

PROCEEDINGS OF THE

POLICY ROUNDTABLE
DISCUSSION OPEN FORUM



Public Consultation for Proposed Transport Developments

Dr. Guillen: Let us start with the first question: how much public consultation is done to inform the public of any proposed transport development? Engr. Santiago, would you like to start?

Engr. Santiago: When we did the bus reorganization in the 70's, we were interacting almost on a daily basis with the bus operators. Of course, they knew it is physically impossible and technically not doable to do crowdsourcing with their customers at that time. Right now, you can do public consultation via internet, so it is easy to do that. But we did a lot of consultations with the bus operators, and we adjust the plans as we go along. It was not a fixed one, it was a moving target, that is why we were able to achieve 14 consortia within 2 or 3 years.

Dr. Guillen: I think in the early 70's and late 80's, there were even very few advocacy groups, if I am not mistaken.

Engr. Santiago: Yes, there were not that many pretenders to good work and good deed at the time, but we did receive a few threats along the way. It is always dangerous to be a reformer when you are occupying a public position.

Engr. Villarete: When we started the BRT in 2008, nobody knows about BRT, so it was difficult to explain to the people. That was a situation when people did not know about BRT because all they see in the TV are LRT and MRT, so we have to go village by village in the city to explain. In the evening, we have to go do pulong-pulong (i.e. meetings). We gather all the people and explain it in Cebuano because they cannot appreciate it in English. So it is really at the local level. Secondly, we also invited all the student leaders to one forum and explained to them the BRT. Then, these student leaders organized presentations in their own universities. We really need to do that because at that particular time, very few people know about the BRT.

EnP. Pontawe: In the specific case of PUV modernization, people may be wondering why it was launched in July 2017. It was because we were going around the country from 2016 to 2017 to do stakeholder consultations. These are all documented, because various senate and congressional hearings mentioned that there was no consultation at all. I think there was also one case wherein the latest version of OFG was presented to the public and it was indicated that the minimum financial requirement was around PhP1.6M. These kinds of probations were adjusted and removed because of public consultations. And as mentioned by Engr. Santiago and Engr. Villarete, such programs that remove us from status quo are challenging. For example, why do we need to

(EnP. Pontawe cont.) consolidate hundred plus thousands of jeepneys and entities? Why do we need to rationalize the routes? Why do we need to improve the transport areas? First of all, in the business perspective on public transport setting, the primary goal is to earn or to generate revenue. This is quite difficult, hence, the need for stakeholder consultations. I am also coming from a standpoint that my father used to be a tricycle driver and a jeepney operator and driver from 2003-2009 before I went to college, so I was a public transport rider on a daily basis. I understand this and that is why it is very important. Even when I come to our home, I need to explain to my dad the issues even though he's not in the sector anymore. Public consultation is really important.

Just one additional thing: jeepney drivers, bus drivers – how do we consult them? It is very difficult because they are driving. You cannot call them to a meeting to explain things. You really have to go down to where they are. One of the things that we did was to go to where they have their lunch and explain it to them. You really have to go that deep.

Dr. Guillen: I agree with you, Engr. Villarete. I actually have to join the drivers' evening meetings during Davao bus project. I had to drink with them just to get information with their permission. So yes, the consultation is a very tedious process.

Dr. Tiglao: I think more than 150 operators for the EDSA Busway actually were consulted. My take with that process was some of them were really adamant because these are closely held family businesses over the years. But I think the gap is in the information. I am beginning to sense now that there is information asymmetry. They really did not understand how the technical design is shaping up. In fact, when I was in a meeting there was really heated discussion and some just have a wait-and-see attitude. Moving forward, we really need to keep a strong relationship with the sector and I think that has not happened because their stance is to just wait-and-see and there is really no strong communication; they just respond to what will affect them, but not really the industry as a whole. There is a potential there because now they are organized, we just have to continuously engage them. Engr. Santiago, can public consultations be coordinated in the case of multiple operators? I think there has to be some approach and we have to build some communication as one of the pillars of transport. How do we communicate technical to their bottom line? I think we have to do better at communicating and dealing with the industry players. And of course, I know the comments about Thredbo but I think partnerships is a way to go. We need to define how this partnership should be rolled out apart from just the consultation, which is I think the first level. There has to be strong partnership. Thank you.



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EnP. Pontawe on
Public Consultations

Engr. Martinez: Just to quickly join on their comments on the consultation or lack thereof of EDSA Busway. There were efforts, but probably not as intense and as pervasive as the Cebu BRT because of lack of time. If you can imagine the preparation from zero concept to making everything available within 6 weeks, we do not know where to source the fund, we do not know what actual form will solution would look like. Dr. Tiglao's observation is right. When LTFRB talks to the bus operators, they could share to them the details of how they will be contracted. This is right if you view public consultations from the perspective of what we are usually doing in normal time.

Dr. Guillen: I just want to share also. I am teaching transportation systems and one of my students gave a good feedback on the EDSA bus carousel. I was actually surprised – she was sharing in our online class that it took her 20 minutes to traverse EDSA going to UP Diliman. So that kind of experience is also very good because she is used to a 2-hour drive, but again, this is just an experience of one person. Having said that, thank you for all your responses to this very important question multi-stakeholder consultation.

TOPIC 2:

Sustainable Transport

Dr. Guillen: The other question that we would like to address is the hot topic in transportation planning which is about sustainability. Is there anyone who would like to discuss briefly the concept of sustainable transportation?

Engr. Santiago: Sustainable transport is always associated with green transport, carbon, and so on. But in a paper I made decades ago, I expanded the concept also in terms of financial viability. Because of years of experience I may appear clairvoyant to say that the EDSA Busway is not sustainable in the way it is being planned. I do not know why they have to rush something that is important. If it is good, you do not need to rush. Cebu BRT after all was not rushed; it was a subject of intense study, but up to now it has not been completed. There are many dead ends that the EDSA Busway will encounter along the way that they have not yet gone through or explored. In the last 20 years, I have predicted so many projects that will fail, and so far I have 100% average, starting with the 2003 LRT1 extension to Cavite. It was announced and inaugurated by two presidents that it will be completed. And in the discussion with the governor in 2004 when we are doing a feasibility study, I told him that his expectation that it will be finished in 3 years will not happen, and it did not happen. Up to now, the LRT1 to Cavite is not completed, but hopefully it will be completed next year. The other more controversial one that I called out was the North Rail deal with China that caused the

(Engr. Santiago cont.) government \$300M with nothing to show for it. But in 2005 before the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee, I already said that it is a contract that no one can execute properly because it was so badly written. So I may appear strange now when I say that EDSA Busway as currently conceptualized is not financially viable.

Dr. Tiglao: Yes, I agree. Some projects have failed in terms of time and cost. And my take is maybe we really do not have the framework. Not only the technical framework, but basically what the panelists have weighed in on. The institutional aspect has gaps. To some extent, maybe there is too much excitement of putting things on the ground without the hindsight of a really well-crafted plan. I think we really have information asymmetry in the way planners think and the way operators understand the project. The commuters think that they are having something but turns out to be another thing all together. And I can say this for a fact. For example, I have always hinted this with our partners in the academe, even in the TSSP, I really advocate for open data, open planning. These studies and forecast should be out there so that the people can understand and the actors can really see their role in the overall plan. But unfortunately, right now, information asymmetry is the norm. Even in the case of the Cebu BRT, the technical FS for the line was already there when in fact the strategic masterplan for Cebu was not yet updated. Of course, DOTC at that time went in and developed a city wide plan, but I think there is still information asymmetry and of course market failure. Information is just not on several actors.

Engr. Santiago: Just a slight correction, you are saying that there was no masterplan for Cebu. We were doing the masterplan for transport in Cebu in 2013, and we included the Cebu BRT as part of the plan at the time because it was already a committed project. What the DOTC did in 2016 I think or 2018 was they changed the alignment of configuration of the Cebu BRT.

Dr. Guillen: I think what is really important is what's highlighted earlier: It is very important that all information is being shared, and there is really a platform for sharing. and I think this is the reason why we are all here to discuss those things.



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Dr. Tiglao on
Project Frameworks

TOPIC 3:

Integration of Environmental Impact Studies

Dr. Guillen: The other question that is not being answered yet is: how are environmental impact studies integrated into the overall transport plan? This is always a part of feasibility studies. Even in the masterplan, you cannot have any transport plan without understanding the environmental impact.

Engr. Santiago: The problem is in the implementation of it, we have corrupted the IS process to require barangay approval. In other words, it is no longer about environment; it is about political approval. I will give you an example. The latest one, the Lawton Bridge which was inaugurated I think a few months ago, that was started in 2014. It was about to be implemented at that time but the Barangay Kapitolyo objected to it. So that was delayed on the grounds of environmental consultation.

TOPIC 4:

Public Access to Information on Transportation Projects

Dr. Guillen: There's another question here that I think need to be directed specifically to DOTr, will the studies including data and assumptions be made public? And will it be available in the DOTr website? Example, for EDSA Busway and also for other studies, we are seeing long queues – were these expected by the studies? And because of the changing residential landscape, how will the origin-destination (OD) information be updated and how often?

EnP. Pontawe: I have to clarify that for the EDSA Busway, we did not have much time to do stakeholder consultations because this is a pandemic response, so we have to delegate transport projects prior to the pandemic and the current COVID-19 pandemic. I think we are all aware last March 16, 2020 that public transport was prohibited from operating. IATF gave us the go signal to resume public transport but we have to ensure that the pre-pandemic transport system in Mega Manila will not be the new normal. So in a few weeks' time, with our route rationalization consultants, we really have to do with what we can and stakeholder consultation is really focused on the LGUs and MMDA. We also have all the operators. I have to clarify that we only have 3 consortia; that's what we consolidated. That was the main problem and these were really rapid assessments. For the question on data availability, we currently are calibrating the new set model. For the Mega Manila area, we are currently doing the route rationalization study with the perspective of the new normal. Stakeholder consultations will also definitely be part of the succeeding outputs of the LTFRB and consultants. We expect early next year these studies will be made available to the public because, as I have mentioned, aside from public consultation, the data information sharing is also crucial. So yes, this will be made available and EDSA Busway is part of that larger route rationalization. I will repeat, the existing routes are a

(EnP. Pontawe cont.) result of rapid assessments and these will be adjusted. The main objective of the Department now is to improve the current system that was put in place as a pandemic response.

Engr. Martinez: Maybe just to address the point on database and probably also to share this information so that in the subsequent discussion or in the future, somebody else within this group can make a follow up on this. What I know being the former Program Manager of the BRTMO is that part of the investment identified as the BRT program is the creation of a database platform within DOTr. So the idea is if you want to have information on the planning, say on origin-destination information for all the DOTr projects, everyone can access that on a certain platform. I am not sure whether funding for this creation of a database platform are covered within the present DOTr budget proposal because as far as I know, the configuration of the budget has been modified several times with Bayanihan 1, 2, and then 3, where the priority project identified have shifted. So there. Perhaps in the future discussions, we can ask this question again for a follow up.

TOPIC 5:

*Acceptable
Service
Contracting*

Dr. Guillen: Proposals on service contracting were raised by Engr. Villarete. A private sector component for service contract management is a good option. The question now lies on what is acceptable service contract fee for operators for them to run on fixed KPIs?

EnP. Pontawe: For the Department, what we usually do aside from the calculated per km fee, we also consult with the operators themselves if these are acceptable and if these per km fees could actually cover the operational expenses plus margin for revenue. We do that in certain a way. Hence, for example, the rate varies especially now that there is fuel price hike. We really coordinate with our stakeholders.

Dr. Tiglao: I think the contract fee really is a service contracting design. I think we should put the operator and the commuter as well at the center of that design. For example, we have been closely working with General Santos City. We are pushing this partnership and data sharing to a higher level. In the case of General Santos City, they have a public transport alliance where they actually share even their cost and revenue – information to really try to convince the sectoral players. I think that should happen because it should inform the policy design because one would say one thing and the other one will say another. So I think it is a case where, again, you have this clear idea of how do we do the design? The design in this policy is very important and highly

(Dr. Tiglao cont.) contextual. This is contextual to the city – even Metro Manila would be quite different from other cities.

CLOSING

Conclusion

Dr. Tiglao: I think this RTD is a start. We should have our own series on RTD. It should not stop here, as I always say with all other webinars. There has to be continuous engagement, policy at the level of theory and practice, so let's continue this RTD. I hope we have more of this and let's take on more topics. So thank you again for the wonderful panel: Engr. Santiago, Engr. Villarete, and of course, EnP. Pontawe and Engr. Martinez there, and of course, Dr. Guillen for moderating this. Thank you very much.

Dr. Guillen: Thank you Dr. Tiglao. To end, I would like to share his favorite line of mine from Ms. Robin Chase: "Transportation is the center of the world. It is the glue of our daily lives. When it goes well, we do not see it. When it goes wrong, it negatively colors our day, makes us feel angry and impotent, curtails our possibilities." But when it is working well, we do not really appreciate it. So I think it is very important that we keep on discussion and hopefully, we can really see the changes on the ground. I think that is what we are all after and hopefully, we will not turn very cynical about all the experiences. We might get lost along the way – Engr. Santiago has given us a very good overview of what happened through the years – but I think with this kind of webinar, it is very important that we value the history, we value the learnings, and also we value being very open to all disciplines. Thank you for the opportunity and with this, let us give a big hand to everyone.

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Robin Chase, Transportation Entrepreneur





About the Moderator

Dr. Marie Danielle V. Guillen

Dr. Marie Danielle V. Guillen is currently an independent consultant and an academic with expertise on policy and regional and urban planning sciences with focus on transport, tourism, climate change, and social development.

She received both her PhD and MS in Policy and Planning Sciences from the University of Tsukuba, Japan, and her MA in Urban and Regional Planning and BA in Sociology degrees from the University of the Philippines. She is currently a professorial lecturer at the University of the Philippines Asian Institute of Tourism and a lecturer at the Ateneo de Manila University Japanese Studies Program.

She has published articles in several refereed international and local publications. She also has peer-reviewed many manuscripts for Elsevier's Transport Policy, Sage Open, UN Sustainable Development Journal, and Oscar M. Lopez Center's Climate, Disaster and Development Journal. She has also co-written transportation and governance related articles in Rappler, ANC, and Asia Dialogues. Her research interests are on informal transportation, active transport, tourism transportation, gender, and climate change. She is one of the lead members of the Women in Transportation Leadership (WITL) Network, a platform to produce knowledge, foster innovation, and increase female collaborative linkages in Australasia. She is also strong advocate of inclusive mobility.

Her latest consultancy undertakings in the Philippines include: projects in the City of Davao and local and international organizations such as UN Environment Programme-Initiative for Climate Action Transparency, or UNEP-ICAT. She has also worked with other firms as independent consultant on some short-term projects in the Asian region. She has worked fulltime for the Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI) based in Japan and as Senior Advisor of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit's (GIZ) for its transport and climate related projects in the ASEAN region from 2014-2017.

She also worked full time from 2011 to 2013 in Ateneo de Manila University under the School of Government. Here, she developed and managed the Rockefeller-supported Inclusive Mobility Project which was later adopted by the University's Institute of Sustainability where she was one of the first managers. She has also been involved in the drafting of Ateneo de Manila University's very first Campus Sustainability Report. Prior to taking her graduate studies in Japan, she worked as a development professional in SEAMO-SEARCA and Philippine Business for Social Progress.