

Turning Heads—To Land Transport

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Abstract

Today's young users of land transport will "own" both the public transport system and the road network tomorrow. For this group to invest their hearts and minds in shaping our future transport system, they need to understand the significance and trade-offs of their transport options. Yet catching young people's attention amid the many distractions and media outlets is a challenge. This paper looks at how the Land Transport Authority (LTA) of Singapore used a variety of innovative platforms to capture the attention and involvement of the younger generation on land transport issues.

Introduction

Cities around the world are examining how to meet exploding transport needs and one thing is clear—getting people to understand the need to rely more on public transport and less on private cars will be critical. Smart planners, policymakers and communicators know that a pivotal audience is young travellers.

Put simply, today's young are forming opinions about their lifestyles. Owning a car is a common aspiration among young people, yet convincing them that public transport can meet most of their needs will be essential for the well-being of most cities. Those who do choose to drive need to understand the broader environmental implications and responsibilities of car ownership.

LTA has been actively engaging the younger generation through various channels to ensure that the transport system will cater

to their needs and aspirations, now and into the future.

Competing Creativity

In 2004, a group of young LTA officers was tasked to create a programme that would engage youth. The organizers asked the students to envision Singapore's future and then share their ideas and insights on how land transport could evolve to fit Singapore's needs. The students were invited to put their visions and ideas in the form of an essay, in what would become the annual "LTA Book Prize."

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LTA's objective was to view land transport through young people's eyes, and in doing so, consider the possible impact of LTA's services

"It is a very good experience for our students to be given an opportunity to participate in this competition and to have come so far." - Richard Seow (Lecturer, Temasek Polytechnic, 2008 Winner)

"[I became more] familiar with transport issues and LTA, juggling with different variables to arrive at a best solution..." Galven Lee (Hwa Chong Institution, 2007 winner)

"I did not know LTA had staff who are super cool! It was an eye opener to explore places in Singapore..." Faris Basharahil (Temasek Polytechnic, 2007 Winner)

"I learnt about what LTA does for its community and a lot of my misconceptions were erased..." Andrea Taryn Baker (Catholic Junior College, 2004 winner)

and operations upon the broader community. At the same time, LTA hoped that the students would not only gain a better understanding of the complexity of building a land transport system to meet the needs of a diverse population, but also ignite their interest in land transport planning, development and management.

Over the years, the LTA Book Prize increased its outreach from junior colleges to polytechnics and international schools. Students rose to the challenge—short-listed candidates serenaded judges with original songs, skits and poems to get their ideas across. All winners were

awarded cash prizes and invited to a 10-week apprenticeship with LTA.

In 2007, the competition included an "Amazing Race" component. The finalists teamed up with LTA staff and travelled around the island to investigate and analyse real-life land transport challenges, such as traffic noise and road safety concerns for the visually impaired, and proposed solutions to LTA's senior management.

In 2008, LTA revamped the essay competition to take advantage of growing interest in online networking. Students were asked to work in teams to design a social networking website to encourage idea-sharing on land transport based on LTA's newly-launched Land Transport Masterplan: A People-Centred Land Transport System (the full report may be viewed online at <http://www.lta.gov.sg/ltmp/>). The top winners of the competition produced creative networking ideas.

The Alien has Landed...

Possibly the most colourful spin-off to date from the LTA Book Prize is an e-game for primary school students, conceived by winners of the 2004 prize. Recognising that young students may find studying government policies and traffic regulations rather dry, LTA embraced the proposal to develop an e-game to inject education into entertainment and equip the young students with a relevant working knowledge of land transport. The result: edutainment.

In recognition of LTA's 10th anniversary, the new game was called VR-10 ("we are 10"). VR-10 is embodied in a small green space alien who lands in Singapore on his spaceship (*Figure 1*). Bits of his spaceship fly off during landing. To return home, VR-10 must use public transport to find the missing bits. In the process, VR-10 picks up interesting and little-known facts about Singapore's land transport system, as well as safety tips when using the road and rail networks.

Figure 1: VR-10 with an ez-link card in hand to travel on public transport



VR-10 enjoyed overwhelming interest from the public, particularly students, parents and education officers. The e-game received the Minister's Innovation Merit Award 2006 from Singapore's Ministry of Transport, and was showcased at various events, including the World Cyber Games 2006 Asian Championship. In 2007, VR-10 clinched the coveted International Association of Public Transport (UITP) Youth Project Award Grand Public Prize in the category "Improving Mobility of Young People" at the 57th UITP World Congress in Helsinki, Finland.

LTA launched the sequel "VR-10 Returns" in 2008 with more characters and greater interactivity. This new edition e-game goes beyond learning about land transport to promoting greater civic consciousness and good commuter behaviour. Besides the CD-ROM edition distributed to schools and libraries, the game can also be downloaded from www.vr-10.com.

More on the Web...

If I were the Transport Minister

The overwhelming interest in VR-10 spurred LTA to further leverage on new media as an effective and interesting channel to engage younger audiences. In 2007, when the Ministry of Transport and the LTA undertook a year-long land transport review that culminated in the launch of the Land Transport Masterplan, LTA developed an online game, "The Great Transport Challenge 2020—If I Were the Transport Minister." The game was designed not only to help the younger generation become aware of the land transport review, but also to help them understand that land transport policy planning is about making choices and understanding the trade-offs at work.

In the game, participants learn about using different strategies to achieve desired outcomes e.g. do you use more traffic management techniques on existing roads, or build more roads (probably underground and more costly) and consider tolls to pay for them? The game is not a win or lose proposition. It produces a scenario that might result from the series of choices that the

“Minister for the Day” makes: ranging from a congested and unlivable city, to a clean and mobile metropolis.

Public transport security website for students

Enlisting young commuters in public transport security may seem obvious given the amount of time that they spend on the network, but getting them to think about it in the first place is a bigger challenge. LTA, in collaboration with other government agencies and the public transport operators, will be launching a website to address this need for greater awareness and vigilance.

The website will encourage students to learn about public transport security, such as counter-terrorism measures taken to secure public transport infrastructure and make journeys safe and, what to do when suspicious-looking persons or articles are spotted on public transport or when there is an emergency. LTA held focus group discussions with school teachers and students to learn more about students’ interests so that the website would be captivating to the young audience and allow them to relate easily to the information. The outcome is a website where public transport security awareness is reinforced through animation, interactive multi-media games and regular contests related to public transport security.

A Gallery that Exhibits....

LTA opened its Land Transport Gallery in January 2008 with multi-media and interactive exhibits tracing Singapore’s land transport

progression from 1945 through the present day and into the future.

The Gallery has since become a key learning platform for students of all ages who visit LTA. It is a popular stop under the Ministry of Education’s “Learning Journeys” programme, which sees students visit key national institutions and heritage sites in Singapore to learn about subject matter beyond their textbooks. LTA has a dedicated team of officers to host such visits and devises programmes and projects to engage younger citizens. For older students, a visit to the Gallery is followed by a discussion on land transport matters and how they affect everyone.

...the Art that Left the Gallery

When LTA built the North East Line (NEL)¹, it made a visible commitment to making sure the journey was pleasant—in each of the line’s 16 stations, the commuter will find “integrated art” or, as LTA calls it, “Art in Transit.” Artwork of different media and genres decorates each station uniquely, bringing to life the history and culture of the neighbourhood it serves. Nothing quite so vividly expresses the idea that the journey is more than just getting from one point to the next. Art in Transit is now an integral part in the design of all rail stations.

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LTA has further teamed up with Art Outreach² to offer the Art in Transit Walking Tour. The two-hour tour brings students, young professionals,

and anyone keen to get a unique view of the rail line to the artwork in the NEL stations. Through the tour, visitors get a glimpse into Singapore’s rich, diverse cultural fabric and the artists’ take on the neighbourhoods and their inhabitants, plus stories of how various considerations (e.g. area flooding and emergency shelter needs) influenced the design of the station. *Figure 2* shows participants at the Art in Transit Walking Tour learning about the artwork.

Figure 2: Art in Transit Walking Tour



Art Outreach also includes in its classroom portfolios an entire segment on the NEL integrated art. The school children love the idea that they can commute and appreciate art all at the same time. And they like that someone had the idea to make their train ride pretty.

Coming to a School Near You

To reach out to more students, LTA heads out to meet its young audience on their main

turf: at school. It brings a roving exhibition to secondary schools to showcase the Land Transport Masterplan and the thinking behind it. The exhibition’s appealing illustrations and interactive games usually pique students’ interest enough to whet their appetites for more. This often leads to subsequent visits to LTA’s Land Transport Gallery as an extension of the learning journey.

KPE Underground

Reaching out to communities around major land transport infrastructure projects has been a core element of LTA’s public communications planning. Recent efforts to further ramp up the engagement, especially to get the attention of the younger audience, included walks/runs, promotions and outdoor events helmed by popular radio DJs.

The recent opening of Singapore’s longest underground expressway, the Kallang-Paya Lebar Expressway (KPE), demonstrated the creative use of both new and traditional media to “stir up” the appeal and reach of an otherwise mundane road safety programme. The primary task of the KPE public education programme was to ensure that motorists know how to use the 12-km long KPE safely.

LTA decided that radio would be the best channel to reach the motoring public. Moreover, radio had the capacity to pull in younger listeners too with music. Music and radio make fine partners and became the cornerstone of the public education programme.

KPE Underground Radio—a 30-minute radio show over a one-week period—was launched to talk to the public, especially motorists, about the KPE and how to drive safely on it. To drive home safety messages, LTA cut an album titled “Sounds of the Underground” that featured prominent local artistes with songs such as “Turn on the Radio”, “Don’t Overtake” and “Look at the Signs”. The songs were played during morning drive-time on the KPE Underground Radio.

Figure 3: Advertising the KPE Underground Radio



Urban graphic art and edgy stylized photography could be seen on LTA’s construction hoardings and public places, such as underground linkways, serving as teasers to “advertise” the KPE Underground Radio (Figure 3). These elements came together to create the “KPE Underground” public education programme, clever word play alluding to the unknown programme to come and the literal location of the KPE.

For the younger and web-savvy motorists with a preference for new media, LTA also launched a KPE web portal (<http://www.lta.gov.sg/kpe/>). The portal took on a refreshing design distinct from usual government websites. It was designed to be thorough, informative, easy to update and appealing. This portal would be pivotal in drawing hits over time and at full launch in September 2008 received more than 3 million hits in the first month.

Figure 4: Tunnel Discovery programme for school children



New and old media aside, bringing people into the tunnel before it opened had an obvious and long-lasting impact. Prior to the first phase opening of the KPE in October 2007, LTA developed a “Tunnel Discovery” programme for school children (Figure 4). The children visited the tunnel, met the people involved in the project and learnt about the unusual challenges faced by the team, such as dealing with soil the consistency of

“toothpaste”, snaking the tunnel between tall apartment buildings, safely moving canals and going under a river.

To give youths an opportunity to leave their mark on a significant land transport infrastructure, LTA held a Mural Design Competition for neighbourhood schools along the KPE. The designs of 18 finalists now decorate the tunnel’s escape staircase housings that dot the streets in those neighbourhoods.

Notes

1. The North East Line is a 16-station rail line that starts at the northeast perimeter of Singapore and heads straight to the central business district. It is 20km long and is Singapore’s first fully underground, driverless rail system.
2. Art Outreach is a not-for-profit organization that teaches art appreciation in local schools, using art as a platform to discuss everything from history to current events.

Conclusion

Tapping on the outlook and formative ideas of the younger generation is an essential component of a public education programme on land transport. To succeed in getting this energetic audience’s attention, events and programming need to be geared to their schedules, interests and motivations using the channels of communication they use. Doing this successfully will go a long way in keeping our major cities on the move.

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Tammie Loke is the Group Director of the Corporate Communications Group in the Land Transport Authority of Singapore. Under her leadership, LTA has invigorated its public education and community outreach efforts through media relations, marketing and various consultation programmes. She leads the organization's ongoing public communication of LTA's policies and projects outlined in the Land Transport Masterplan. Ms Loke firmly believes that building working partnerships with LTA's many stakeholders helps the LTA to address commuters' rising expectations, increasing construction challenges and complex policy decisions. Reaching out to today's young, who are tomorrow's owners of the land transport network, is especially critical to creating greater understanding of the many issues confronting transport development in Singapore.