

SURVEY REPORT ON SINGAPORE'S TRANSIT HERITAGE

A survey-based inquiry into the cultural significance, public interest, and
design opportunities surrounding the preservation and celebration of
Singapore's transport history

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Introduction

Public transport has long been woven into the everyday life of Singaporeans, yet its historical and cultural significance remains underrepresented in our national heritage narrative. This survey was undertaken as part of an exploratory effort to assess public attitudes toward transit heritage preservation, outreach, and awareness in Singapore. At a time when rapid urban development within our small island has often resulted in an erasure of many tangible aspects of our transport memories, from trains being deposited off to bus models and station gone from the public eye, it has become increasingly pertinent for us to ask: does the public value the preservation of our transit past, and if so, how can we meaningfully act on it?

This report consolidates the responses of 56 individuals, most of whom are young Singaporeans with a keen interest in local heritage. Through a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions, the survey aimed to gauge familiarity with the public transport system's history, willingness to engage with transit heritage, and openness

to different forms of preservation and storytelling. The feedback received was enthusiastic and deeply insightful, ranging from practical ideas such as museum formats and exhibition styles to heartfelt calls for proper farewells for retiring vehicles and authentic, respectful presentation of transport history.

This report makes a compelling case for transit heritage as a viable and meaningful focus of cultural engagement in Singapore. The findings reinforce the idea that heritage need not be confined to monuments and colonial buildings; it can and should include the vehicles, systems, and shared experiences that shaped the city's growth and people's lives. We hope this report contributes to ongoing conversations about how to honour and sustain Singapore's public transport legacy in ways that are inclusive, accessible, and future-facing.

This document serves as a foundation stone for future initiatives, collaborations, and policies that can breathe new life into the heritage of movement.

Executive Summary

This executive summary presents the key findings from a public perception survey conducted late January to late February 2025 to explore the viability and public interest in **transit heritage preservation, outreach, and awareness in Singapore**. The survey, completed by **56 respondents**, primarily from the youth and student demographic, reveals strong basis of support for the preservation and promotion of Singapore's public transport history.

A substantial proportion of respondents (over **70%**) expressed high interest

in Singapore's broader heritage and history. When asked about specific areas of heritage interest, **transport and infrastructure emerged as the most popular category (75%)**, surpassing traditional heritage themes like architecture, culture, and food. This indicates that transit heritage is not a niche interest but one that resonates deeply with a broad and youthful audience.

Familiarity with Singapore's transit history was moderate to high for most respondents, with over **60% rating**

themselves as at least somewhat familiar. Furthermore, 75% indicated interest in attending transit-related heritage events, especially guided tours of old stations and depots (89.3%), physical museums with vintage memorabilia (83.9%), and interactive exhibitions. There was also notable support for digital formats such as virtual archives and talks by transport historians.

The survey also indicates strong support for the establishment of a permanent transit heritage museum was strong (83.9%), with cost accessibility, engaging displays, and convenient locations cited as key factors for encouraging visitation. Nearly all respondents showed openness

to contributing to such initiatives, whether through volunteering, storytelling, or donating memorabilia.

Qualitative feedback emphasised the importance of authentic preservation, inclusive design, and avoiding overly “childish” presentations. Many advocated for documenting and celebrating old transit assets, collaborating with Singapore’s regional partners (e.g., Malaysia), and leveraging media platforms like YouTube to raise awareness.

Overall, the findings provide a compelling case for institutional efforts to preserve and promote Singapore’s transit heritage, grounded in community participation, emotional connection, and innovative storytelling.

Methodology

This survey was conducted as part of a broader exploratory initiative to assess public attitudes, awareness, and engagement potential concerning transit heritage preservation in Singapore to lay the foundations of a service design project aiming to tackle the subject matter. The approach aimed to capture both quantitative metrics and qualitative insights from a cross-section of the public, particularly those with a latent or expressed interest in Singapore’s heritage landscape.

- Multiple-response questions to identify respondents’ areas of interest and preferences for engagement formats (e.g., types of events or museum features).
- Open-ended questions to gather qualitative suggestions and personal opinions on how Singapore could better preserve and promote its transit heritage.

The questions were carefully designed to:

Survey Design

The survey was structured as a mixed-method questionnaire, comprising of:

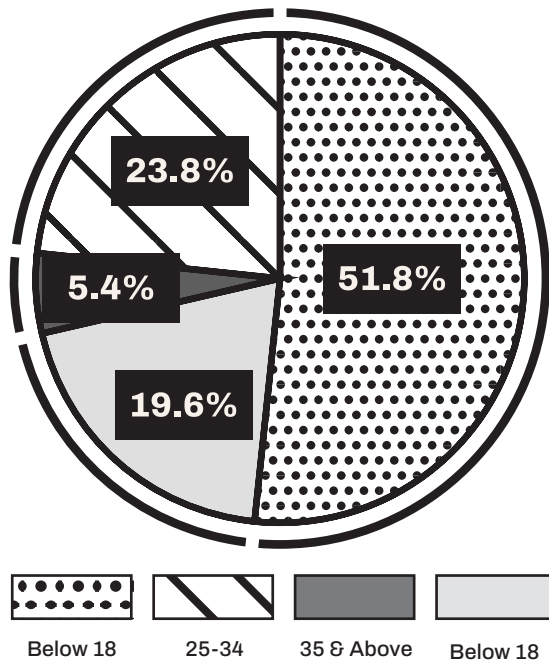
- Closed-ended questions to collect demographic information and measure levels of interest, familiarity, and support using multiple-choice formats and Likert scales (e.g., 1 to 5 interest levels).
- Map out the relationship between general heritage interest together with transit-specific engagement
- Explore public openness to different forms of outreach and preservation
- Capture ideas and sensing from respondents on meaningful and sustainable heritage efforts, especially in relation to transit.

Data sampling

The survey was created and distributed using Google Forms, ensuring accessibility and user-friendliness across most devices. Outreach was conducted via social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Discord, where the survey author promoted the questionnaire through personal and interest-based networks. These platforms were selected for their effectiveness in reaching younger, digitally engaged audiences with a potential affinity for local culture and civic issues.

A total of 56 valid responses were ultimately collected. While the sample is not statistically representative of Singapore's entire population, it offers valuable insight into the views of youth and heritage-conscious individuals, particularly students and early-career adults; groups increasingly influential in shaping future narratives of national identity and cultural memory

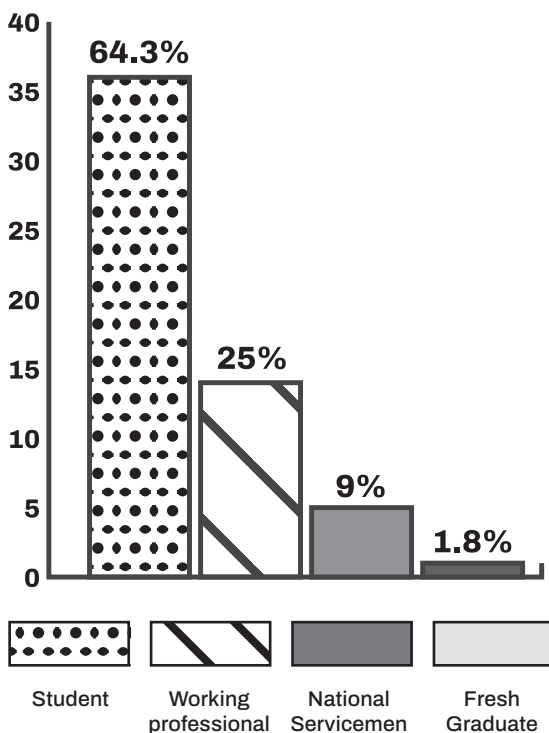
1. Demographic analysis



Qn 1: What is your age group?

Age Group	Percentage
Below 18	19.6%
18-24	51.8%
25-34	23.2%
35 & Above	5.4%

The majority of respondents (over 70%) are aged between 18 and 34, reflecting a predominantly youth and young adult demographic. This aligns with the online-based outreach approach and suggests that younger generations are actively interested in heritage themes, including those related to public transport. Their voices are particularly relevant for shaping long-term preservation strategies and outreach efforts.



Qn 2: What is your occupation?

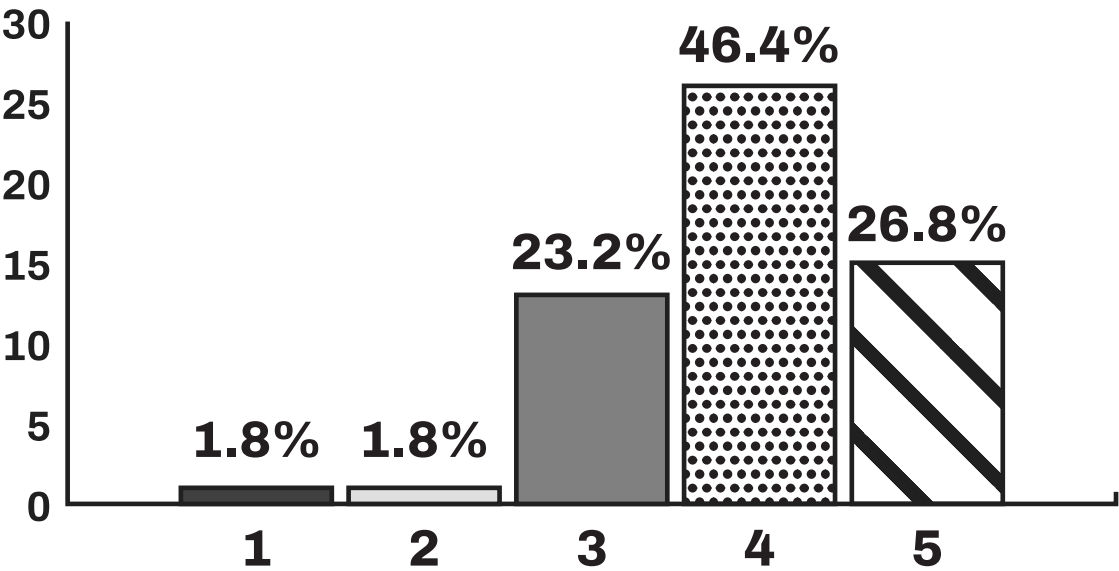
Occupation	Percentage
Student	64.3%
Working professional	25%
National Servicemen	9%
Fresh Graduate	64.3%

A significant number of respondents identified as students, indicating that educational and youth audiences represent a key stakeholder group in the future of transit heritage engagement (64.3%.) The presence of working professionals (25%) and National Servicemen also points to a broader cross-section of young adults who interact with public transport regularly and may hold emotional or nostalgic ties to it.

2. General Interest in Heritage and History

Qn 3: On a scale of 1-5, how interested are you in Singapore’s heritage and history?

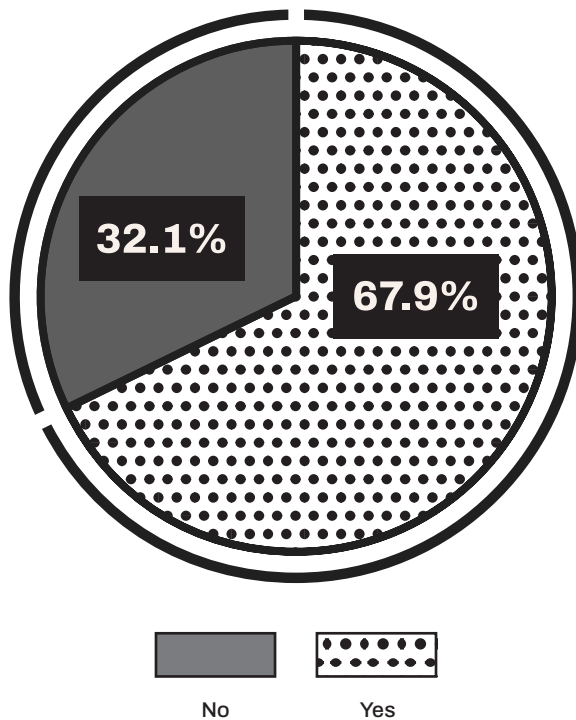
1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest



Rating	Response Count	Percentage
1 (Not interested at all)	1	1.8%
2	1	1.8%
3 (Moderately interested)	13	23.2%
4	26	46.4%
5 (Highly interested)	15	26.8%

Insights

- A clear majority (73.2%) of respondents rated their interest as 4 or 5, indicating a strong and active interest in Singapore’s heritage and history.
- Approximately one-quarter (23.2%) expressed moderate interest (rating of 3), suggesting there is openness towards heritage engagement but potentially requiring more accessible or compelling formats to deepen involvement.



Qn 4: Have you ever attended a heritage-related event in Singapore?

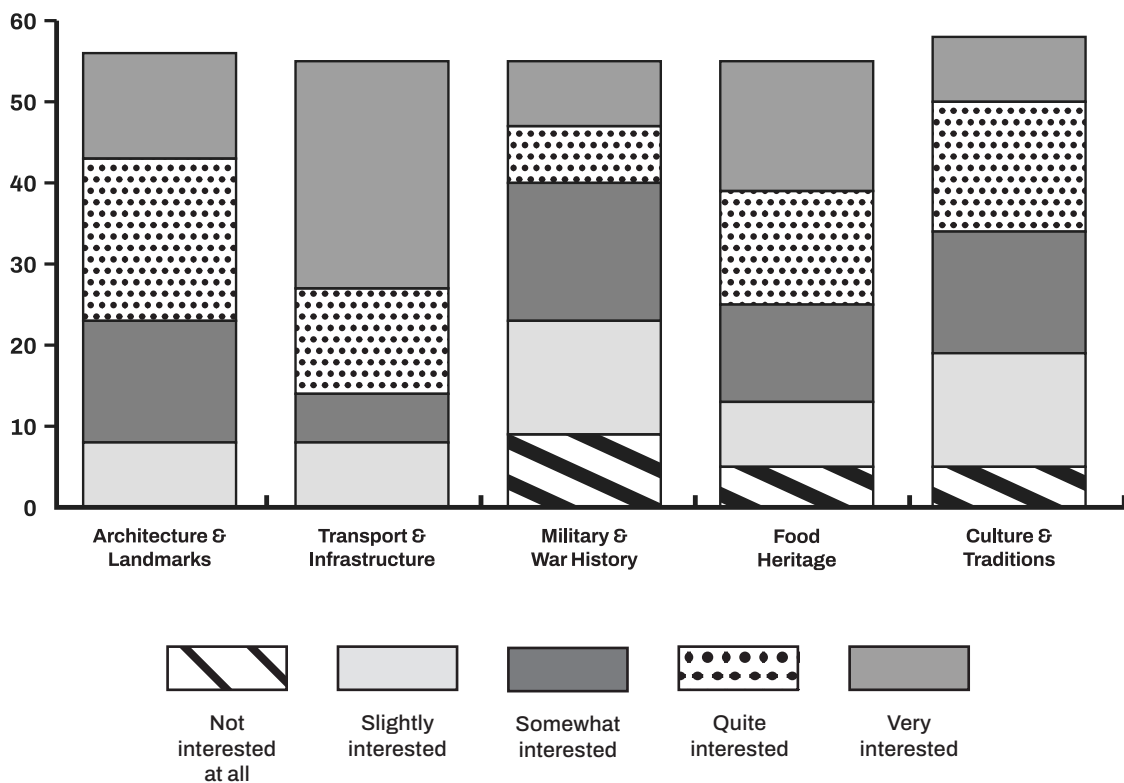
Yes 67.9%

No 32.1%

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2. General Interest in Heritage and History

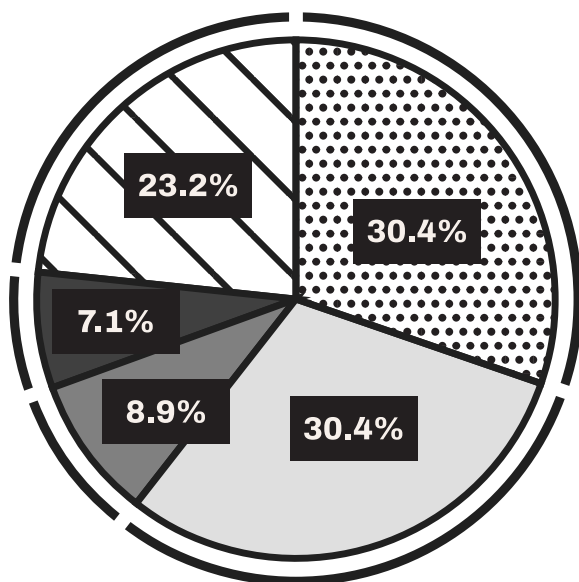
Qn 5: Which aspects of Singapore's heritage interest you the most? (Select all that apply)



Insights

- Transport & Infrastructure is the most selected category, surpassing even traditionally celebrated areas like architecture and food, with Over 50% of respondents rated their interest as “very interested” in transport, with another 23.2% “quite interested”.
- These figures supports the premise that public transport holds deep cultural and personal significance, especially among youth who have grown up with Singapore’s MRT and bus systems as the main features of their life.
- Closely following transport, Architecture & Landmarks drew high interest (73.2%), with many respondents considering them of high interest to themselves.
- This overlap suggests that built environment heritage, including transport stations, depots, and infrastructure sits at the intersection of these two interests and should be central if one wants to do transit heritage storytelling.
- Culture & Traditions (50%) and Food Heritage (51.8%) continues to remain popular as topic, reflecting broader national pride in intangible heritage.
- These could be strategically woven into transit heritage experiences—for example, exploring hawker culture near iconic train stations or telling cultural stories from bus routes through historical neighbourhoods.

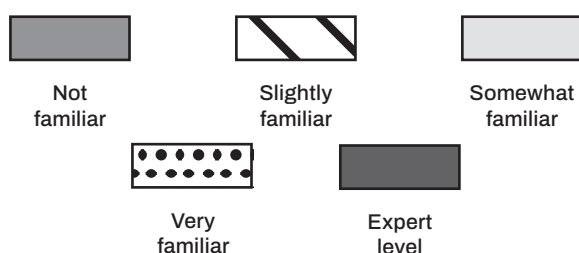
3. Familiarity with Singapore’s Transit History



Qn 6: How familiar are you with the history of Singapore’s public transport system?

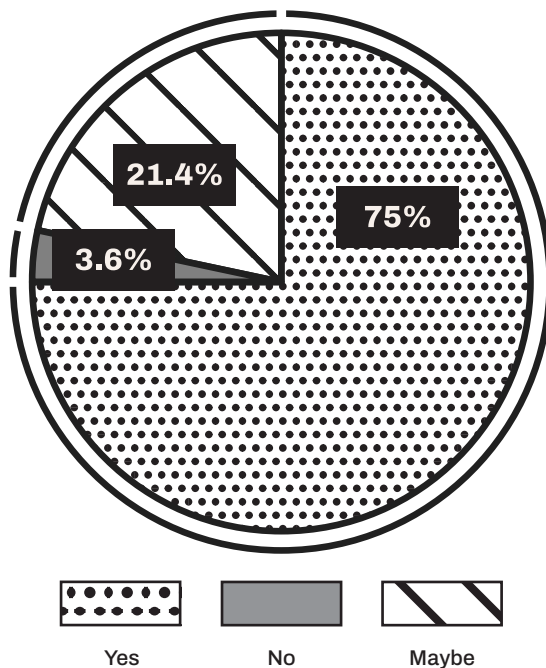
Not familiar	7.1%
Slightly familiar	23.2%
Somewhat familiar	30.4%
Very familiar	30.4%
Expert level	8.9%

These figures are highly promising, suggesting that transit history is not a foreign or inaccessible subject for most participants.



This awareness base implies that transit heritage programming can go beyond the basics, offering depth, archival material, and historical storytelling without fearing loss of public interest.

4. Interest in Transit Heritage Events

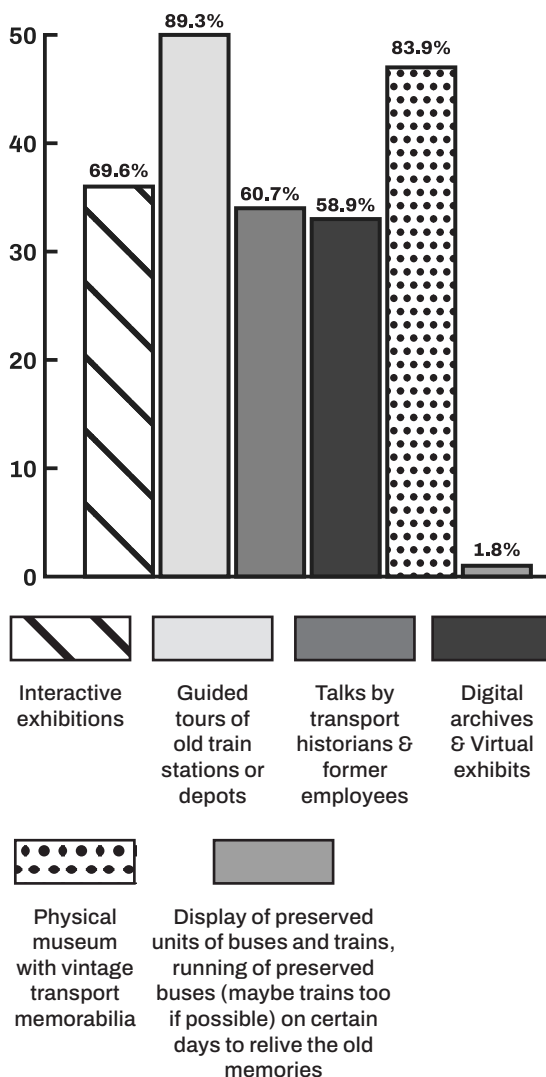


Qn 7: Would you be interested in attending a transit heritage event (e.g., exhibitions, guided tours, talks)?

Yes	75%
No	3.6%
Maybe	21.4%

A commanding 75% of respondents would attend a transit heritage event, and only two expressed disinterest.

This indicate a high interest within our audience at attending transit heritage related events.



Qn 8: What type of transit heritage events or collections would appeal to you? (Select all that apply)

Interactive exhibitions	69.6%
Guided tours of old train stations or depots	89.3%
Talks by transport historians & former employees	60.7%
Digital archives & Virtual exhibits	58.9%
Physical museum with vintage transport memorabilia	83.9%

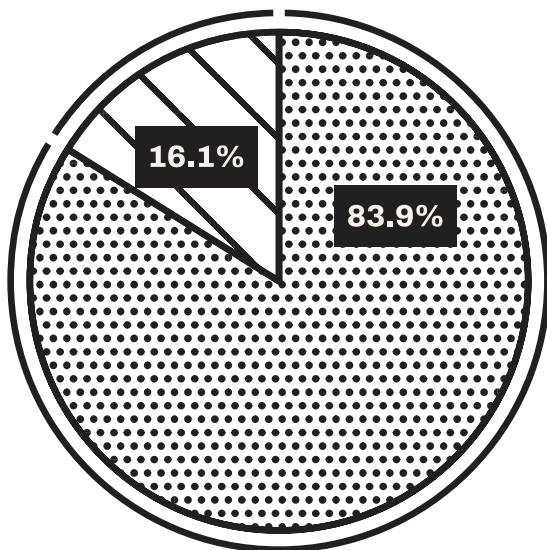
Display of preserved units of buses and trains, running of preserved buses (maybe trains too if possible) on certain days to relive the old memories 1.8%

From the results, guided tours emerged as the most appealing format, reflecting a desire from the respondents for a more hands-on, immersive experiences that connect visitors directly with physical sites and objects.

That there is also a strong interest in both physical museums and interactive exhibitions, which suggests that a multi-sensory and experiential design approach would be key to audience engagement at that level. The notable support for digital exhibits and talks also indicates the importance of hybrid programming that includes both in-person and online components.

All these preferences emphasize the public's desire for narrative-driven, spatial, and tangible experiences, further validating the case for creating a dedicated transit heritage center.

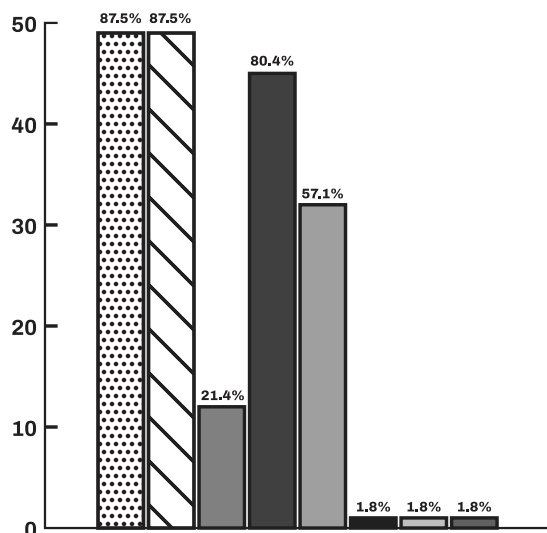
5. Support for a Transit Heritage Museum



Qn 9: Would you support the establishment of a permanent transit heritage museum in Singapore?

Yes	83.9%
Maybe	16.1%
No	0%

An overwhelmingly vast majority of respondents indicated support, at 83.9%, the establishment of a transit themed museum, with no respondents having objections to the idea.



Qn 10: What would make you more likely to visit a transit heritage museum or event? (Select all that apply)

Free or affordable entry fees	Engaging and interactive displays	Special programs for families & children	Convenient location & accessibility
Collaborations with local artists & historians	Full fledged preservation of train sets & buses (like the MLR in HK)	Weight of history - how important it is	Unique merchandise relating to the transit stuff

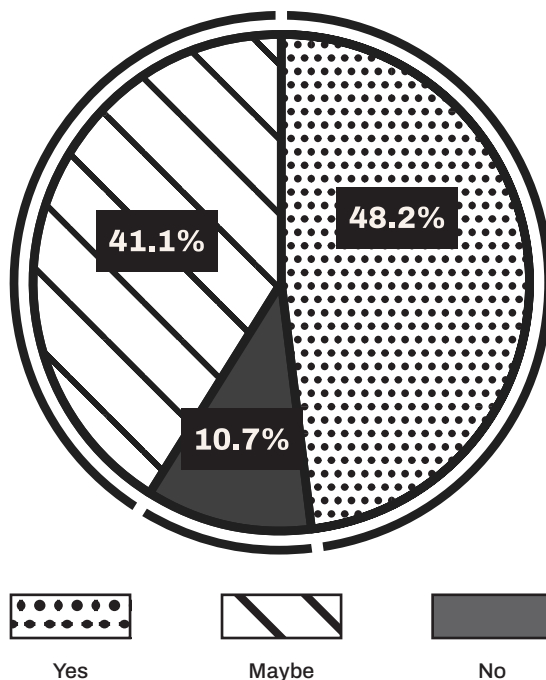
Free or affordable entry fees	87.5%	Engaging and interactive displays	87.5%
Special programs for families & children	21.4%	Convenient location & accessibility	80.4%
Collaborations with local artists & historians	57.1%	Full fledged preservation of train sets & buses (like the MLR in HK)	1.8%
Weight of history - how important it is	1.8%	Unique merchandise relating to the transit stuff	1.8%

Respondents highly rate accessibility, both in terms of cost and location, as a major motivator towards visitation, which indicates it as a critical and important component towards encouraging visitation.

The desire for interactive displays and artistic/historical collaborations continues to be vindicated as respondents highly rated signals the need for a museum that is engaging, dynamic, and rooted in storytelling, not just static display.

Notably, interest in family programs is lower, affirming earlier feedback that a museum should not be designed only with children in mind, which run contrary to some expectations but it may be a result of audience biases.

6. Willingness to Contribute to Transit Heritage



Qn 11: Would you be interested in contributing to Singapore's transit heritage (e.g., donating memorabilia, sharing stories, volunteering)?

Yes	48.2%
Maybe	41.1%
No	10.7%

The vast majority of respondents are open to contributing in some form, either definitively or potentially. This is a strong indicator that there is a potential source of transit heritage preservation and it can be participatory and community-driven.

This indicates an appetite from the public for grassroots or co-curated initiatives, such as community exhibits, archival crowdsourcing, or citizen-led storytelling campaigns.

7. Qualitative Feedback and Suggestions

Qn 12: Do you have any suggestions on how Singapore can better promote its transit heritage?

Selected answers:

What Knackstop is doing is pretty good as they promote sg transport or local centered tid bits into merchandise. Partner with SBS to create events that I'm sure transport enthusiasts will love.

Work with Malaysian counterparts on heritage preservation on transportation given Singapore's intertwined history on railways and transportation with FMSR and later KTMB and its impact it has in early development of Singapore's economy.

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

Dont make it childish. Thats no. 1 way of restricting outreach, since everyone will just think its a musuem for children only + those who want to go will feel shameful for doing "childish things"

Preservation without modification to external and internal appearances is key in promoting transit heritage.

Insights

Preserve, Don't Scrap:

A good number of respondents emphasized the importance of conserving decommissioned trains, buses, and related infrastructure rather than discarding or exporting them. Some drew inspiration from Hong Kong's MLR system, which commemorated its legacy assets with proper farewells and preservation efforts.

Narrative & Emotions Matter:

Respondents were also advocating for farewell ceremonies for outgoing vehicles, public nostalgia events, and storytelling that highlights the emotional significance of Singapore Transit system.

Using Media & Technology:

Some respondent advocated the usage of Media and technology: Suggestions included launching a YouTube channel, building a digital archive, and leveraging social media for outreach and education.

Avoid Child-Centric Framing:

Several respondents stressed the need to avoid overly "childish" approach towards transit conservation and museum, which may alienate adult audiences or reduce the perceived seriousness of the subject.

Interdisciplinary Integration:

Some respondents recommended collaborations with artists, designers, and historians, as well as transforming disused or discommissioned transit spaces into community and cultural venues.

Transnational Collaboration:

Some responses suggested working with Malaysian counterparts, recognizing the shared history of railway systems that existed between Singapore and Malaysia (e.g., FMSR, KTMB)

8. Comprehensive Interpretation

This survey reveals a clear and compelling pattern: transit heritage is of significant interest to the public, particularly among youth and young adults in Singapore. The strong preference for transport and infrastructure over traditional heritage topics such as food, war history, or politics indicates that, despite assumptions, everyday urban experiences, especially commuting, form a substantial part of our emotional and cultural memory.

High levels of interest (73.2% rated 4 or 5 out of 5) in Singapore's heritage are generally matched by strong familiarity with public transport history, with nearly 70% of respondents claiming moderate to high levels of knowledge. This is reinforced by the high attendance at heritage events (67.9%), and by the fact that 75% of respondents expressed a willingness to attend transit-themed events in the future.

While a significant number of respondents (83.9%) support the idea of a permanent transit heritage museum, it has to be acknowledged that developing such an institution lies

beyond the immediate capabilities of this project. Nevertheless, the findings point toward a broader public desire for physical spaces, tangible experiences, and meaningful engagement with Singapore's transport history, which can be further explored by this project.

Respondents also advocated strongly for authenticity, accessibility, and inclusivity, calling for approaches that avoid tokenism or infantilisation, and instead recognise transit as a serious cultural and historical subject. The desire to contribute personally, whether through volunteering, storytelling, or donating memorabilia, further highlights a strong sense of civic ownership and pride in Singapore's transit evolution.

Overall, the data support the idea that transit heritage in Singapore deserves greater visibility, recognition, and creative outreach, even if full institutionalisation is not yet feasible. Grassroots efforts, partnerships, and temporary activations offer viable and impactful alternatives.

9. Action Forward: Next Steps

Although the establishment of a permanent transit heritage museum may currently lie beyond the author's means, this survey lays critical groundwork for short- to medium-term initiatives and ideas that they can explore that can advance public engagement with Singapore's transport history.

1. Think Spatial

Start up small-scale site-based experiences such as pop-up exhibitions, open depot days, or photo installations at MRT stations. These activations could offer the public a chance to engage physically and emotionally with familiar environments reframed through a heritage lens.

2. Use Digital Platforms

Leverage platforms like Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok to narrate overlooked stories of Singapore's transit past highlighting vehicle transitions, station designs, or personal commuter stories. Use technology within physical spaces to enhance engagement as well.

3. Collaborate

Collaborate with local museums, transport operators (e.g., SBS Transit, SMRT), schools, and civic groups to co-host educational workshops or create shared learning resources.

Closing Thoughts

This report does not claim to provide a complete solution to the preservation of transit heritage in Singapore, nor does it attempt to provide a fully developed institutional model such as a national transit museum. However, what it does uncover, through data and heartfelt public responses, is a deep and often under-recognized public appreciation for the cultural and historical value of transport in Singapore.

As the author, this survey has offered more than just empirical insights; it has provided a deeper, more nuanced understanding of how the public perceives both transit and transit heritage. Transport beyond just a necessity of life, it is remembered, felt, and even mourned. People recall their experiences with old train models, decommissioned buses, and long-gone stations with affection and a surprising level of historical awareness. Their calls for preservation, storytelling, and respect for authenticity highlight that transit heritage is alive in memory, if not yet in form.

Thus, this offers a clear and grounded direction for action in the context of a design project. Rather than aim for grand proposals beyond the author's current capacity, the path forward lies in human-scale interventions: design responses that are community-driven, site-aware, and emotionally resonant. Whether through temporary exhibitions, interactive media, public installations, or reimagined transit spaces, the goal should be to create platforms for connection, between past and present, infrastructure and emotion, the public and their heritage.

The findings affirm that transit heritage is a fertile and powerful design territory. The responsibility now is not to preserve everything at once, but to begin crafting moments and experiences that allow people to see what is usually unseen.