound of Policy Band

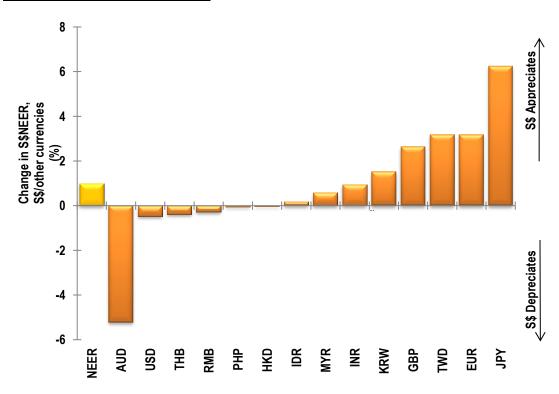


Source: Bloomberg, Maybank FX Research & Strategy

Aside from a brief two-week period from late Feb to early March, when SGD NEER dipped, our expected trading range largely held. The brief period of modest pull-back might have been due to the escalation in Russia-Ukraine conflict then. The Budget announcement of staggering of GST increases to start in 2023 (rather than 2022), meaning slightly less near-term inflationary concerns, could have contributed to the SGD NEER dip a tad too.

We had also cautioned that with our model suggesting that SGD NEER was testing the upper bound of the band, there might be limited room for SGD gains, with USDSGD pair more likely to follow USD cues in the interim. This too, similarly came to pass, as incrementally hawkish Fed signalling over the period led to a buoyant dollar DXY in March, and USDSGD traded in higher ranges alongside.

Recent Strengthening in SGD NEER (31 Dec 2021 to 5 Apr 2022) Masks Diverging Outcomes Among Peers



Source: Bloomberg, Maybank FX Research & Strategy

YTD, we estimate that SGD saw modest appreciation (+1.0%) versus a basket of its trading peers' FX.

SGD saw losses versus commodity-linked AUD, and to milder extents, USD, THB and RMB. While USD and RMB both hold significant (trade proxy) weights in the SGD basket, the % drags in SGD versus these two currencies were quite modest and did not weigh on the SGD NEER basket excessively.

On the other hand, SGD saw gains versus most other FX, the most significant being JPY, followed by EUR, TWD, GBP, KRW, INR. JPY tanked largely on widening UST-JGB yield differentials, on incrementally hawkish Fed versus commitment to ultra-dovish stance from BoJ. EUR



and GBP continue to see drags on geopolitical risks emanating from the Russia-Ukraine war and concomitant sanctions. Risk-sensitive KRW and oil import-dependent INR similarly saw bouts of softness since the war started and as oil prices spiked on supply-side concerns. But we note that both these currencies have bounced off modestly from interim troughs alongside very tentative signs of progress in Russia-Ukraine talks and some recent moderation in oil prices from highs.

MAS Could Re-center the Policy Band in Apr

House view is for the MAS to tighten by re-centering the SGD NEER band to the prevailing level at the mid-April meeting, given elevated inflation pressures and supply bottlenecks. Core inflation is rising at the fastest pace in nearly a decade given rising commodity prices, a tight labor market and a demand recovery from the reopening. (See our economist team's preview note here). A change in the width of the band is not expected for now.

The tightening will provide more room near-term for the SGD NEER to appreciate and contain imported inflation. MAS will likely maintain the current slightly steeper slope, given the worsening growth outlook in the medium-term. The Russia-Ukraine war, China's fresh lockdowns, rising energy prices and supply chain disruptions are risk factors to watch for.

Past Episodes of Re-centering (Upwards) & Estimated Impact on SGD

	1-Day		1-Week (5 Trading Days)		1-Month	
					(21 Trading Days)	
Past Episodes of	Chg in	Chg in	Chg in	Chg in	Chg in	Chg in
Recentering	SGD	USDSGD	SGD	USDSGD	SGD	USDSGD
Higher	NEER (%)	(%)	NEER (%)	(%)	NEER (%)	(%)
Apr-11*	0.7	-0.8	1	-1.5	0.9	-1.4
Apr-10	1.2	-1.4	1.3	-1.3	2.1	-0.9
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^{*} Re-centred below prevailing level of the SGD NEER.

Note: Changes are estimated versus SGD NEER or USDSGD levels just before the policy shift.

Source: Bloomberg, Maybank FX Research & Strategy Estimates

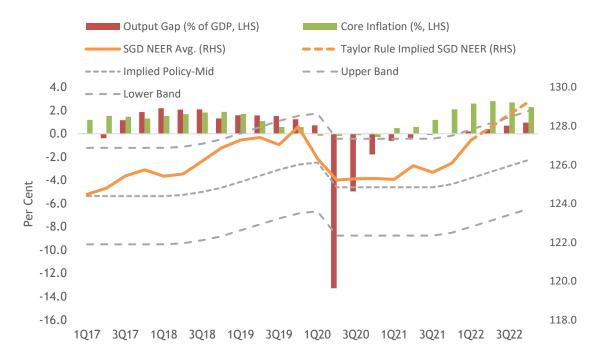
From the table, we see potential for +1.0% or greater boost to SGD in the case of re-centering higher in the policy band, to prevailing level. Notably, given that this is a structural shift in policy parameters, the impact is not transitory, i.e., SGD NEER remains significantly higher versus pre-policy shift levels one month post announcement.

The risk is if MAS prefers to wait-and-see on global oil developments and avoid the more impactful re-centering option, choosing to steepen the slope instead. In this alternative scenario, given that hawkish MAS bias is somewhat priced, boost to SGD could be much less discernible.

For a check on the potential trajectory for SGD NEER going forward, we turn to our Taylor rule model. Despite potential external growth drags from global geopolitical risks, the output gap (red bars) is still expected to return to a mild positive over the year. Core inflation (green bars) has exceeded 2% since Dec 2021 on the back of higher energy and food costs, and will likely jump as the Russia-Ukraine conflict intensified in March, driven by both rising food and energy prices. Our economist team's latest forecasts for core inflation and headline inflation in 2022 are 2.7% and 3.6%, respectively.

Given these macro conditions, our Taylor rule estimates (dotted orange line in chart below) suggest that SGD NEER is likely to continue seeing upward pressures in the coming quarters. Notably, our estimates imply that the current upper bound of the policy band may not be able to contain the inherent upward pressures on SGD NEER.

SGD NEER Could See Upward Pressures in 2022 (Taylor Rule Estimates)



Source: Bloomberg, Maybank FX Research & Strategy Estimates

One downside risk to SGD is if the Russia-Ukraine war and ongoing additions to sanctions on Russia from US and Europe weigh on global growth to a larger extent than markets currently expect. Besides the sentiment channel, weaker growth in Europe could still dampen regional growth momentum. As our economist team pointed out earlier, the EU accounts for a substantial 9% of ASEAN exports, while FDI from the EU makes up 11% of ASEAN FDI inflows. But historically, if military conflict is short-lived, drags on AxJ FX sentiments tend to be reversed (on average) over several weeks or months.

Threat of double Fed tightening (balance sheet run-off and rate hikes) at faster pace also needs to be monitored, as play-up of QT uncertainties can undermine sentiments for longer than expected. But while not immune, AxJ FX have shown some resilience to recent bouts of UST yield

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upswings. Back in Singapore, further easing in Covid curbs are supportive of broad SGD sentiments as well.

On net, considering these factors as well as historical SGD NEER performance, if a re-centering comes to pass, our bias is for SGD NEER to trade on the stronger side of the policy band post policy-announcement, till the next policy decision in Oct. A tentative trading range could be +0.5% to +1.5% above the new (higher) policy mid-point.

For the USDSGD pair, a MAS re-centering has the potential to lead to an ad-hoc dip in 2Q. Dips in subsequent quarters could be more gradual, but bias for the USDSGD pair could remain to the downside if pandemic/war drags remain contained. Historically, USD strength also tends to fade post the first Fed rate hike in each cycle.

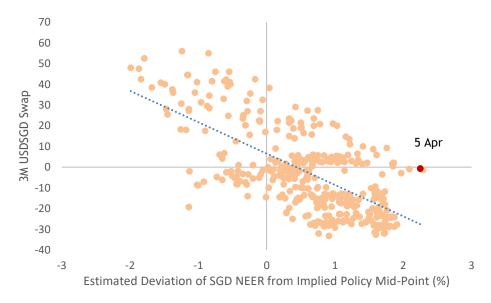
Forecast	2Q 2022	3Q 2022	4Q 2022	1Q 2023
USDSGD	1.3200	1.3100	1.3000	1.2900

SGD NEER and FX Swaps

Given our expectations of a tightening bias from MAS in Apr, and positive trading range for SGD NEER post-policy announcement, the 3M USDSGD FX Swap—which also represents the differential between 3M SG-US rates—could see some downward pressures going forward, i.e., SG rates modestly lower versus US rates in same period. (See broad negative relationship between SGD NEER & rate differentials in chart below).

In this case, with US short-end rates potentially seeing exponential hikes between now and the end of the year—OIS markets implied looking for +220bps in Fed funds rate between now and end-2022 at last check—SG short-term rates could also see a quick climb as well, but at a slight laggard pace. House view of 3M SIBOR for end-2022 is at 1.8%, before climbing to 2.3% by end-2023.

3M USDSGD FX Swap Could See Some Drags Going Forward



Source: Bloomberg, Maybank FX Research & Strategy Estimates Note: Data is from 2015 till latest, in weekly frequency.

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USDSGD (Daily): Still Two-way Swings into MAS Decision

Source: Bloomberg, Maybank FX Research & Strategy

USDSGD pair last seen near 1.36-handle, slightly higher than levels seen end-Feb, but below interim high near 1.3690. On USDSGD daily chart, momentum is not showing a clear bias while RSI is on a gentle climb. Some upside risks for pair not ruled out in interim, but extent of upswings could be mild given expectations of hawkish MAS move in mid-Apr. Pair could follow broader dollar cues near-term.

Resistance at 1.3620 (23.6% fibo retracement from Feb low to Mar high) could be tested; next at 1.3690 (Feb high). Support at 1.3520 (61.8% fibo), 1.3470 (76.4% fibo), 1.3410 (2022 low).

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Malayan Banking Berhad (Incorporated In Malaysia)

Foreign Exchange
Singapore
Saktiandi Supaat
Head, FX Research
saktiandi@maybank.com.sg
(+65) 6320 1379

Christopher Wong Senior FX Strategist Wongkl@maybank.com.sg (+65) 6320 1347

Fiona Lim
Senior FX Strategist
Fionalim@maybank.com.sg
(+65) 6320 1374

Yanxi Tan FX Strategist tanyx@maybank.com.sg (+65) 6320 1378

Fixed Income

<u>Malaysia</u>

Winson Phoon Wai Kien

Fixed Income Analyst

winsonphoon@maybank.com

(+65) 6340 1079

Se Tho Mun Yi
Fixed Income Analyst
munyi.st@maybank-ib.com
(+60) 3 2074 7606

<u>Indonesia</u>

Juniman
Chief Economist, Indonesia
juniman@maybank.co.id
(+62) 21 2922 8888 ext 29682

Myrdal Gunarto Industry Analyst MGunarto@maybank.co.id (+62) 21 2922 8888 ext 29695

Sales

Malaysia

Azman Amiruddin Shah bin Mohamad Shah Head, Sales-Malaysia, GB-Global Markets azman.shah@maybank.com (+60) 03-2173 4188

Singapore

Janice Loh Ai Lin Head of Sales, Singapore jloh@maybank.com.sg (+65) 6536 1336

<u>Indonesia</u>

Endang Yulianti Rahayu
Head of Sales, Indonesia
EYRahayu@maybank.co.id
(+62) 21 29936318 or
(+62) 2922 8888 ext 29611

Shanghai

Joyce Ha Treasury Sales Manager Joyce.ha@maybank.com (+86) 21 28932588

Hong Kong

Joanne Lam Sum Sum Head of Corporate Sales Hong Kong Joanne.lam@maybank.com (852) 3518 8790