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**THE SOCIAL ACCEPTABILITY OF INTRODUCING A MASS TRANSIT  
SYSTEM OF THE PASIG RIVER**

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**Abstract:**

The Philippines today is in the midst of great upheavals and as it slowly approaches the crossroad leading to the "Pacific Century", where and when multifaceted transformations in the Asia-Pacific Region and the Pacific Rim are expected to take place. For the country to take an active role in this identified future global growth area, the sea of ongoing and impending multisectoral changes that have made themselves manifest most especially on the social, economic, and political fronts have to be stabilized and thereafter put on a steady course towards achieving the ultimate goals of attaining a newly industrialized country (NIC) status and realizing true self-sufficiency.

The emphasis has always been on economy and finances and for this reason, the plethora of problems currently plaguing the nation must be solved economically without sacrificing either the quality or the extent and effectiveness of the remedy.

This immediately brings to mind the transport ills afflicting Metropolitan Manila's residents for it must be remembered that most of the solutions previously prescribed to alleviate their plight were not only costly and western-oriented, but more often were intended primarily to propagate the demand/dependency on products or services developed by industrialized countries. Such prescriptions were proven relatively short-lived and thus rendered ineffective over time.

Many indicators point to the gradual but eventual veering away of the country from what is generally considered tradition or convention and matters affecting transportation are no exception.

The intermittent reintroduction of water travel to Metropolitan Manila's waterways, particularly for the Pasig River, was a step in that direction. It was not only cheap and relatively easy to effect, but also timely, resource-oriented, flexible, and responsive to the prevailing needs and situation in the light of the unique requirements that had to be met. It was most of all novel, as inland water travel for inter-urban routes could be one of the remaining but little explored solutions to the peculiar problems confronting us.

The concept of water travel along metropolitan estuaries and rivers is not new, as it had been employed as the primary means of travel for centuries in what are now the Metro Manila area, the Greater Manila area, and the Manila Bay Region. The advent of rail and highway at the turn of the century completed the local shift from water to land-based travel modes, and things have remained pretty much the same since then.

During the past few decades, privately initiated ferry services were reintroduced to the Pasig River, but only for very short durations, and they have been met with rather limited success. The Researcher believes that it is nonetheless worthwhile to persevere in

attempts to reintroduce such a service, for it appears to be one of the more viable courses at the moment.

The success of the most recent and still largely private venture by Magsaysay Lines, Inc. was also short-lived, as low usage of the Pasig River ferry service has now forced its transfer to Cebu City where there is reportedly greater demand for said service between Cebu City and Mactan Island.

One could be led to initially opine that there could have been something missing, something that would have ensured sustained public patronage of waterborne intra-urban travel here in Metro Manila and its absence may have been largely contributory to the continuing demise of ferry services on the Pasig River.

To guarantee success, subsequent attempts to reintroduce the service may have to be backed up by strong political will, particularly on the rehabilitative component of efforts to resuscitate the river, and this would have to be coupled with sustained government participation, particularly on the capital investment aspect.

These future attempts would also have to be attended by very strong public support, acceptance and patronage. To do this, however, one must identify and validate passenger concerns that may not have been properly addressed in the fare, frequency of vessels, safety considerations, and possibly what the government will do with the foul sights and smell of the river will constitute parameters that can be used to gauge support, acceptance, and decision to patronize the service.

The Researcher's original decision to look into the acceptability aspect of the proposed inland waterway mass transit system for the Pasig River stems from a host of reasons, foremost among which were his genuine belief and interest in the potentials of the Pasig River to serve commuter travel, his love of the rich Philippine culture, tradition and history, his fascination with mass transit systems and their consequences on the urban environment, his desire for a better kind of life in the urban milieu, his perceptions of the possibility of bringing about changes in our urban setting and changes in our attitudes towards matters affecting our daily existence, and of course, the overwhelming drive to do work which could serve as a learning experience.

The Researcher's subsequent decision to confine the scope of the study to only the Social Acceptability aspect of introducing a true mass transit system on the Pasig River stems mainly from his primary Adviser's instructions to delimit the scope of the research to something more manageable, aside of course from the need to satisfy only the minimum requirements. The Researcher is thankful for this sound and timely advice, particularly in the light of resource constraints.

This research work on the social acceptability of the envisioned system attempts to gauge multi-sectoral support for the proposed introduction of a true waterborne mass transit system utilizing the Pasig River as the pilot area. However, the study was not altogether confined to measuring the social acceptability alone as minor investigations pertaining to technical/economic/environmental feasibility still had to be undertaken because the Researcher felt that the result could have had a cross-influence/effect in interpreting the proposed system's social acceptability.

This study involved some seven hundred thirty-two (732) respondents polled over a total five (5) month period in 1989. One thousand twenty-four (1024) respondents were originally targeted, but difficulties and delays in retrieving the balance of the questionnaires coupled with events arising out of the failed December 1989 coup attempt conspired to keep the returns below seventy-five percent (75%) mark.

The low returns come from the government sector, the media, and planners.

All respondents are urban dwellers and forty-nine (49) of them were government officials then occupying local and national offices. The bulk of the respondents were ordinary citizens who were either residents along the Pasig River banks or transients (e.g., students, workers, jeepney/tricycle drivers, visitors, etc.) frequenting areas/establishments near the banks.

The inclusion of government officials in the survey is in cognizance of the importance of their involvement and support for the success of this form of mass transit, considering the traditionally low official priority given this form of travel.

Government entities who participated in the survey included barangay officials/councilors/vice mayors/mayors from the City of Manila, and the municipalities of Makati, Mandaluyong and Pasig; officials of concerned executive offices such as the DOTC, DENR, PCUP, etc.; members of the Transportation Committee (TRANSCOM) of the House of representatives; and members of the Philippine Senate.

The study would not have been limited to these subjects alone, had other special interest groups who were initially targeted been available for interview in larger numbers during the course of the research work.

The results of the survey show a very high level of acceptance for the proposed system. The response to the proposed system was very much on the positive side, especially if taken within the context of pre-January 1990 conditions when revival of ferryboat travel on the Pasig River was still in the planning or pre-operation stage. This may have been an indicator of the high public expectations of the ferry service.

The inauguration of Pasig River ferry (MetroFerry) services in early 1990 proved the technical feasibility of the proposed system and it is conceded that the public awareness and acceptance base as regards intra-urban waterborne travel has since been further expanded. Given the past public experience with MetroFerry, a new survey would probably elicit somewhat or possibly vastly different results.

The Researcher is nonetheless convinced that the acceptance levels in post-1989/1990 surveys that may have been/may be conducted will still yield positive results. A precondition would of course be that a thorough information campaign should have first been/be conducted prior to any other survey purposely to inform the general public why the MetroFerry failed to live up to their expectations. Otherwise, acceptance levels may be low.

This research deals with a very important but oftentimes neglected aspect of urban and transportation planning and this has to do with ascertaining public perception of a developmental project being envisioned. The study tries to identify certain parameters

which may influence the acceptability and subsequent patronage of the proposed riverborne mass transit system.

The Researcher firmly believes that the early infusion of public and official thinking as inputs in any planning exercise assumes greater importance, particularly for projects that affect the daily existence of large to very large urban populations. Given an opportunity to air his view/s, the common urban dweller is thus given a chance to perform a semi-active role in the planning process. A more democratic, rational, responsive, and effective solution can only result from such an interaction.

The Researcher is cognizant of the fact that only positive public and official involvement would be crucial to the envisioned ferry system's success, but is also well aware that generalizations/conclusions that result from an analysis of the potential end-user and potential supporter survey are only localized and time-bound. As such the results of this research must be viewed with extreme care.

Consider the following:

1) inasmuch as the potential end-user sample size was taken from riverside residences and workplaces near bridges or crossings (where the bulk of initial users are expected to come from), the survey results will probably differ in comparison with those to be taken from other points along the river at some distance from the bridges/crossings or in other metropolitan areas at varying distances from the river; and

2) the survey for this study was taken in mid-1989 or approximately six (6) months before the Pasig River ferry (MetroFerry) service was reintroduced and the results will therefore be different from surveys that may have been taken in 1990 and the succeeding years.

This thesis is not meant to engage in framework/master/detail planning nor in the design of the proposed mass transit system, as these can only be addressed after the successful conduct of more exhaustive studies at present or in the immediate future.

Two such studies are the 1990 WTPD-DOTC Report on the status of ferry transport services on the Pasig River, and the 1991 Danish feasibility study for the rehabilitation of the Pasig River. The Researcher considers himself fortunate in being contributory as a data source to the successful conduct of these official studies prepared by or for the Philippine Government.

This study advances scenarios and projections based on what the Researcher feels may be realizable potentials/possibilities for the proposed ferry service not only for the Pasig River, but for the Metropolitan Manila area and the urban fringes as well. Most of the scenarios presented are based on the Researcher's personal concepts of what should be done and on his past experiences as a planning professional, related studies and expert advice.

This revised draft already incorporates some of the Researcher's new ideas and interpretations as regard the results of the survey completed in late 1989 and it is hoped that these may still be valid for both present and immediate future.

The full report consists of one (1) Report Volume (this document), and eight (8) Appendix Volumes.