

# (IV — 93) An analysis of Public Relations Operation and Its Impact for Newly Constructed Urban Railway - In the Case of Bangkok -

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## 1. Introduction

An elevated electric train of BTSC and a subway of MRTA are first urban rapid railway system for Thai people which they have never had experienced before. So, it is rather hard for them to understand and accept the impacts. Also, due to the lack of receiving correct information and proper communication, some people are just against it. Thus, public relations will play an important role in this stage to correct misunderstanding between organizations and their publics.

In this study, the role of public relations will be investigated through conducting a survey to find out how they work in order to get public acceptance and which media they use to reach public.

## 2. A dispute over BTSC and MRTA projects

### (1) Outline of BTSC and MRTA

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of April 1992, Bangkok Mass Transit System Corporation Limited (BTSC) formed by Tanayong Public Company Limited, signed a 30-year Concession Agreement with the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) to build, operate and transfer an elevated railway system on two routes of 23.5 km in central Bangkok.

The Metropolitan Rapid Transit Authority (MRTA) was established in accordance with the Cabinet resolution on July 28, 1992 to implement and put into service a mass rapid transit system project. From Nov. 19, 1996, the MRTA started to implement the 20-kilometer MRTA Initial System Project underground Blue line.

### (2) Traffic management during construction

Since BTS has been built as the elevated railway on the main street, its construction work has obstructed two central lanes of every route and has made heavy traffic. MRTA has just disturbed the traffic at the construction site of stations for which the open-cut method has been employed. However, after one way system has been applied on the section of Asok, it has also caused traffic jam. And, the most obvious problem is the complaint of Dusit Thani Hotel. about MRTA plan to construct a station underneath Rama IV which it will be connected to BTS station at Silom through the hotel. The hotel especially afraid to disturb their guest to approach by a car during construction. To solve this problem, MRTA has to redesign some part of the plan.

### (3) Environmental impact

Two environmental studies for the project were commissioned by BTSC. According to first study, the location of the depot was changed from Lumpini Park to Mor chit in late 1993. The second report was prepared by Kasetsart University and approved in mid-1995.

MRTA has been studying to minimize other environmental impacts resulting from the Initial System Implemen-

tation. As the result, the entire alignment of the Initial System has been revised from elevated to underground route to minimize impacts such as visual, noise from train operation within the densely populated area.

### (4) Social security

The most obvious problem of BTSC facing until now is the complaint of Mather Dei School. Since many outsider come to use a railway, the school expected the area near a station will be unsafe. Such kind of image may come from the situation of subway in the city of u.s. like New York. Also, it is from the national state railway in Thailand (SRT), because scouters used to locate beside of rail truck.

## 3. Public relation operation

### (1) BTSC's Public Relations Division

Public Relations Department of BTSC consists of two sections : information & publicity and complaint section.

The duties of the information & publicity section are press relations such as providing news, articles & photos, preparing materials, providing an information to the public, advertising and the coordination with related agencies.

On the other hand, the public complaint section takes care community relations by establishing an information center (near Siam Square) together with a toll-free hot line for providing in process information and receiving the complaint of people. Also, it alerts to misinformation about the organization and correct it by going door-to-door meeting local people in the area where source of information came from as well as conducting a community survey. Crisis management is also its responsibility.

### (2) MRTA's Public Relations department

Public relations division in MRTA consists of public communication & information and public complaint section whose duties are also the same with BTSC's sections.

### (3) Public relations work of BTSC and MRTA

For BTSC's public relations, sometimes they hire PR agencies such as Siam Vision Co., Ltd., leading by Dr. Seri Wongmontha team to do the crisis management (e.g., increased traffic congestion), and to build image of BTSC. While MRTA does almost of all of PR work by themselves due to the limitation of budget and subsidies (receives only 200,000 baht per year for doing PR work) When any crisis is taken place (e.g., increased traffic, the road surface obstacle of constructing materials and equipment of subway, and etc.) MRTA has asked the cooperation of the contractors (such as Cho. Karnchang Plc, and etc.) to provide some indication such as billboard, banner, cut out telling public about the construction and apologize for any inconvenience that may have occurred during the construction. And also, the contractors have to pay compensation in case unexpected accident happened.

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#### 4. Result of interview survey

##### (1) Conducting interview survey

From Dec. 28, 1998 to Jan. 8, 1999, we conducted a interview survey with 100 people who stays or works at near construction sites, Latprao (near Central), Purunchit (near World Trade Center), Asok intersection and Rachadapisek and who not stay nor work at near construction site for comparison.

On the interview, we mainly asked what information they know about both projects, how and when they got that information and how that information correlated with their opinion.

##### (2) Results of interview survey

97% of respondents has ever heard and 93% has ever seen about BTS, while 79% heard and only 54% seen about MRTA. This is because BTS's construction has been started earlier and is elevated. The route, station's location and figure of the train of BTS are being recognized comparing with other informations of BTS or MRT project as depicted in Table 1. The toll-free hot line is one of fundamental PR service, but only few people identified this.

Most of these informations have been provided by TV, newspaper and billboard as shown in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2. Comparing both figures, the way that information reached public is rather different between BTS and MRT. The information regarding BTS used to broadcast on TV more frequently than MRT. Billboard seem very effective way to provide information in both cases because 40 % of people have seen it properly.

However, people have received different type of information from each media. Table 2 shows from which media people received and what kind of information they have got for the case of MRT. The people have known events and news such as accidents, opening ceremony, traffic congestion problems mainly by TV, while the fundamental information about the project or construction work such as schedule, route, etc. are being known by billboard. For flier and brochure, the respondents who received information from these media before the construction is very small.

It is hardly clarify the relationship between PR activities that tried to handle the problems and to access to public through various media, and the opinion of people toward these new projects from this survey, because most of people gave positive answer for the construction of both railway systems. Since the nature of Thai people always think optimistically, they seem to already adapt and be familiar toward the life and environment with new facilities.

#### 5. Conclusion and Discussion

According to the result of the survey, it can be concluded that mass media such as TV, radio, newspaper, billboard and brochure are the effective tool for PR to get the message across to their public. However, still some information leaving unclear to public which is the confusion. Especially, before starting the projects, its information seems to reach to few people

Also, there is the confusion among people toward BTS and MRTA. Some people believe MRTA is elevated railway system, while some believe BTS is subway train. This shown the lack of well-planned message on public relations and publicity as it is still being today.

Table 1 Information known by people

Items	BTS		MRTA	
	Known	Unknown	Known	Unknown
1) Route	83	14	49	30
2) Station's location	93	4	56	23
3) Commence year	50	47	34	45
4) Figure of the train	81	16	19	60
5) Investor	61	36	32	47
6) Constructor	58	39	27	52
7) Official name	59	38	28	51
8) Main office	28	69	15	64
9) Site office	15	82	9	70
10) Special events	28	69	10	69
11) Toll-free hot line	23	74	7	72
12) Complete year	66	31	28	51
13) Other (specify)	4	93	2	77

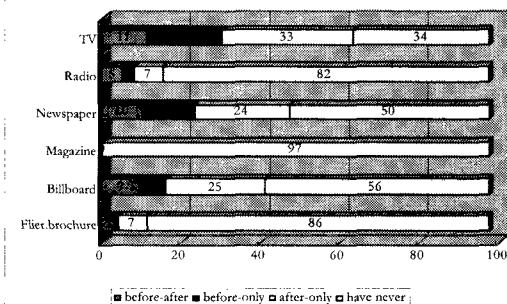


Fig. 1 The time to get information type of media of BTS

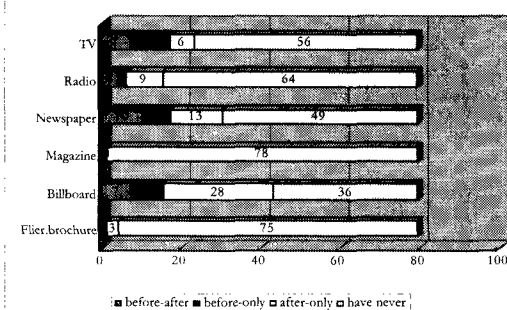


Fig. 2 The time to get information type of media of MRT

Table 2 The information by type of media regarding MRT

Items	TV	Radio	News paper	Billboard	Flier / brochure
trial news	1				
accident	1				
sign	2		1		
traffic problem	2	2	1		
construction problem			1		
information about project	3				
information about construction	14	9	16	24	3
schedule	2	4	2	7	
information about route	1		1		5
progress	1		1		1
closed route for construction	1				
infr avoid route		1			1
benefit			1		1
sorry for inconvenience					8

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