

CSISG 2014 Q2 RESULTS: TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS

An all-aspect approach to transport issues

The key to getting on top of Singapore's public transport issues could lie in putting the power in commuters' hands

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SINGAPORE – The solution to increasing customer satisfaction with public transport lies not only in improving elements of our transport infrastructure, such as boosting the reliability, frequency and availability of buses, taxis and trains. It could also lie in giving commuters the information they need to plan their journey according to evolving traffic conditions and the availability of public transport services.

What if commuters could use an integrated transport app that not only informed them of transport delays but could also suggest alternate routes or even offer to book a taxi for them?

That's something that Assoc Prof Lim Yun Fong, Associate Professor of Operations Management, Singapore Management University, believes is within reach.

"We could, for example, use apps to meet the individual demands of customers. Every commuter can build his or her own itinerary through the app. This can help the commuter link up with the service provider or get information about arrival times," said Assoc Prof Lim.

Such a scenario isn't as far-fetched as it may sound. Apps such as the Land Transport Authority's MyTransport. SG Mobile app already update users about traffic conditions, bus arrival times and train and taxi services. Taking this one step further, future versions of such apps could let commuters book taxis or let commuters know if they'll be able to get on the next train.

COMMUTER SATISFACTION

Such information would be crucial in helping commuters find the fastest way to their destination. It would also boost customer satisfaction with public transport services, which are currently facing declining levels of customer satisfaction.

The second-quarter results of the Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore (CSISG), conducted by the Institute of Service Excellence at Singapore Management University (ISES), showed that the year-on-year scores for the MRT System, Public Buses and Taxi Services sub-sectors fell by 6.8 per cent, 3.6 per cent and 6.1 per cent respectively.

One approach to addressing the issue has been to increase the supply of services. Under the Bus Services Enhancement Programme, for instance, the government, working in partner-



Giving commuters the information they need to adapt their plans to evolving traffic conditions could improve satisfaction with public transport services. TODAY FILE PHOTO

ship with bus operators, plans to introduce 1,000 buses from 2012 to 2017.

The Land Transport Authority aims to double the length of Singapore's rail network from 178km today to 360km by 2030. Steps such as these will help increase the supply and reach of Singapore's public transport network.

Ms Sylvia Fong acknowledged that rail operators have been taking steps to address the issues, but feels that increasing supply doesn't address other issues.

Said the 29-year-old assistant manager: "Although the frequency of train services has improved, there are other areas that fall short. For example, the speeds at which the trains travel are inconsistent — during peak periods, trains sometimes still move slowly.

"I feel that train operators have realised the problem of over-crowding a little too late and are trying to play catch-up. But I can see continuous improvements being planned and rolled out so they are trying and communicating to commuters appropriately."

REDUCING MISMATCHES

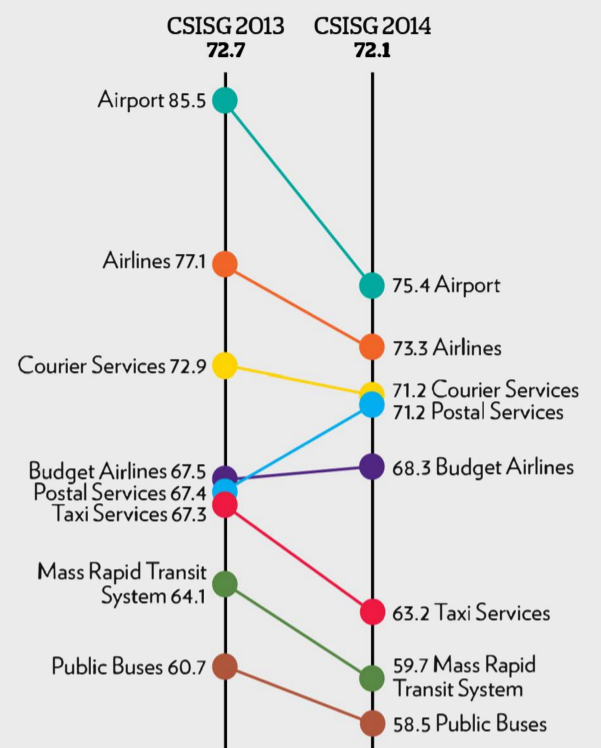
Another key issue, said Mr Lim Kell Jay, general manager of GrabTaxi Singapore, is being better able to match demand and supply.

Citing GrabTaxi's experience in attempting to meet the demands and expectations of commuters and taxi drivers, he said: "On the one hand, there is the mismatch of demand and supply. On the other hand, we looked at data to understand what time of the day, what day of the week, what day of the month the biggest mismatch occurred. And we tried to do something about that."

"I wouldn't say we have solved the problems, but we're heading in the right direction."

Ms Anusha Krishnamoorthy, a 26-year-old copywriter, appreciated that taxis are generally comfortable and convenient, but also spoke about the mismatch of demand and supply. "I find it hard to flag down a taxi unless I am at a central location, so I end up spending extra on booking charges."

CSISG 2014 Q2 Transport & Logistics Year-on-Year Changes



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Dr Marcus Lee
 ACADEMIC DIRECTOR,
 INSTITUTE OF SERVICE
 EXCELLENCE

RIISING EXPECTATIONS

Said Ms Caroline Lim, director, ISES: "Commuters' expectations here have been shaped by the smooth operations of our public transport network until recently — the spate of MRT breakdowns in 2011.

"Operators and regulators will have to do more to engage commuters so as to give confidence, to bring back the sense of a seamless experience like it was in the past."

Digital marketing manager Gurmit Singh Kullar, felt that a more integrated approach should also extend to payment methods.

Said the 39-year-old: "Passengers should be allowed to use any payment method — buying tickets with credit cards and going through MRT fare gates with an NFC (near-field communication) device should become the norm."

Key to improving overall customer satisfaction with public transport would be examining all aspects of the transportation equation to give commuters a smoother journey.

Said Dr Marcus Lee, academic director, ISES: "Our public transport stakeholders should focus on the total journey experience; this should take centre stage. By focusing on seamless transfers between modes of transport, the total journey experience is optimised.

"A common goal like this is one way for all the public transport stakeholders to work together to improve commuter satisfaction," he said.

This report is a collaborative project between TODAY and the Institute of Service Excellence at Singapore Management University.