

The Metro Train System: A Victim of its Own Success?

Given the horrendous traffic situation in the metropolis, the commuter trains have become the preferred mode of transport of ordinary people. Ridership continues to grow but the system can hardly cope with the demand.

M

BY LORELA U. SANDOVAL

MORE THAN two decades ago, the Light Rail Transit Authority (LRTA) created the Light Rail Transit (LRT) system to provide a "reliable, efficient, dependable, and environment-friendly mass rail services to all residents of Metro Manila." Years later, the Department of Transportation & Communications (DOTC) also established a Metro Rail Transit 3 (MRT-3) "to alleviate the chronic traffic congestion experience along the EDSA corridor." However, the Metro train system apparently has become, in a way, a problematic and inconvenient mode of transportation for riders. Reason for this is because the system has been beset by several woes.



Increasing ridership plus inadequate trains equals congestion and poor service.

"When it comes to operations, the number one problem is the shortage of trains," according to Atty. Hernando Cabrera, LRTA spokesperson.

He explains they have three kinds of trains: first, second, and third generations. A first generation train is about 30 years old, second generation is 20, and third generation is 10. Many of these trains, primarily the first and second generations, are out of commission. Only 27 trains are being deployed, instead of the ideal number of 33 trains, for Line 1 alone. Like a domino effect, Cabrera says the shortage of trains results to huge number of people waiting at the stations plus a huge

number of people riding trains.

But the shortage doesn't automatically mean there's a need to buy new ones, he clarifies. "All we need to do is to rehabilitate the old trains, or *kahit bago*, or 'yung *second generations*." He says rehabilitation projects are on the way, but the challenge lies in the long procurement process.

Tedious procurement process

"*Alam mo naman sa government na* you cannot just proceed to buy things, to buy spare parts, to engage the services of providers without following procurement process, which is Republic Act No. 9184," Cabrera continues. The procurement law, he said, is "more of an anti-corruption tool than a procurement tool." Besides, he points out that train parts are imported, which adds up to the waiting period.

MRT 3 has a shortage of trains and badly needs to replenish its fleet. Cabrera, who chairs the Bidding and Technical Group, bemoans the slow process of procurement. He says bidding alone takes three to six months, not including the awarding of contract, presentation of design and prototype, and manufacturing. It usually takes two years to finish the process, including the delivery of trains.

Growing ridership

Given the horrendous traffic situation in the metropolis, the commuter trains have become the preferred mode of transport of ordinary people. Ridership continues to grow but the system can hardly cope with the demand.

"*Kasi nagiging victim kami ng success eh*," says Cabrera. *The moment na maganda 'yung service mo, people keep coming in. 'Pag dumami ang tao mo, 'di ka*



As traffic woes worsens, commuters look to the trains for salvation. But is the system up to the challenge?