

SIGNALS:
LIGHTING SINGAPORE
TRANSIT LEAGCY
PROPOSAL

Introduction

From the first bullock carts and sampans to the gleaming metro trains and buses of today, transit has the constant, sometimes prominent partner that came hand in hand with our nation's development from a collection of villages to the bustling metropolis of today.

We assume that our transit journey involves primitive Trishaws advancing towards buses and MRT trains—a neat, easily digestible story. However, there are much deeper aspects of our transit history than meets the eye, some hidden in plain sight, from the long political debates that led to the first MRT line in Singapore, to the more obscure, such as the short existence of our tram systems in the late 1800s till the early 1900s.

As we advance ourselves into a middle-aged nation, celebrating 60 years of independence, we are slowly moving ourselves away from the past and the issue of both preservation and presentation of them has come out time and time again, including our own transit history.

This project aims to tackle that by kickstarting the conversation on our transit heritage forward into the mainstream consciousness through placemaking in a common commuting space that is often considered mundane and basic to many Singaporeans: The Busstop.

Two threads:

Increasing Public Awareness

Over the years, there has been an increase in public awareness over the importance that our cultural and historic heritage has towards fostering national identity and creating a sense of belonging towards Singapore.

Efforts have been made both on a state and community level to increase public knowledge and awareness of Singapore's history, helping to add depth to our public and social history. A good example has been the National Heritage Board's Heritage Trails, where the local history of communities and neighbourhoods such as Bukit Timah and Changi highlights their contribution within the larger national narrative of our history but also the local stories of kampungs, businesses and spaces that were shaped by residents in the past.

There has been also been conscious effort in terms of increasing engagements and space for heritage, from making our collection more accessible the general public to building spaces to tell our stories.

Loss of our heritage

However, despite increasing public awareness of our heritage and its value to nation-building, our heritage continues to be lost as the ever-continuing pressure of development and progress means that our heritage, both tangible and intangible continues to be sacrificed unto the altar of urban development

We have seen that building and spatial preservation have been under threat as its physicality has often come under pressure and conflict with modernisation and redevelopment, most prominent in the case of the loss of the Pearl Bank Apartments.

Even our lauded Hawker food culture, which had entered UNESCO list as intangible heritage of humanity, continues to face challenges as increasing cost of raw material, manpower shortages etc. bedevils the industry, leading to old hands leaving the industry without successors. All these losses can incur a flattening of our social and public history, leading to solastalgia as the public, especially the younger generation becomes unaware of our rich culture and history beyond the subject curriculum.

For a niche topic like transit heritage, this means continual loss of assets and stories such as infrastructure not just in terms of material worth but also from the public memory. Even as efforts have been made recently to preserve and promote them, this challenge continues to be an issue.

Field Survey**Heritage Walkway @ Woodlands Integrated Transport Hub**

This mini-walkway is a collaboration between SMRT, Matthew And Naz Photography (MANBSP) and SG Transportations, displaying transit memorabilia, photographs and other bus-related artefacts at a small corner near the bus interchange portion of the transport hub.

I was first aware of the walkway's existence through a transit enthusiast friend from Malaysia who visited the walkway, though I never managed to find it a few times previously that I was transiting through it, which became apparent when I went looking for it.

Key observations:

- The main display is isolated in the corner of the Integrated Transport Hub, hidden from public sight with little indication from afar nor near to newcomers where the main walkway is. However, the mockup outside near the bus bay is eye catching.
- The exhibition is themed only around buses, ignoring the MRT system that also exist.
- The display items revolves around the Woodlands area, from the infographic to to the items such as bus service plates (Bus 187a and 950 both start from Woodlands interchange)
- The exhibition timeline is relatively short, focusing from the 1980s till 2020 (Relevant as the full development of Woodlands as an housing estate started in the 80s)
- Bus driver Uniform on display displayed were donated by bus drivers themselves.

Conclusion:

- The display is a good attempt at collaboration between transit operators & transit enthusiast community, with both sides contributing their assets and perspective, highlighting the importance of collaboration between community and industry.
- Spatial is important component when it comes to physical display - The lack of awareness and visibility of the walkway hinders casual visitors from visiting it.
- Locally themed display (Neighbourhood wise rather than country wide) may be more sensible for small displays - Also would be in theme as focus on neighbourhoods has been in vogue here.

Field Survey**SG Mobility Gallery (LTA Headquarters)**

The SG Mobility Gallery is a permanent exhibition gallery located inside LTA Headquarters and run by them. The exhibition provides visitors with an inside look at how LTA plans, manages and construct Singapore's transport system.

The headquarters, is located beside Little India MRT Station and was formerly the Kandang Kerbau Hospital (KKH). The structure of the building means entering the Mobility gallery necessitated registration through booking.gov.sg site, which is rather inconvenient compared to other exhibition by other stat boards such as the Urban Revelopment Authority (URA), who has dedicated exhibition spaces.

Key observations:

- The exhibition has a noticable blind spot towards the past; focusing towards the future means the target audience (Kids & schoolgoers) is not informed or made aware of our past
- The Exhibition also has a narrow focus towards engineering and traffic management aspect of transport which makes the gallery a missed opportunity to talk about the bigger picture of transit.
- Mini souvenir vending machines located at the enterance (Run by Knackstop) dispenses vehicle models and some heritage themed items which highlight the potential of our transit as cultural assets.

Conclusion:

My final thoughts viewing through my field survey is that it is enlightening seeing the two ways transit is being viewed from these few stakeholders, especially from LTA's POV as they are a major stakeholder within my project purview.

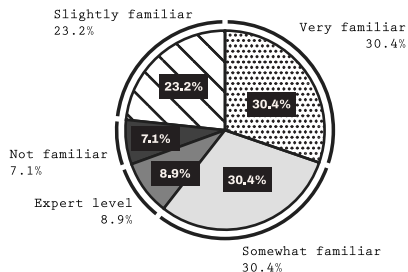
It is clear from my field survey that there is a wide gulf between what is available as published materials such as books, magazines etc. and the public presentation for our transit history. The fact that there is only one permanent display talking about it to me feels shortsighted especially as our country matures into a middle-aged nation, and there is an increasing disconnect between our past and present.

Survey:

I felt that that it is necessary to provide further justification into my project direction and also have some general sensing at the public receptiveness towards our transit heritage. My own judgement on the matter that a cost effective way on doing this would be public survey, which would enable me to get as wide of a sensing as possible.

Thus I conducted a survey on google form, inviting the public to gauge 1. Their familiarity with our transport system's history, 2. Interest in our transit history, what aspect of it 3. If they are interested in something permanent. They are so invited to opine and give comments on what could be done to further promote Transit Heritage in Singapore.

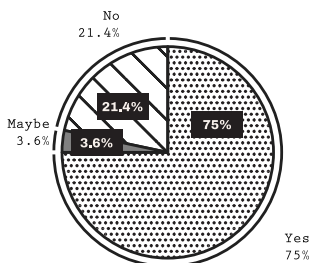
Field survey highlights:



How familiar are you with the history of Singapore's public transport system?

30.4%

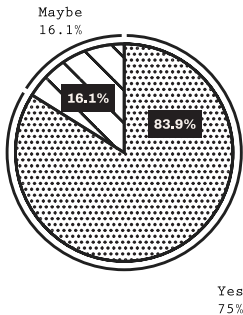
Says they are Somewhat familiar.



Would you be interested in attending a transit heritage event (e.g., exhibitions, guided tours, talks)?

75%

Says Yes



Would you support the establishment of a permanent transit heritage museum in Singapore?

83.9%

Says Yes

Selected answers for:

Do you have any suggestions on how Singapore can better promote its transit heritage?

"Actually preserving its things in a dedicated facility (from the biggest vehicles or machinery like TBMs, to the smallest things like signages or faregates)"

"Consolidate all historical articles, videos, news, everything, into 1 place. Not only to ensure preservation, but also for ease of finding things (accessibility)"

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Problem Statement

Due to a lack of focus and energy towards preserving and telling our transit heritage, a key thread of the Singapore story is being left out, leaving the public less informed about their own history.

Opportunity Statement

Kickstart Singaooore's transit heritage conversations into the mainstream consciousness through placemaking

Overall conclusion:

From the research, survey and other analysis that I have conducted, I have come to the conclusion that in order to fully address the challenge of introducing transit heritage to the public, placemaking would be the best way to get the public to view it just as a niche topic for enthusiasts, especially as many elements of transit is physical and from experience.

Target Audience:

Young Adults (18-35): This group is often interested in urban development, heritage preservation, and the blending of modernity with tradition. They are also more likely to engage with social media platforms where your project can gain visibility. This age range might also include students, young professionals, and community activists who care about the city's cultural evolution and public spaces.

Main proposal**1. A heritage bus lane in the central and civic district**

A heritage bus lane will be formed starting at Keppel Road(Tanjong Pagar railway station), going up Anson and Robinson roads and ending at the old civic district.

This route is chosen for several reasons: 1. The historic nature of the civic and central district, which has been at the forefront of not just Singapore history but also the development of transit throughout the years 2. centrality of the location, which would make it convenient for the target audience to visit and experience.

The lane will be divided up into three sections that will tell the stories of our transit history concisely:

- 1. 20s-30s (Starting off at Tanjong Pagar Railway station at Keppel Road up till Anson road)*
- 2. 50s-70s (Robinson Road up portion of Parliament Place)*
- 3. 80s-90s (The rest of the roads within the Civic district)*

2. A heritage bus lane in the central and civic district

Singapore bus stops in the past used to be of colour and in many different forms and varieties, before today's more standardised grey design.

As a nexus of commuting and transit, my proposal re-envisioned them as a medium of storytelling, infusing current bus stops with elements of transit of the past, such as the Orange bus stops that used to dot the city in the 80s and 90s, to parts of the trolleybuses that used to ply our streets in the 20s, all while the dimensions and space adheres to the current bus shelter standards by LTA.

By combining the present with the past, visitors would be able to experience and feel the differences and understand the progress that has been made throughout the years.

Several designated bus stops on the heritage lane would also come with heritage information markers that would allow visitors to view and read up on the history of our transit as part of their self-guide tour of the heritage bus lane. Interactivity such as recreated heritage items for visitors to interact with and QR codes would also be employed on the information markers to allow greater interactivity with visitors.

20s - 30s:

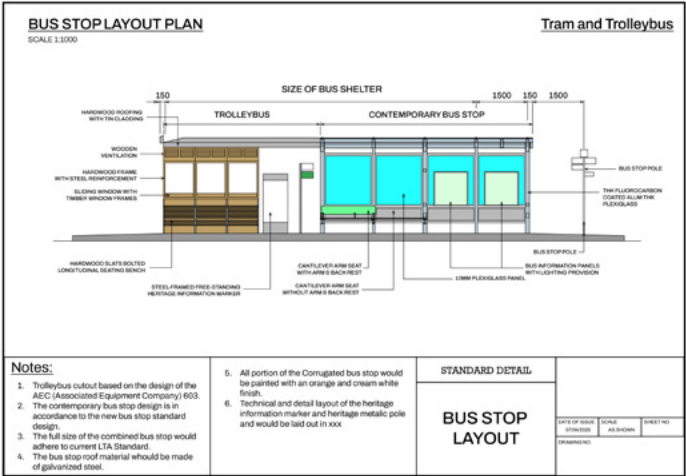
- Cantonment Station exit D (Stop ID: 14069)
- (Former Tanjong Pagar Railway station)
- 21 Keppel Road (Stop ID: 05641)
- 70 Anson Road (Stop ID: 03222)
- Aft Enggor St (Stop ID: 03241)
- Tanjong Pagar Stn Exit C (Stop ID: 03223)

This era marked the beginning of public transit in Singapore, with trolleybuses gliding quietly through colonial streets. It was a time of firsts—wires overhead, new routes, and a growing reliance on public transport. These early systems laid the groundwork for the country's mass transit. While limited in reach, they introduced the idea of modern connectivity and shaped daily life in a rapidly urbanizing colony.

1. Bus stop proposal

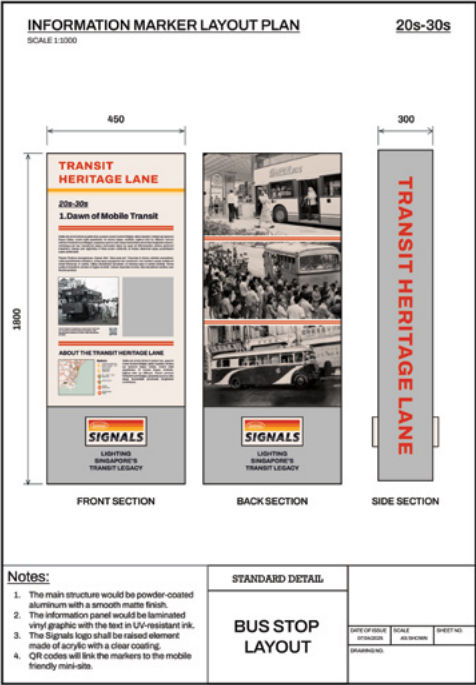
The bus stop shall incorporate elements of the AEC (Associated Equipment Company) 603 Trolleybus, one the main rolling stock of trolleybuses in that period and ran by the Singapore Traction company at that period,





Activation portion:

The information marker will incorporate a 'press to play' button that would play sound recreation of tram and trolleybus bells of that era.



Bus stop layout & Information marker proposal

50s - 70s:

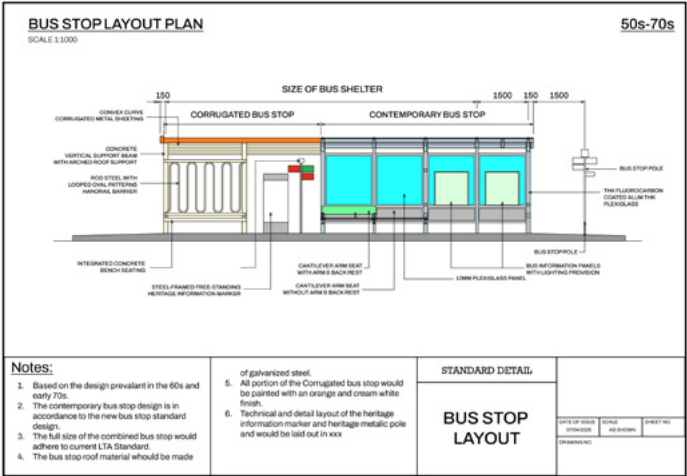
- Aft Capital Tower, Robinson Rd (Stop ID: 03111)
- 80 Robinson Rd (Stop ID: 03071)
- Raffles Pl Stn Exit F (Stop ID: 03031)
- Fullerton Sq (Stop ID: 03011)
- Tanjong Pagar Stn Exit C (Stop ID: 03223)

Post-war Singapore saw a surge in motor-bus services amid rising population and expanding housing estates. However, these decades also witnessed challenging working conditions for bus crews, leading to pivotal labour movements. Buses became central to nation-building—connecting kampungs to new towns and enabling people to access work, school, and markets. As Singapore gained independence, buses evolved into more than transport—they became lifelines of a growing nation.

1. Bus stop proposal

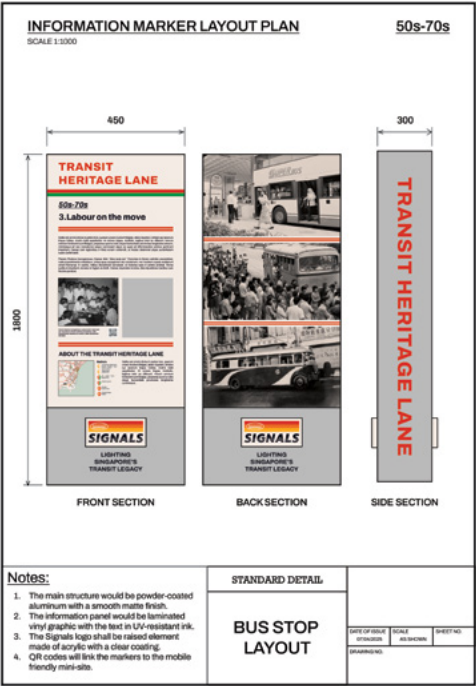
The bus stop shall recreate and incorporate design elements that was prevalent in the early 70s, which emphasises materials such as concrete and metal.





Activation portion:

The information marker will incorporate a 'press to play' button that would play sound recreations of the era such as strikes crowds chanting, overcrowded buses and bus conductors selling tickets.



Bus stop layout & Information marker proposal

80s - 90s:

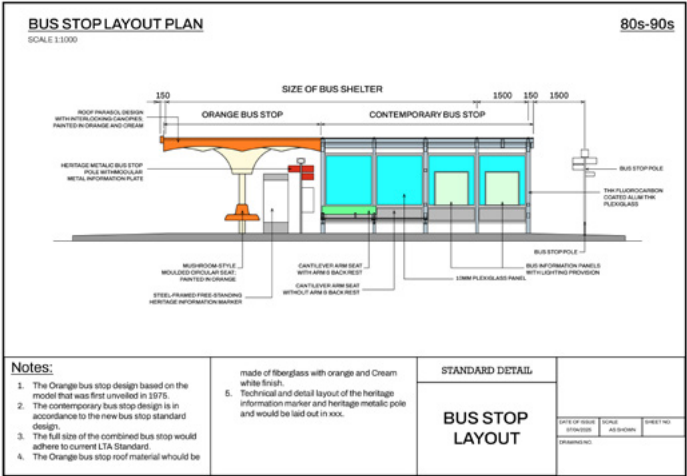
- Opp The Treasury (Stop ID: 04249)
- Aft City Hall Stn Exit B (Stop ID: 04168)
- City Hall Stn Exit B (Stop ID: 04167)
- High St Ctr (Stop ID: 04229)
- Old Hill St Police Stn (Stop ID: 04223)

By the 1980s, Singapore's bus system began a rapid modernization drive. New bus interchanges, air-conditioned fleets, computer-aided dispatch, and a focus on commuter comfort transformed the experience. As the city moved toward corporatized service models, branding and reliability took center stage. This era cemented buses as a professionalized, dependable system—one aligned with Singapore's vision of efficient, world-class urban living.

1. Bus stop proposal

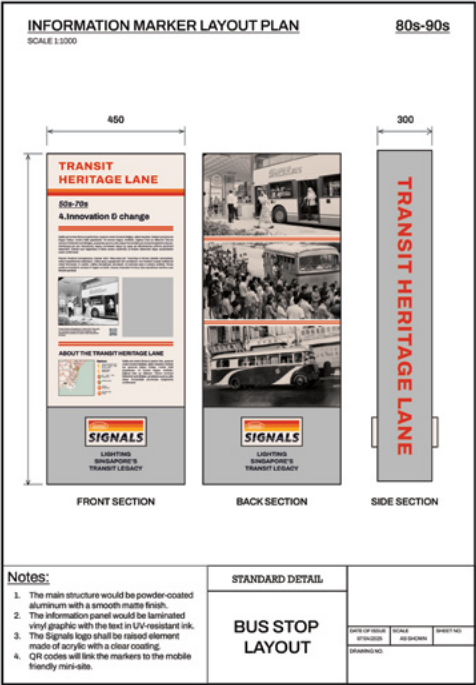
The bus stop shall recreate and incorporate design elements from the iconic orange and beige bus stop of that era, which uses materials that was becoming popular at that time like moulded plastic.





Activation portion:

The information marker will incorporate a recreated SBS red Ticketing machine that visitors can play with and read ez-link cards.



Bus stop layout & Information marker proposal

Activation:

The activation segment invites the public to engage directly with our transit history and increase

VR element:

Selected bus stops along the Heritage Bus Lane will feature Virtual Reality (VR) experiences accessible via QR codes. Visitors can scan the code with their phones to view and interact with 3D models of historical buses—such as the 1920s trolleybus, the post-war Albion Victor, and the classic SBS Super Bus—right where they once operated, allowing visitors a digital window into how transit was like in the past.

Redesigned livery and sounds:

To celebrate Singapore's transit legacy, a special fleet of Alexander Dennis Enviro500 buses will debut with redesigned heritage-inspired liveries. Drawing visual cues from the iconic green-and-cream Albion Victor buses of the Singapore Traction Company and the bold stripes of the 1990s SBS "Super Bus," these modern double-deckers will be moving tributes to our transport past. Each design element—from retro fonts to color schemes—reimagines historical aesthetics through a contemporary lens.

These vehicles will also incorporate older sounds such as bus bells and chimes from their respective eras to add into their charm and appeal for both transit enthusiasts and nostalgic commuters alike.

These heritage buses not only turn heads but serve as mobile storytellers, linking past and present as they travel through the very routes that shaped Singapore's evolving cityscape.

BUS LIVERY		20s & 30s	
SCALE 1:50			
Notes: 1. The bus model used an example for the livery design is a Alexander Dennis Enviro 500. 2. The bus livery design is based on the Albion Victor bus model livery as was used by Singapore Traction Company.	STANDARD DETAIL BUS LIVERY		DATE OF ISSUE: _____ DRAWING NO: _____
			SCALE: AS SHOWN SHEET NO: _____

20s-30s: STC Albion Victor design

BUS LIVERY		80s & 90s	
SCALE 1:50			
Notes: 1. The bus model used an example for the livery design is a Alexander Dennis Enviro 500. 2. The bus livery design is based on one of the liveries for the Volvo Olympian 12 "Superbus" in 1992 by SBS.	STANDARD DETAIL BUS LIVERY		DATE OF ISSUE: _____ DRAWING NO: _____
			SCALE: AS SHOWN SHEET NO: _____

80s-90s: SBS Volvo Olympian 12 'superbus' design

Conclusion:

Signals reimagines public transport as a moving archive—where buses, stops, and streets become vessels of shared memory. By weaving together design, storytelling, technology through placemaking, the Heritage Bus Lane and the reimagining of bus stops not only honours Singapore’s transit past but invites the public to see everyday journeys in a new light. From vintage-inspired bus liveries to the VR experiences and heritage bus stops, this campaign sparks curiosity, reflection, and connection. Ultimately, it’s a celebration of how mobility has shaped our communities—and a reminder that even the most ordinary spaces carry extraordinary stories worth preserving and passing on.