

i say

WHY NOT SPEND NOW TO SAVE LATER?

JEFFREY HO LOON POH

STARTING from October last year when the Aljunied Group Representative Constituency (GRC) announced its \$160-million upgrading plans, we have seen the stakes rising, almost exponentially, with each GRC announcing its own upgrading plans – the latest being the \$1-billion plan by the relatively new Pasir Ris-Punggol town.

To date, we have seen some \$3.1 billion committed to the five-year upgrading efforts by the various GRCs: Aljunied, Tampines, East Coast, Sembawang, Jalan Besar and Pasir Ris-Punggol.

In the coming weeks, we will see more of such announcements by the other GRCs.

While this money for upgrading is welcome news to the concerned residents, I wonder if how much of the spending could have been avoided had proper planning been done.

Take the case of lift upgrading. A number of the announced upgrading programmes involve lift upgrading – accounting for \$200 million of the \$332 million budgeted in Tampines; \$200 million of the \$500 million in East Coast; and \$336 million of Sembawang's \$570-million plan.

Granted, hindsight is always perfect, but if the HDB had initially planned for lifts to stop at every floor, such upgrading cost would not be necessary now.

While the primary reason for not including such features earlier might well have been the cost of doing so, has a cost comparison been done to determine if it would be cheaper to include such features to begin with, rather than spend money later on to upgrade the estates?

Same goes for efforts to make estates accessible to the elderly and the

handicapped. Again, why weren't these features taken into consideration when the flats were built? Instead, we now need to spend to ensure flats and estates are readily accessible to those with disabilities.

Looking ahead, are such future needs taken into the HDB's planning considerations?

Will it provide just bare minimums, thus cutting immediate costs, and upgrade them in the future when needed, or add these features – which will cost more now but save on the need to upgrade them in the future?

Possible considerations include:

- Underground car parks below every block, as many condominiums and office buildings are already doing, maximising land use;
- Underground rubbish disposal systems;
- Central air-conditioning system for every block – refer to the report "How to chill out the equatorial way", March 23, 2006;
- Elderly-friendly and disabled-friendly features in every block, taking into consideration the rapidly-ageing population;

• Flats equipped for solar power and high-speed broadband.

We may yet see more underground transport networks, waste disposal and infocomm systems in the not-too-distant future, given the scarcity of land in Singapore; but this must be sensibly catered for now, as any conversion from land to underground use can be prohibitively costly if not properly planned and provided for.

What's your view? Email us at news@newstoday.com.sg

Water, water everywhere – much of it being wasted

Green gardens, but at what cost?

Letter from DAVID SOH

MARCH 22 was World Water Day. But while some of us are trying to limit the water we use, other irresponsible organisations are wasting water while washing car parks and watering gardens.

A few weeks ago, when I was at Block 34, Chai Chee Avenue, I passed by an open space that had been transformed into a vegetable garden.

In this garden was a tap with a long hose attached. While the spray mechanism fixed to the end of the hose was shut, the tap had been turned on, resulting in the water leaking.

I located the cleaner and asked him to turn off the tap. He in turn told me that the garden belonged to the Residents' Committee (RC). I asked him to remind those concerned to turn off the tap when not in use.

Worryingly, there are many more such gardens run by RCs, grassroots organisations and other non-government organisations at various HDB estates.

My question is: Why are we using tap water to water these gardens?

Water from the drains near these gardens can be used instead.

I hope something can be done immediately to save our precious drinking water from being wasted.

Car-washing the culprit

Letter from COLIN ONG TAU SHIEN

I AM heartened to read that Dunman High School has been named a Friend Of Water. The school's efforts will have positive effects that will be felt by future generations.

However, will the Government bring the same water conservation message to petrol companies which run round-the-clock car-washing services?

CORRECTION

In the report, "Over 1,000 will vote overseas" (Mar 23), it was stated that the Elections Department will only count the ballots in the case of a contest that is too close to call, and where the overseas voters registered for that constituency will make a difference.

This is incorrect.

The overseas votes of every contested constituency will be counted regardless of the number of local votes polled by each candidate or whether the overseas voters registered for the constituency will make a difference.

We are sorry for the error.

A bridge we shouldn't wait to cross

Let's set the standard and install escalators on overhead bridges

Letter from CHEONG CHEE MUN

The Land Transport Authority's (LTA) Lynn Ong ("The high road or the low?", March 22) has said that pedestrian overhead bridges have been made more user-friendly by reducing the height of each step by 25mm and widening them by 12mm. They have also provided two more intermediate platforms.

But if we apply that argument to HDB blocks, it seems we need not spend millions of dollars providing lift stops on every floor of HDB blocks, since the steps of staircases in HDB blocks are neither very high nor narrow, and there are also half landings, or intermediate platforms.

On top of that, each intermediate flight of stairs in an HDB block has usually about eight steps – compared to about 20 steps for each intermediate flight on an overhead bridge – while most of the existing staircases to overhead bridges have two flights of stairs, and one intermediate platform, with a total of about 40 steps up to a height of 4.5m.

Perhaps Ms Ong should observe the elderly using the staircases to overhead bridges. She will find that many of them struggle to climb the stairs, or shy away from the bridges entirely and cross the road at ground level, especially if they are carrying bags of groceries.

Many also have health problems, so it is easier for them to climb the fewer steps at HDB blocks than the many steps on an overhead bridge – especially

under the hot sun.

Of course, providing more pedestrian crossings and traffic lights will only impede the flow of traffic.

The LTA and policy-makers need to change their mindsets and adjust their perspective: How much does an escalator cost to install and operate, compared to a lift – and the cost of providing a lift stop on every floor of a typical HDB block?

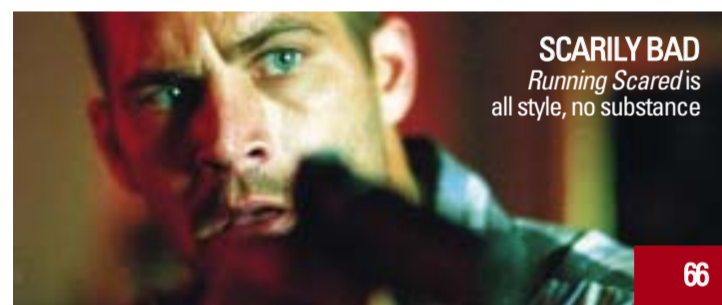
We aspire to be a global city, a first-world country. Yet we cringe from installing escalators on overhead bridges because they are costly, but spend millions on other road works.

Why not set standards that other countries will follow, instead of following others?

For a start, why not install escalators on overhead bridges at locations where there is heavy pedestrian traffic, such as outside hospitals, markets and town centres?

The authorities should face up to the fact that with a rapidly-ageing population, escalators to overhead bridges – or for that matter, to other facilities – will become a necessity. They should plan for this and implement this, and not just say "thank for your feedback" ... only to dismiss the feedback.

We aspire to be a first-world country. Yet we cringe from installing escalators on overhead bridges because they are costly, but spend millions on other road works.



SCARILY BAD
Running Scared is
all style, no substance

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Do you know who your estate beneficiaries are?

Letter from LEONG SZE HIAN

I REFER to media reports in which the Consumers Association of Singapore, or Case, has raised the problem that those under the Dependents' Protection Scheme (DPS) now have to write a will or nominate beneficiaries by submitting a form, depending on which of the two insurers they are insured with.

The CPF nominees for some who have died since the transfer of the DPS to the two private insurers on Sept 17 last year will not receive the DPS proceeds as intended by the CPF account holder who was insured.

For example, some may have nominated their parents. But, if they die intestate – without a will – the DPS proceeds will be split equally between the spouse and children, leaving nothing for their aged dependent parents.

Surely, something has to be done to redress this, since

hardly anyone knows that they have to write a will or nominate beneficiaries following the privatisation of the DPS.

Writing a will at a cost of about \$150 to \$350 may not be the best solution, because lower-income Singaporeans may have to pay thousands of dollars in legal fees and other costs to probate the will and the estate's distribution on death.

And families of those who die with a will cannot avail themselves of the low-cost services of the Public Trustee if the dead person's assets exceed \$5,000.

Therefore, the families of those with not more than \$50,000 in the estate may be better off if he dies without a will, so that they can use the Public Trustee's services, available to intestate estates not exceeding \$50,000.

In contrast, the limit for those with a will is only \$5,000.

The additional costs of writing a will may also negate the DPS privatisation premium savings.

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