

SERVICE AT YOUR DOORSTEP

Chandrasekar Palanisamy
Traffic Management and Community Partnership, Land Transport Authority, Singapore

Sekar_chandra@lta.gov.sg

Ng Margarita
Community Partnership (Central), Land Transport Authority, Singapore

Margarita_loh@lta.gov.sg

Tan Jane
Community Partnership (Central), Land Transport Authority, Singapore

jane_tan@lta.gov.sg

ABSTRACT

The Land Transport Authority of Singapore (LTA) released its Land Transport Master Plan (LTMP) in March 2008, mapping out the changes envisaged for its land transport system over the next 15 years. Focusing on a vision to provide a 'People-Centred Land Transport System', involving the community (customers) in playing a larger role to help shape and implement land transport plans becomes vital.

This paper describes the transformation undertaken by the LTA to better understand and address the diverse transportation needs of Singaporeans, by engaging the populace directly at a more intimate level, through face-to-face interactions. To do this, a Community Partnership Division was established to provide this 'Service at Your Doorstep' so that many of the community's diverse needs can be comprehensively captured, analysed, understood and addressed in a people-centric and holistic manner.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since its formation in 1995, the Land Transport Authority of Singapore (LTA) has delivered a safe and efficient land transport system that served Singaporeans well. With increasing population, rising affluence and changing demographics, it is inevitable that transport related needs became more diverse and challenging.

To capture these needs, LTA gathers feedback and suggestions through numerous channels such as service counters, telephone hot-lines, paper mails, electronic mails and internet web portals. However, as these channels are largely remote-based and lacked face-to-face interaction, comprehensive understanding of the actual ground situations does pose a challenge.

To see through the eyes of the commuting public, LTA made a bold decision to engage them directly at a more personable and intimate level. Hence, when the Minister of Transport launched the Land Transport Master Plan (LTMP) in March 2008, the establishment of the Community Partnership Division (CPN) was featured as a means to engage the community directly through face-to-face interactions. This is intended to support the organization's and LTMP's vision of creating 'A People-Centred Land Transport System', by allowing the community to play a significant role in shaping and implementing land transport initiatives, over the next 10 to 15 years.

2. STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A multi-pronged strategy was adopted to enable this community engagement to achieve its intended outcome. This entailed areas of recruitment, work assignment and knowledge repository.

2.1 The Team

To form this team, officers with strong technical knowledge and good people management skills were selected from various internal divisions. This provides an opportunity to have a technically competent and customer-centric team to execute its tasks.

Reaching out to each individual in the community poses a challenge and there are practical limitations to such efforts. To overcome this aspect, the engagement was planned to be executed through an established ground network of key community leaders and their adviser, who is usually an elected Member of Parliament (MP) for that area. This process of having a group of key community leaders has, over the years, served as an excellent platform for the government to engage in citizens' dialogues, gathering feedback and foster community bonding.

Each officer from CPN was assigned to specific areas and became the contact point for the community on land transport issues. After months of knocking on the doors of the community leaders to network, connect and understand the community's transport-related needs, the CPN officers were able to eventually build sufficient trust and gain acceptance into the community leaders' regular meetings. The regular meetings held by these community leaders became the platform to share and exchange ideas, suggestions and feedback on land transport matters.

Land transport issues can be wide ranging and all CPN officers will need to be well versed in a variety of work scopes. To assist in this area, a repository of good practices, frequently asked questions and technical guidelines was instituted. This enhanced the CPN officers' knowledge, so that they can be efficient and proficient in handling a variety of issues raised by the community.

The above strategy was put into action and eventually enabled CPN to successfully work with the community leaders and their advisers in all the areas island wide (84 wards/constituencies, in total).

2.2. Objectives and Role of Community Partnership Division

The objective of the CPN Division is to connect, partner and network with the community at large and ultimately establish a healthy long-term relationship with the community leaders and their advisers.

Each officer serves as a single point of contact for LTA. Feedback is gathered through the regular meetings with the community leaders and their advisers, who would channel resident's feedback at these platforms. There will be occasions where the CPN officer is expected to explain and clarify transport related issues raised at these meetings (Figure 1). In addition they would need to ensure that feedback is carefully assessed, outcome conveyed and implementations monitored.

At the same time new initiatives that are being rolled out by the Authority are explained to the community leaders, so that as leaders they are able to act as knowledgeable sources of information to the ground.

Widening the network is essential for CPN officers to capture and understand the ever increasing diverse needs of the people. Hence, CPN officers would accompany the community leaders and advisers in their residential visits at their wards. Through these visits, CPN officers could clarify issues directly with residents and bring a clearer picture back to LTA, for resolution (Figure 2).



Figure 1 - At regular meetings



Figure 2 - At residential visits



Figure 3 - At community events

The community leaders also organise events to promote community bonding. Leveraging on these community event, CPN officers would set up information booth, to display land transport exhibits and distribute flyers, designed to educate the public on land transport matters. Many residents have approached these booths to clarify and provide feedback on land transport matters affecting their living environment. All these activities required the strong dedication of officers to work outside the usual working hours, on weekends and sometimes even during public holidays (Figure 3).

2.3 Capturing Customers Needs Systematically

Direct and personable interaction has helped LTA to build rapport with the community and opened more opportunities for people to provide valuable feedback. Discussions with the community have led to better and deeper understanding of many ground sentiments and underlying problems they faced. The more complex problems gathered are brought back for subject matter experts to review and recommend appropriate measures and seek resolutions. Very often the resolution of such problems requires balancing the diverse needs of the community.

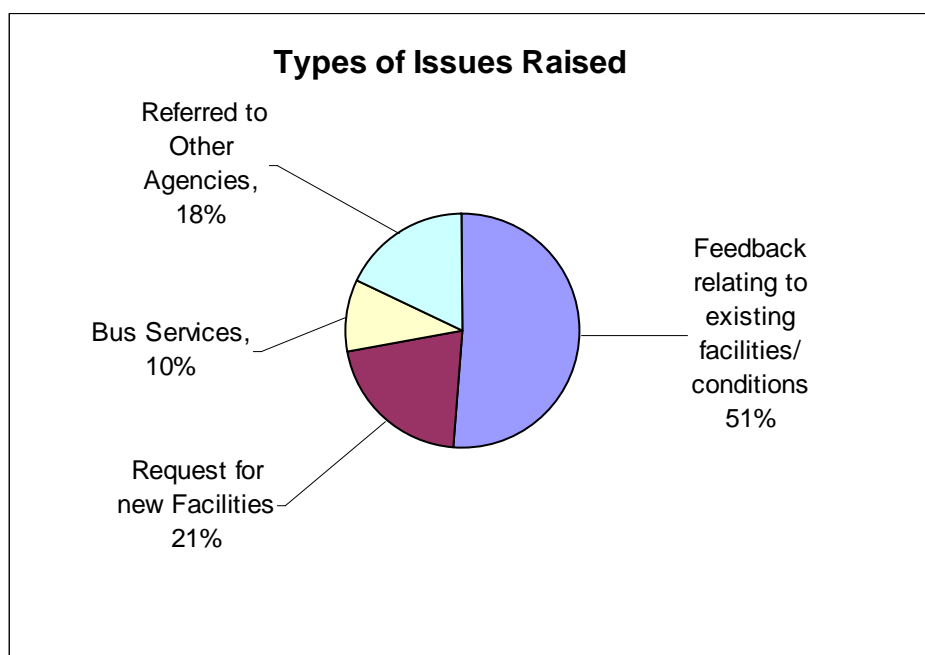


Figure 4 – Types of Issues raised.

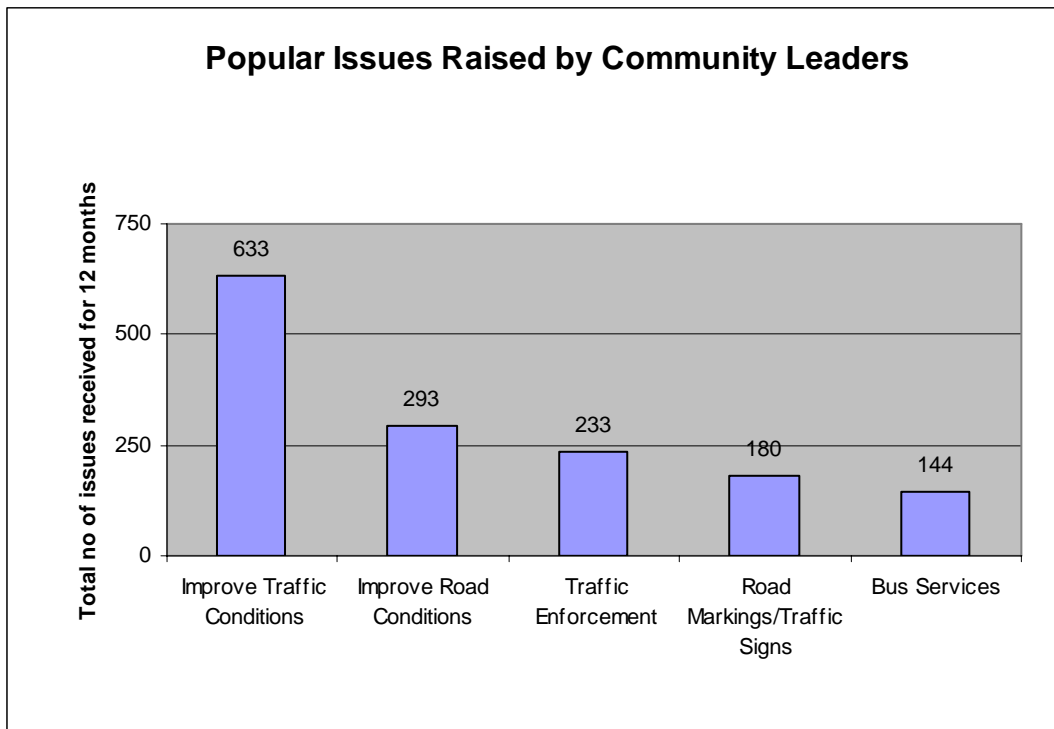


Figure 5 – Popular issues raised by Community Leaders

To capture the needs systematically, a tracking system was designed to document and monitor progress and outcome of the problem resolution initiatives, and to close out with the community in a timely manner. All issues are also analysed on a monthly basis, to better understand the concerns that affect fellow citizens. Many of these issues are related to improvement to traffic flow and road conditions, traffic enforcement, road markings and traffic signs and suggestions to improve public bus services (Figure 4 & 5).

It was noted that many members of the public are often unsure of the relevant agencies to send in their feedback (Figure 4). To alleviate their frustrations of going to the wrong government agencies, we often advise and help direct their feedback to the appropriate agencies, adhering to the civil service 'No Wrong Door' policy*.

2.4 Understanding Customers Needs

The outcome of LTA's interaction with the community in the early months of the formation of the partnership has led to a deeper understanding of the public's more intense and recurrent needs. Having studied the patterns of issues raised, it became evident that many issues are related to several different sectors of the community with differing transport related needs and concerns.

The school and places of worship community are generally concerned about road safety and traffic congestion. On the other hand, residents of private housing estates are very concerned with road obstructions and parking issues. Businesses and commercial establishments are more concerned about traffic flow and accessibility. Having analysed the needs of the different segments, we are able to proactively help facilitate collective collaborations with various stakeholders and government agencies, to resolve issues together. As a result, task groups targeted to schools, private estates, places of worship and commercial establishments were formed to study the common trends and needs of each sector with the aim to deal with them holistically.

During the adviser's (MP's) residential visits, the CPN officer gathered feedback by taking down details and at the same time explains to residents what could or could not be done in dealing with a particular issue. In one occasion, residents requested for a sheltered walkway from their homes to a nearby mass rapid transit station. While the request is reasonable, such a provision would entail the building of a shelter across a road. The CPN officer explained that in such a situation, the shelter across the road would need to be placed at a height that permits vehicles to move below and this would reduce the effectiveness of the shelter in the protection against inclement weather conditions.

Being at the ground often allows LTA to see the problems clearly and also the opportunity to provide immediate clarifications and alternatives. More complicated issues that require studies would be brought back for the subject matter experts (SME) to address and propose the most optimal solutions.

The local print media carried an article on this new approach taken to understanding customer's needs. In the article, the community welcomed the way problems were resolved in such a personable and interactive manner. Residents interviewed said that it was a more sincere way of listening and addressing complaints than through emails and letters. Community leaders were quoted as stating that CPN was a good asset, as there was always someone to direct feedback to. Advisers commented that having CPN on the ground was great as LTA could actually see the problem first-hand, on the spot [1].

3. DEALING WITH TRANSPORTATION ISSUES

The fundamental principle in dealing with road and traffic issues is to bring about the optimum benefits for the majority in the community without compromising safety. However, the diverse needs and perspectives of the community makes this provision challenging. Often there will be a minority who would oppose the revision to the traffic scheme as they do not gain any benefits. This is where the CPN officers step in and play the interlocutor role, to explain to these adversely affected minorities why the solution is for the greater good of the community at large.

"Nimby" (Not in my backyard) syndrome is one of the attitudes that CPN officers often have to contend with while working directly with the community. For instance, residents often request to explore ways to shorten their walk to the nearest bus stop but would frown upon the idea if the bus stop is placed near their homes, citing concerns on environmental pollution (noise and air). When traffic engineers propose speed calming devices to ensure safe operating speeds, motorists would object to these features on the basis that it would slow them down.

To address and balance these widely conflicting needs, much effort is needed in engaging the community to explain the technicalities, benefits and trade-offs of the various traffic measures. Getting full and unanimous supports for implementing these measures are rare. But, it is absolutely essential that we get the support of the majority through this engagement process. Keeping the community leaders and advisers informed and rallying their support is a key role for CPN and this avoids any unpleasant situations should the affected residents lodge complaints to their advisers (MP) against the newly implemented traffic schemes. With the rigorous process of engagement and rationalisation of the benefits to the majority, such measures, while sometimes unpopular with the adversely affected minority, will garner strong ownership and yield positive supports from the community at large.

3.1 Approaches to Resolving Transportation Issues

Feedback from the community leaders and advisers are systematically gathered and documented for follow up at subsequent meetings, where updates on the progress and outcomes and rationale of the resolutions are shared.

The development of a keen understanding of the differing needs and perspectives of different segments of the community has enabled LTA to place a proper focus on each community segment. To involve the appropriate segments in the decision making and develop the ownership of any remedies and measures to alleviate traffic problems LTA adopts the following 'segmentation strategies' to resolving many transportation issues as well as developing initiatives to bring the LTMP to fruition.

3.1.1 *Consultation*

To balance the views of the various segments of the community and ensure that implementations of initiatives would benefit the majority, consultation with the community is essential. Following is an example to illustrate the importance of this approach.

Illegal parking is the main concern of the people living in private housing estate because many landed home residents own more than one car. The lack of parking space within their premises had driven many to park their other cars outside their premises, along the roadside. Residents who own only one car would raise concerns of safety and obstruction due to the parked cars along the roadside. They would prefer the authorities to disallow roadside parking and take enforcement measures as necessary. Of course those with more than one car would raise their objections if the authorities proceed with enforcement action in the estate roads.

Issues like this are challenging and can sometimes get amplified unnecessarily to a rather unpleasant level. CPN has found that the best way to address such issues is to engage all the stakeholders together in open discussions on the rationale, the constraints and the trade-offs of implementing certain course of action and more importantly for all to come to a consensus on the particular course of action chosen.

Through consultation with residents, some options have been tried out in various estates. Some residents also agreed to carry out opinion survey to see what most people wanted. Such engagements have become the key platform in helping the community reach the option that everyone can live with.

3.1.2 *Collaboration/ Negotiation*

Sometimes, the approach of collaboration and negotiation is necessary to solve particular issues. Traffic conditions outside schools, religious and commercial establishments are perennial concerns especially in terms of safety and congestion. It is observed that many motorists prefer to compromise road safety for the convenience of parking or waiting illegally along roads with high traffic volume, thus causing traffic congestions and safety hazards.

To enable residents and motorists to understand the cause and effect of their actions, we collaborate with the respective stakeholders of schools and religious organizations and commercial establishments to negotiate for ways to improve the traffic situation at these localised areas.

The collaboration with stakeholders normally facilitates mutual obligations and inculcates a shared ownership and responsibility of the problem and its resolution. This has tremendously helped in many instances to improve the traffic conditions around these institutions.

3.1.3 *Joint site assessments*

With the increase in greying population, the community often request for provision of comprehensive barrier-free accesses at footpaths and transport facilities, to enable the older and physically-challenged to remain mobile and active in society.

We listened to the feedback through their community leaders and conducted joint site visits and assessment with them. This has been useful as we are able to identify the popular spots to provide these barrier free accesses and avoiding undesirable places, thus saving public funds.

Joint site assessments are also conducted with residents and their community leaders to verify traffic and safety problems at a number of localised spots to allow LTA to capture the exact issues that cannot be easily communicated on paper, emails or otherwise. LTA traffic engineers as well as other agencies are also directly involved to bring about a comprehensive understanding of the situation.

3.1.4 *Advisories*

Another approach LTA undertakes is to provide advice to the community about certain undesirable practices that can cause safety and traffic problems. Such advisories/information leaflets are prepared in-house with simple “dos” and “don’ts” listed enabling the community to be enlightened. For example, a common phenomenon found at private landed estates is residents placing bulky articles along footpaths and even at the roadside, causing obstruction at these points. Obstructions on the footpaths forced pedestrians to walk on the road carriageway which is a safety hazard. Sometimes residents place articles along the roadside in order to “reserve” the space to park their cars.

In resolving such practices, we often work with the community leaders to engage the residents and get them to understand the impact of such undesirable practices. This softer approach, as opposed to conducting forceful removal of the obstruction, has been well received by the community at large.

3.1.5 *Information Briefings*

New transport initiatives rolled out by LTA will invariably create significant impacts on the community. To manage their expectations, CPN officers would conduct briefings to the community leaders and advisers at regular meetings, well in advance of the implementation of such initiatives. Queries and feedback are discussed at these meetings. More importantly, such meetings provide LTA the opportunities to explain the rationale behind these initiatives so that the community leaders could convey the information to their residents where necessary. Inputs and suggestions gathered are then collated and handed to LTA to further refine and fine-tune the implementation.

The promoting of public transport as the choice mode is a major effort in LTA and a recent new bus priority scheme introduced was the ‘Mandatory give-way’ to buses measure. In this scheme, buses are to be accorded priority when they are moving out of the bus bays. This is to help buses move commuters faster and thus getting the commuters to their

destinations within reasonable time periods. Prior to piloting this scheme and full scale implementation, the CPN team explained the merits of this measure to the community leaders. By doing so, the community at large gets to know the benefits to the commuters on the bus as opposed to the small number of car commuters who would be inconvenienced by having to give way to the bus. The message emphasizing that the scheme can benefit their family members, friends and colleagues taking public transport encourages greater acceptance of their trade-offs.

Other examples are the implementation of more Electronic Road Pricing system in town areas and conversions of staged fares system for public transportation to distance-based fares system. These initiatives were thoroughly briefed by CPN Officers to the community through the regular meetings. Such briefings are also useful as they prepare people psychologically on what to expect and make the necessary adjustments during the transitions.

3.1.6 *Dialogue Session*

The community leaders periodically organise gatherings for residents to network. CPN officers would avail themselves during these occasions to support the community leaders and the Advisers in dialogue sessions, where residents often give their views on various national issues including transport-related ones.

Through these light hearted occasions, we are able to clarify and explain many transport related issues, so that people could fully comprehend and appreciate the LTA's efforts in making the road environment safe and more efficient.

4. CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

Interactions with the community leaders have led LTA to realise that there are communication gaps or misconceptions that the community may have conjured of the many transport-related policies and issues. There are perceptions that traffic measures are not put in place and therefore a cause for safety concerns. With this mindset, many road users expect LTA to implement rules and traffic schemes to mitigate many unsocial motoring habits such as speeding and illegal roadside parking.

To correct these perceptions and change mind sets, CPN went on to develop public education programmes to better explain various road safety policies, targeted at the various segments of the community.

4.1 The Task Groups

Task groups in CPN Division were formed targeted at closing gaps between perceptions and the realities, by providing the community with the appropriate public education. The Task groups also engage with stakeholders to forge a common ground and develop a concerted approach to manage the various issues.

4.1.1 *School Task Group*

The School Task Group looks into the safety of young children at primary schools at their interface with the traffic. Although there are special traffic measures (enhanced school zone scheme) for all primary schools and special schools, the most common traffic problem faced by the schools is that of parents parking their vehicles in the school zones and even pedestrian crossing zones, causing much congestions. Some parents even resort to making illegal U-turns right in front of the school gates instead of doing so the

nearby U-turn facility. The School Task Group embarked on projects to work out approaches to these persistent problems by engaging the school community and the stakeholders. The task group met the school management, representatives of Neighbourhood Police Centre (NPC), Traffic Police and other relevant stakeholders to gather ideas for improvements and implemented them.

4.1.2 Private Estate Task Group

A Private Estate Task Group looks at the common road and traffic concerns of residents living in private housing estates. The concerns such as footpath and road obstructions, illegal parking and maintenance of road facilities are carefully studied and packaged for sharing with the stakeholders and residents. Special brochures/messages to promote good road safety practices among the residents were created and distributed.

A forum entitled 'Towards a Livable Neighbourhood' was conducted to reach out to the key community leaders representing these private estate residents. It included highlighting the various road and traffic problems encountered and showcasing the way these problems can be resolved. Some community leaders were invited to share on how they had worked with LTA to handle the various issues at their estates, and as the result, had enhanced the neighbourliness of their estates.

The proactive initiatives of the task groups have added value to the CPN's engagement as best practices and ready solutions shared could be emulated by the respective segments. The various task groups also serve as another platform for particular segments of the community to approach for help to facilitate collective resolution of problems involving various stakeholders and government agencies.



Figure 5 - Educational games used at community events

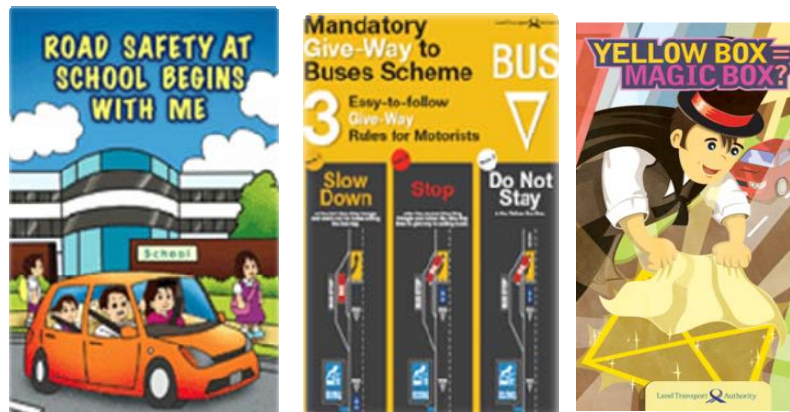


Figure 6 – Types of information leaflets created for public education

4.1.3 Event and Publicity Task Group

The Event and Publicity Task Group has a role in educating the community, foster shared responsibility on road safety and champions transport policies. Educational materials, games and tokens related to transport and road safety are created in-house by this group of creative CPN officers. Advisories required by the other task groups are channelled to the group for customisation of appropriate educational and publicity materials and collaterals. These materials cater to both the young and old, and serve to educate, inform and guide the community through fun and games put up during community events by the CPN Officers (Figure 5 & 6).

5. IMPACT AND VALUE CREATION

Through the past three years of engaging the community, it is clear that a more personal approach to engage the community is essential in order to adequately deal with such complex and challenging endeavour of providing the nation with the next generation transport system. Engineering solutions and enforcement measures cannot resolve all the issues. There must be a spirit of give-and-take in every segment of the community and LTA through the work of the CPN need to draw this spirit to the forefront. Reaching out to the citizens in a personalised manner can help to ensure that the public comprehends the LTA's transport policies and initiatives. The importance of balancing the many needs of the people through open communications throughout the life-cycle of any initiative/policy cannot be overstated.

The use of public funds for the provision of public amenities cannot be taken for granted by the community. To create a greater sense of appreciation, ownership and accomplishment, CPN often invites the community to participate in the launching of LTA's completed major and minor initiatives, e.g. the commissioning of newly completed signalised pedestrian crossings and opening of barrier free facilities at transport infrastructures.

In terms of recognition, our customer survey for the past years showed that more than 90 per cent had rated CPN services as highly satisfactory. Partnership leads to buy-in and opens doors for CPN officers to address cross-agency issues, formulate alternative solutions and manage trade-offs involving land transport plans and policies. This is, of course aligned with the vision of the Public Service in the 21st Century, aspiring to be a more networked government with a whole-of-government approach to work better and move forward together.

CONCLUSION

Providing this 'Service at Your Doorstep' requires LTA to tread many extra miles to capture, understand and address Singaporeans' transport-related needs and concerns in a more comprehensive and holistic manner.

The gathering of major and minor issues through such transactions, segmentising and analysing them has given LTA a map of the communities needs and wishes. This has helped in the planning of targeted initiatives like educational blitz, forums or adjusts our engagement approaches, to appropriately address the different customers segments and their diverse needs.

The shared responsibility by the community leaders, garnered over the years has enabled LTA to partner them in co-creating solutions, to enhance the community's living environment.

In essence, the outcome of this transformation to engage customers at a more intimate level, through direct interactions has indeed benefited the community at large, contributing significantly to the LTA's vision of creating a 'People-centred Land Transport System'.

REFERENCES

1. AuYong, J. (2008). The land transport foot soldier. The Straits Times.

Note:

** The 'No Wrong Door' (NWD) policy was introduced in 2004 as a means for the Public Service to deal with misdirected feedback or cross-agency issues from the public effectively. This is to avoid having members of the public being referred from one agency to another when they have an issue for the Government to resolve. Under this policy, when a public agency receives a query or feedback on an issue that does not fall under its purview, it should identify the agency responsible for the issue and get an officer from the agency to get in touch with the person who made the query or gave the feedback. If the issue involves more than one agency, the agency which receives the query is to co-ordinate and put up integrated response. The intent of the policy is to help members of public resolve issues even if they do not know which agency to approach.*