

# Public satisfaction with trains at all-time low

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**SINGAPORE** – Public dissatisfaction with buses and trains showed up starkly in the latest edition of the Singapore Management University’s (SMU) customer satisfaction index, with the scores for trains registering an all-time low and commuters giving buses their second-lowest scores in the index’s six-year history.

The MRT/LRT sub-sector scored 61.9, a drop of 6 percentage points from 2011. For public buses, the score was 61.6, a dip of 4.8 percentage points.

At least 1,000 commuters were polled for the bus and train sub-sectors between April and June, when the

Committee of Inquiry hearings for last December’s major train breakdowns were ongoing — which could have made public transport service standards “very salient in people’s minds”, said Assistant Professor Marcus Lee, academic director of SMU’s Institute of Service Excellence, which produces the index. Disruptions and delays on the Circle Line and East-West Line also occurred in April.

However, data shows that commuter expectations have not been lowered despite train breakdowns in the past year. Disruptions could instead have “primed weary commuters to be more intolerant of service lapses”, said Asst Prof Lee.

Customers’ expectations are measured by asking what level of quality,

customisation and reliability — on a scale of one to 10 — they expected to receive prior to the last three months of using a particular company’s product. Expectations of buses did not change either.

Taxi customers’ expectations rose from 2011 and this could have been due to the fare revisions last December sending an “implicit signal to expect better service quality”, said Asst Prof Lee.

An SMRT spokesperson said some survey respondents could have been those affected by the train disruptions or associated issues with the North East Line — operated by SBS Transit, which did not reply to media queries — with SMRT.

SMRT is working on improving

trains’ operating hours, frequency and comfort levels “within ... our system limitations” and has taken steps to increase bus frequencies, the spokesperson said, adding that complaints related to bus waiting time from April to June this year dropped by 33 per cent compared to a year ago.

The index also found lower satisfaction for the three universities, with SMU showing the biggest drop of 9.5 percentage points to 68.6.

An SMU spokesperson said it is mindful of the result. It is in the midst of reviewing of its undergraduate programmes, including course offerings and co-curricular activities, and will continue to meet the aspirations of stakeholders like students and parents, he said.