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ANIMALS FLEEING NORTH
AS EARTH HEATS UP

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Do more to assess commuter satisfaction

Letter from Kwan Jin Yao

SOME Singaporeans might have been surprised after reading the findings by the Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore (CSISG), in the article "S'poreans are satisfied with public transport system" (Aug 12).

Following the fare hike requests submitted by the transport providers, there have been sentiments lamenting the less-than-satisfactory standards on buses and trains, though operators and administrators staunchly contend otherwise.

Against the backdrop of these conflicting perspectives, existing Quality of Service guidelines and academic studies – including the Singapore Management University's CSISG – seem inadequate in quantifying on-the-ground commuter experience.

In the CSISG study, although a brief distinction has been made between non-peak and peak-hour travellers, de-

tailed figures have not been released to reveal the full extent of the difference.

This is significant because even though upgraded station and vehicular infrastructure have enhanced general trips, irregular arrival times, infrequent services and poor management have led to chronic overcrowding during rush hour.

Future evaluations should take into account satisfaction levels at varying time periods and different locations, including major interchanges and popular train stations or bus stops in the central areas.

Findings of affordability will be questioned on counts of relevance and timeliness, following the Public Transport Council's recent announcement of a 1 per cent fare hike overall.

To make analysis on costs and fares more holistic, the team must consider passengers – students and senior citizens – who pay concessionary rates and, therefore, are negligibly

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affected by most adjustments.

In other words, future studies should be less conveniently generalised and, instead, meticulously categorised to paint a clearer, detailed picture of the status quo. Focus group discussions with stakeholders representing interest groups will be good complements for current methodologies of transportation assessment.

Heightened correspondence between these groups, service providers and ministries in charge would bring

about valuable qualitative observations, to implement recommendations that are more relevant and effectual.

For instance, greater efforts can be undertaken to reach out to elderly and handicapped commuters and to properly understand their concerns and struggles at the stations and on the vehicles.

More can definitely be done to identify challenges in the current network and to heavily involve members of the public to provide constructive criticisms.

After all, in the service industry, administrators must be hungry for regular feedback so as to constantly reflect upon systems and generate plans of action.

Greater integration can also be expected from the two transport providers – the lack of co-operation evidenced by the absence of integrated travel guides for cross-service transfers – so that passengers benefit.

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