

Making Public Transport Journeys Dementia-Friendly

The Singapore Experience¹

Xin Yang

Mobility – the ability to travel out of one's home to do all the things a person wants to do – is imperative to age well in place. For persons living with dementia, public transport can be one alternative to stay mobile, in addition to being driven by carers. Yet successfully navigating through a public transport journey can be challenging for persons living with dementia.

Singapore's public transport operators have been in close collaboration with various agencies and organisations, e.g., the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC), the Land Transport Authority (LTA), Public Transport Council (PTC) and Dementia Singapore (formerly Alzheimer's Disease Association), to provide more inclusive and supportive public transport infrastructure (the "hardware") and services (the "heartware") to persons living with dementia. This article presents key initiatives that have been rolled out to make public transport journeys more dementia-friendly in Singapore.

¹ This is an evolving database. We will be adding more examples and cases over time.

Enhancing Dementia Awareness of Public Transport Frontline Staff

Frontline staff across Singapore's train and bus networks have been receiving dementia-related training to better recognise and help commuters who may have dementia.

Inclusive Service Delivery Programme

In September 2017, SMRT Corporation – one of the major MRT and bus operators in Singapore – launched the **Inclusive Service Delivery Programme**, in collaboration with the NTUC Learning Hub, Forget Us Not (Lien Foundation) and Jurong Health. This programme has been providing hands-on training to SMRT frontline staff (e.g., MRT station staff, and bus interchange service ambassadors and service delivery associates), with the aim to help frontline staff better recognise and respond to the needs of priority commuters, such as seniors, persons living with dementia, and people with disabilities.

More than 1,400 SMRT staff had received the inclusive service delivery training in 2017.² In 2019, five SMRT Buses staff

completed the Train-the-Trainer programme by AIC to teach other frontline staff how to recognise, approach and help people with dementia when they travel in the public transport network.³

In June 2021, SMRT Buses has enhanced its inclusive service delivery training for frontline staff at the new training centre in Woodlands Integrated Transport Hub. Since the launch of the training centre in 2019, over 700 SMRT Buses staff have received training to provide enhanced commuter services and facilitate more inclusive service in the public transport network.⁴

Ongoing dementia-friendly initiatives at SMRT Corporation include training staff to use the Dementia Friends and CARA (an abbreviation for Community, Assurance, Rewards, Acceptance) mobile applications and establish internal process to further help identify and assist commuters who may have dementia.

"Forget Us Not" Campaign

As part of the "Forget Us Not" Campaign, the Lien Foundation, Dementia Singapore and Moove Media partnered together to deck out two North-East Line (NEL) trains in June 2018 to raise awareness of dementia, promote understanding of dementia symptoms, and educate

² SMRT (2017). SMRT (2017). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Report 2017. <https://www.smrt.com.sg/Portals/0/PDFs/CSR%20Report/CSR%20Report%202017.PDF>. Accessed 17 February 2022.

³ SMRT (2019). SMRT Buses deepens commitment to Inclusive Service Delivery, Signs MOU with Community Partners. <https://www.smrt.com.sg/Announcements/articleid/smrt-buses-deepens-commitment-to-inclusive->

[service-delivery-signs-mou-with-community-partners](#). Accessed 17 February 2022.

⁴ SMRT (2021a). SMRT Media Release - SMRT enhances inclusive service training for frontline staff at new training centre in Woodlands Integrated Transport Hub. <https://www.smrt.com.sg/News-Room/Announcements-News-Releases/Announcement/articleid/1329>. Accessed 17 February 2022.

commuters on how they can support. Moove Media extended significant goodwill rates to the campaign for usage of train stickers in two NEL trains for 6 weeks in June. This initiative was covered by the media.⁵

Establishing Dementia Go-To Points at Train Stations and Bus Interchanges

Within Singapore's public transport network, **Dementia Go-To Points (GTPs)** function as resource centres and 'safe return' points where members of the public can bring persons living with dementia, who may appear lost, to train station or bus interchange staff for help (AIC, 2021, 2022).⁶ Public transport frontline staff at dementia GTPs have completed their training as part of the GTPs establishment under the AIC. They will be able to help persons living with dementia to calm down and assist in the reunion with their family members or caregivers. GTPs can also serve as dementia resource centres and link those who need help with dementia-related services (AIC, 2021).

Within SMRT public transport networks, Yishun Integrated Transport Hub is the first bus interchange listed by AIC as dementia GTP in 2019.⁷ Queenstown and Redhill MRT stations were the first train stations in Singapore listed as dementia GTPs in March 2020. As of March 2022, 46 MRT stations and 4 bus interchanges from SMRT service network have been listed by AIC as dementia GTPs and aim for all 98 SMRT train stations to become GTPs by end of 2022.⁸

SMRT's station and interchange staff are trained to identify and assist the persons who have been brought to them, and will assist to reunite them with their caregivers. As of March 2022, more than 3,000 SMRT staff have been trained to spot and help persons living with dementia with the support of AIC and Dementia Singapore.⁹ Box 1 below provides a snapshot of the effectiveness of the dementia GTPs.

Box 1: How effective is the establishment of dementia GTPs at public transport nodes?

More than 350 cases of missing people with dementia have been reported since the launch of AIC'S Dementia Friends app. Among the reported cases, about 40

⁵ Straits Times (2018). Raising awareness of dementia on NEL.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/raising-awareness-of-dementia-on-nel>. Accessed 2 June 2022.

⁶ We thank AIC for their invaluable inputs and for providing information on Dementia Go-To Points initiative in Singapore.

⁷ SMRT (2019). SMRT Buses deepens commitment to Inclusive Service Delivery, Signs MOU with Community Partners.

<https://www.smrt.com.sg/Announcements/article/d/smrt-buses-deepens-commitment-to-inclusive->

[service-delivery-signs-mou-with-community-partners](#). Accessed 17 February 2022.

⁸ We thank AIC for providing information on the establishment of dementia GTPs in SMRT's service networks.

⁹ CNA (2022b). Reunited after hours gone missing: How people with dementia get help from SMRT staff at train stations.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/dementia-help-smrt-staff-train-stations-2521801>
Accessed 30 March 2022.

were found at bus interchanges and MRT stations.

The recent media coverage illustrates that dementia GTPs at public transport nodes have effectively served as ‘safe return’ points where members of the public can bring commuters living with dementia who appear lost or unable to remember their way home.

In 2021, the 78-year-old Mr Wong who is living with dementia, got lost after his haircut during the day. He was later brought to the passenger service centre at Tai Seng MRT station by a group of tertiary students. With the AIC dementia training and the establishment of dementia GTP at Tai Seng MRT station, the station manager Ms Suriani Lestution Ja'afar identified that Mr Wong may have dementia. She brought Mr Wong to the staff room to make him comfortable and warm, and managed to find his next-of-kin in about an hour with the support from TransCom.

Dementia GTPs can help to “reassure commuters in case they have missing parents”, Ms Suriani said.

Mr Wong’s daughter Ms Wong said the station manager Ms Suriani did “a good job” in taking care of her father before she arrived at the station.

“(She) made sure he’s safe, made sure he’s not cold. When (my family) reached the MRT station, he was wrapped up in a blanket. At the point of time when we saw him, (we had) peace of mind. He’s safe and sound. Nothing happened, no injury, nothing.”

Source: CNA (2022b). Reunited after hours gone missing: How people with dementia get help from SMRT staff at train stations.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/dementia-help-smrt-staff-train-stations-2521801>
Accessed 30 March 2022.

Box 2: An Example of Dementia GTP at Lorong Chuan MRT Station

For instance, inside Lorong Chuan MRT station, a large poster of Dementia GTP (see Figure 1) has been put up since November 2021. It is located next to the map of MRT lines.

The GTP poster follows a consistent design theme – Giraffe – of Dementia-Friendly Community (DFC) in Singapore. Using large font and strong colour contrast, the GTP posters send out easy-to-read message to members of the public about that station staff are trained to help people living with dementia who may appear lost or show signs or symptoms of dementia.

Members of the public can also scan the QR code to access useful information, resources and services related to dementia. Meanwhile, a set of different QR codes are provided for members of the public to sign up as Dementia Friends to lookout for and support persons living dementia in the community.

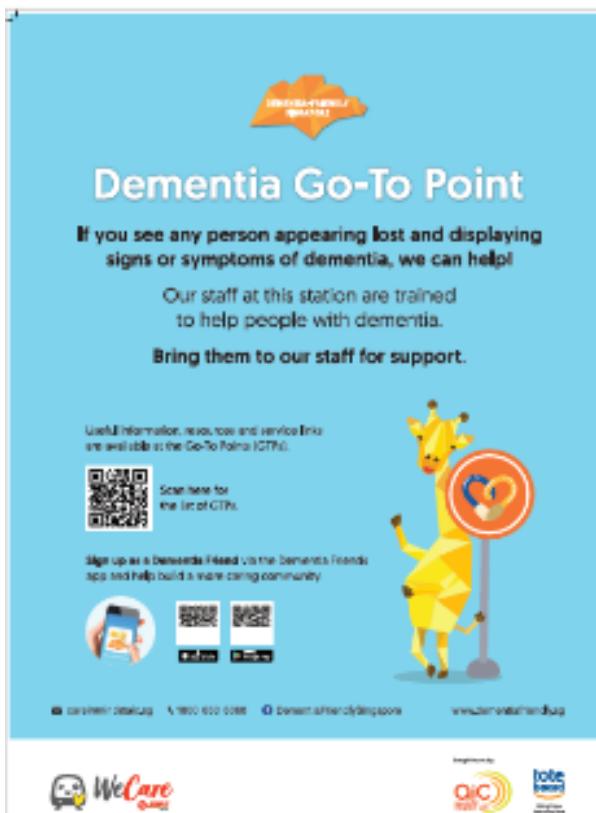


Figure 1: Dementia Go-To Point poster (Image credit: AIC)

For SBS Transit, all its 17 bus interchanges, 7 bus terminals and 50 MRT stations will be established as dementia GTPs by the end of March 2022. More than 750 SBS Transit staff have completed their dementia-related training as part of the AIC certification of GTPs.¹⁰ Other transport nodes managed by Tower Transit Singapore and Go Ahead Singapore would also be listed as GTPs. By December 2022, all transport nodes in Singapore will become GTPs as part of the efforts to make every journey a safe and inclusive one (see Box 2 for an example of dementia GTP established in Lorong Chuan MRT station).

Advocacy Efforts in Raising Better Commuters' Awareness

E-Learning Module for Commuters' Awareness on Dementia

As part of LTA's Land Transport Master Plan 2040, it aims towards creating a more gracious and caring commuting culture in Singapore. As such, LTA has created a free training programme for members of public to learn about the various disability groups in Singapore and how they can assist fellow commuters appropriately during their daily commute on the bus and train.

This course, available online, offers a module that features the various tools which the public can use to help commuters living with dementia. These include the Dementia Friends mobile app and the CARA card. In addition, the module will also teach the public how they can approach and help commuters with dementia who are lost on the bus and train. Upon completing the e-learning course, the public can join fellow Caring Commuter Champions to assist others during daily commute. The e-learning course can be accessed via the link: <https://go.gov.sg/championlearning>.

Commuters living with dementia may approach Caring Commuter Champions, who can be easily spotted by their

¹⁰ SBS Transit (2022a). Persons Living with Dementia Enabled to Find Their Way Around Bus Interchanges and MRT Stations. <https://www.sbstransit.com.sg/news/persons-living-with-dementia-enabled-to-find-their-way-around-bus-interchanges-and-mrt-stations>. Accessed 19 February 2022.

Making Public Transport Journeys Dementia-Friendly

Champion identification badge if they need assistance.

Dementia Friends Exhibition during Caring Commuter Week 2021

In November 2021, the Caring Commuter Week 2021 was launched to promote four caring behaviours while using public transportation:

- Give Time
- Give Care
- Give a Hand
- Give Thanks

A series of educational exhibitions were developed to raise commuters' awareness on the needs of vulnerable commuters, e.g., those with dementia, autism, visual or physical impairments, and how to assist them.¹¹ Caring Commuter Week 2021 exhibition panels on dementia awareness was provided at Woodlands Integrated Transport Hub by the AIC in collaboration with SMRT (see Figure 2 and 3).

As part of the Caring SG Commuters initiative, an inclusive video was also produced by Dementia Singapore in collaboration with LTA to raise public awareness on looking out for commuters living with dementia who may need help and ways to assist them.¹²



Figure 2: Caring Commuter Week 2021 exhibition panel on Dementia Go-To Points at Woodlands Integrated Transport Hub (Image credit: AIC)



Figure 3: Caring Commuter Week 2021 exhibition panel on dementia awareness at Woodlands Integrated Transport Hub (Image credit: AIC)

¹¹ Caring SG Commuters (2021a). Caring Commuter Week 2021.

<https://www.caringcommuters.gov.sg/in-the-spotlight/caring-commuter-week-2021-give-time-give-care-give-a-hand-and-give-thanks-on-your-commute> Accessed 2 June 2022.

¹² Caring SG Commuters (2021b). Meet Chwee Kim (Jack) and Angeline, A Couple Who Frequently Travels by Public Transport.

<https://www.caringcommuters.gov.sg/spotlight-story/meet-chwee-kim-jack-and-angeline-a-couple-who-frequently-travels-by-public-transport> Accessed 2 June 2022.

Dementia-Friendly Kindness Seats

Dementia-friendly themed “Kindness Seats” will be installed in a total of 45 SMRT train stations by June 2022, deepening SMRT’s partnership with AIC in building inclusivity throughout the public transport network.¹³ The seats are wrapped in brightly coloured decals to give a strong contrast between the seats and floor surfaces (see Figure 4). This will make the seats more visible for seniors and people living with dementia to prevent them from falling or knocking against edges.

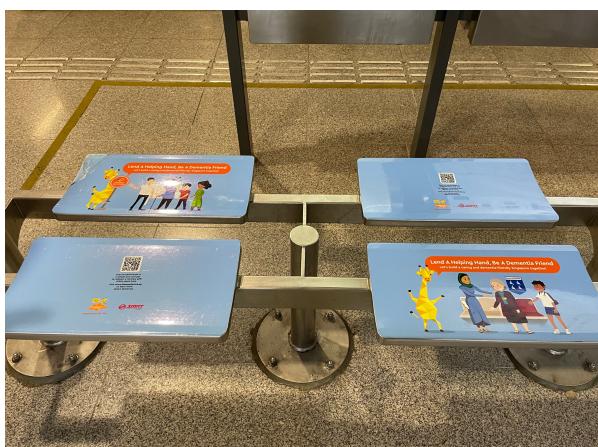


Figure 4: Dementia-friendly themed “Kindness Seats” installed at MacPherson MRT station (Image credit: author)

The tagline on the Kindness Seats “Lend a helping hand. Be a Dementia Friend” aims to highlight simple ways in which commuters can help keep a look out for persons living with dementia and show kindness to those who require assistance.

Themed

Making Public Transport Infrastructure More Dementia-Friendly and Inclusive for All

Besides the above efforts in enabling the “heartware” of dementia-friendly public transport, several improvements have also been made to public transport infrastructure (“the hardware”) to better support commuters living with dementia.

SMRT Inclusive Stations Pilot Project

SMRT started a pilot project of **Inclusive Stations** in mid-2019 to identify and implement required improvements to make MRT stations more inclusive for the elderly and commuters living with dementia. An environment audit was conducted at three stations – Queenstown, MacPherson and Ang Mo Kio – in partnership with AIC. Queenstown and Redhill MRT stations were selected for implementing the pilot project of inclusive stations, due to the larger percentages of older populations living in these estates.¹⁴

A series of infrastructural improvements have been implemented at Queenstown and Redhill MRT stations, including

- Improved visibility of steps (Figure 5), handles and lift buttons
- Improved visibility of seats with kindness stickers (Figure 6)

¹³ CNA (2022b). Reunited after hours gone missing: How people with dementia get help from SMRT staff at train stations. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/dementia-help-smrt-staff-train-stations-2521801>

Accessed 12 March 2022.

¹⁴ SMRT (2020). SMRT Corporation Group Review, 2019-2020.

https://www.smrt.com.sg/Portals/0/SMRT_GO2020_Content_Full_16042021_ps.pdf. Accessed 18 February 2022.

Making Public Transport Journeys Dementia-Friendly

- Non-reflective map for better readability
- Additional signage for handicap-friendly toilets
- Enhancement of handicap-friendly toilet doors
- Establishment of Dementia GTPs (Figure 7)



Figure 5: Yellow stripes along step edges for improved visibility at Queenstown MRT station (Image credit: SMRT Inclusive Station Pilot Project, material shared by AIC)



Figure 6: Kindness seats at Redhill MRT station (Image credit: SMRT Inclusive Station Pilot Project, material shared by AIC)



Figure 7: Dementia Go-To Point at Queenstown MRT station (Image credit: SMRT Inclusive Station Pilot Project, material shared by AIC)

SBS Transit “Find Your Way” Initiative

“Find Your Way” is a dementia-friendly wayfinding initiative that SBS Transit has started since June 2021, in partnership with Dementia Singapore. This initiative seeks to help persons living with dementia find their way around bus interchanges and MRT stations more easily, through using colourful murals of childhood games or activities that many seniors in Singapore may remember. This wayfinding initiative was officially launched on 7 February 2022 at Toa Payoh Bus Interchange, and will be implemented at more transport nodes in the coming months.¹⁵

Drawing upon the Wayfinding Project at Kebun Baru¹⁶, SBS Transit consulted persons living with dementia and was advised to use **colour-coded bus berths** (Figure 8) and **murals** in corresponding colours to assist in wayfinding at bus interchanges and MRT stations. Studies have shown that the use of consistent and

¹⁵ Dementia Singapore (2022). Find Your Way. <https://dementia.org.sg/2022/02/07/find-your-way/>. Accessed 19 February 2022.

¹⁶ Dementia Singapore (2021). Finding My Way Home. <https://dementia.org.sg/2021/06/22/finding-my-way-home/>. Accessed 21 February 2022.

Making Public Transport Journeys Dementia-Friendly

coordinated colour schemes (Bhuyan et al., 2020) and colourful murals (Yuen et al. 2022) can help older people and persons living with dementia to better orient themselves. The effectiveness of these colour-coded murals is also reported in local news (see Box 3).

Five childhood games and activities are presented via colourful murals throughout Toa Payoh Bus Interchange. This theme of childhood game is selected, rather than more recent items, e.g., an iPhone or iPad. This selection is informed by empirical evidence that people living with dementia have better long-term memory and cognition, whereas the recent memory goes. “Find Your Way” posters (Figure 9) are also attached next to some of the wall murals to inform the public of this programme.



Figure 8: Colour-coded bus berths at Toa Payoh Bus Interchange to make public transport more dementia-friendly (Photo credit: author)



Figure 9: “Find Your Way” poster at Toa Payoh Bus Interchange to inform the public of this dementia-friendly wayfinding programme (Photo credit: author)

Colour-coded childhood games at Toa Payoh Bus Interchange include:

- **Five Stones** (Figure 10), an old-time kampong game also known as Batu Seremban
- **Chaptek** (Figure 11), a traditional Chinese sport
- **Traditional paper balls** (Figure 12)
- **Marbles** (Figure 13), also known as ‘Goli’
- **Fishnet** (Figure 14), a popular childhood activity in the 1960s also more commonly known as ‘Longkang Fishing’

Making Public Transport Journeys Dementia-Friendly



Figure 10: Purple Five Stones at Toa Payoh Bus Interchange – “Find Your Way” Programme
(Photo credit: author)



Figure 13: Blue Marbles at Toa Payoh Bus Interchange – “Find Your Way” Programme
(Photo credit: author)



Figure 11: Orange Chaptek at Toa Payoh Bus Interchange – “Find Your Way” Programme
(Photo credit: author)

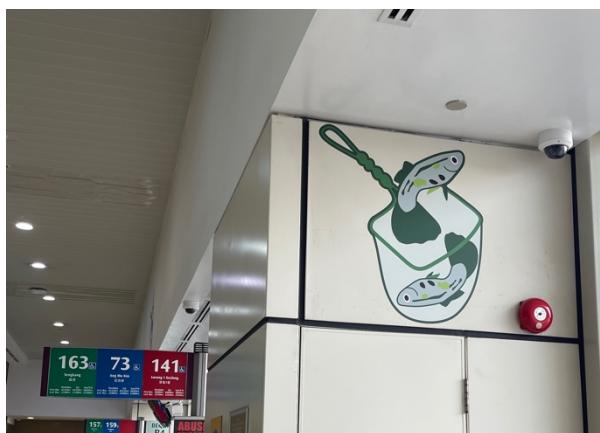


Figure 14: Green Fishnet at Toa Payoh Bus Interchange – “Find Your Way” Programme
(Photo credit: author)



Figure 12: Pink Traditional Paper Balls at Toa Payoh Bus Interchange – “Find Your Way” Programme
(Photo credit: author)

Box 3: How do commuters living with dementia view those physical enhancements to public transport infrastructure?

Positive feedback has been reported on the “Find Your Way” initiative implemented at Toa Payoh Bus Interchange, regarding enhanced wayfinding and the support to stay mobile:

“Although I know I’m just looking out for Service 145, the interchange has many services and berths and this can be very overwhelming for me. Now, I just need to follow the

purple arrows and look out for the purple five stone sticker.

It really makes a difference for me and I don't feel so anxious at the interchange anymore. These efforts are not only helpful for persons living with dementia like myself, but they are also good for older folks as well."

- Mr Jack Tan, person living with dementia (SBS Transit, 2022)

"Ms Ong believes the images will allow both the elderly and those living with dementia, like herself, to continue to travel.

Because that integration into society is very important. If you have that fear of travelling, fear of public transport, then you won't go outside. You're imprisoned by your own environment."

- Ms Emily Ong, person living with dementia (CNA, 2022a)

Source: SBS Transit (2022). Find Your Way.
https://dementia.org.sg/2022/02/07/find-your-way/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=find-your-way. Accessed 21 February 2022.

CNA (2022a). Lost at a bus interchange or MRT station? A touch of nostalgia may help people with dementia find their way.
<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/images-childhood-games-dementia-bus-interchange-mrt-stations-2483986>. Accessed 21 February 2022.

Conclusion

Major public transport operators in Singapore have been playing an active role in making public transport journeys more dementia-friendly and inclusive for all. In close partnership with various agencies like AIC, LTA and PTC and Community Care organisations, such as Dementia Singapore, a series of enhancements and advocacy efforts have been made to create more dementia-friendly public transport services and infrastructure.

While those efforts are made quite recently, some positive feedback has already been reported regarding the effectiveness in supporting commuters with dementia in Singapore. Looking ahead, it will be exciting to see how these enhancements help persons living with dementia stay mobile and socially connected in the community. It would be also interesting to examine how members of the public embrace GTPs, join Dementia Friends and enhance awareness on dementia to create greater community support for persons living with dementia.

Sources:

Agency of Integrated Care (AIC). What is A Dementia-Friendly Community (DFC)?
<https://www.aic.sg/body-mind/dementia-friendly-community>. Accessed 17 February 2022.

AIC (2021). Project Dementia-Friendly Yio Chu Kang 2025: Media Fact Sheet.

Bhuyan, M. R., Lane, A. P., Moogoor, A., Močnik, Š., & Yuen, B. (2020). Meaning of age-friendly neighbourhood: An exploratory study with older adults and key informants in Singapore. *Cities*, 107, 102940.

Making Public Transport Journeys Dementia-Friendly

Dementiafriendly.sg. Go-To-Points across

Singapore.

<https://dementiafriendly.sg/Home/GoToPoints>.

Accessed 17 February 2022.

Dementia Singapore (2022). Find Your Way.

[https://dementia.org.sg/2022/02/07/find-your-](https://dementia.org.sg/2022/02/07/find-your-way/)

[way/](https://dementia.org.sg/2022/02/07/find-your-way/). Accessed 19 February 2022.

Yuen, B., Bhuyan, M. R., Song, S., Moogoor, A.,
Yap, W., Močnik, Š., & Chua, R. (2022). *Age-friendly Neighbourhood Planning and Design Guidelines: A Singapore Case Study*. World Scientific.