

Answer all of the following questions. **(100 marks)**

On 05 February 2016, the Land Transport Authority of Singapore (LTA) released the Environmental Impact Assessment (Phase 1) Report for the stretch of the Cross Island Line (CRL) around the Central Catchment Nature Reserve (CCNR) (Source: <https://www.lta.gov.sg/apps/news/page.aspx?c=2&id=85079f03-0c50-46e2-b44d-328034a5a838>).

Read the article entitled “Cross Island Line Debate Misses Elephant In Room” by Christopher Tan in response to the LTA’s plans, and write a critique of the text, incorporating the following:

- a) An **introductory paragraph** that identifies Tan’s thesis (using your own words as far as possible). This can consist of a few short sentences, or a single all-encompassing sentence that encapsulates the focus of Tan’s work.
(5 marks)
- b) Your introductory paragraph should also contain a **summary of Tan’s arguments**. You should state these briefly, enumerating them using signals such as *firstly*, *secondly*, etc. You need to state *whether you agree or disagree with Tan’s viewpoint on the issue*, and provide brief reasons for your stand.
(20 marks)
- c) Your **own assertions about the ideas and issues** in Tan’s article, supported by your own arguments and evidence drawn from **at least three** external resources, which agree or disagree with specific points in the reading. This incorporates and synthesises the views of others into your writing. Naturally, your critique will be more robust if you cite more resources. Please present **ONE** agreement point and **THREE** disagreement points. You should recognise Tan’s claim, reasons, evidence and assumptions. Develop your position and assertions pertaining to the key issues using the concession and refutation process.
(40 marks)
- d) A paragraph recognising the **overall strengths and weaknesses of Tan’s arguments**. Please provide **ONE** area of strength and **ONE** area of weakness in the main article. You should also suggest how the author could make her arguments more convincing.
(10 marks)
- e) A **concluding paragraph** that sums up your main points and gives a sense of cohesion to the whole essay. You should reiterate and state briefly the flaws of Tan’s arguments. The conclusion should demonstrate an understanding of the question’s requirements and summarise key arguments and their implications.
(5 marks)

Your essay must:

- f) Be clearly written, logically organised and grammatically correct. Employ resources to synthesise the perspectives of others.
(10 marks)

g) Integrate in-text citations and referencing in APA Style.

(10 marks)

The word limit for this assignment is approximately 800-1000 words.

Cross Island Line Debate Misses Elephant In Room

By Christopher Tan

15 February 2016

The proposed alignment of the new Cross Island Line, which could run through the Central Catchment Nature Reserve, has sparked heated debate. While we must do what we can to preserve our natural heritage, we should not shy away from taking hard decisions, if necessary. That has been the pragmatism Singapore prides itself on.

But is building an MRT line under Singapore's largest nature reserve necessary? — It is not. Not only that, it is actually counter-productive to have a mass rapid transit line traversing an unpopulated, forested area.

The basic tenet of transport infrastructure like an MRT line must be for it to serve the masses. Going by this principle alone, the proposed alignment of the Cross Island Line is flawed. By going through a tract of primary and secondary forests, the Land Transport Authority would not only do irreparable damage to a pristine habitat nestling around our reservoirs, but it will also be rendering up to 4km of the 50km rail project void of patronage and revenue.

The Nature Society's suggestion of an alternative route is sound, even if its primary consideration is to prevent the destruction of indigenous flora and fauna. The route calls for the line to loop around the southern edges of the nature reserve. This actually will allow it to serve residents in Thomson, Lornie and Adam roads, not to mention the massive development planned for Bukit Brown. Align it a bit farther south, and it can even serve Balestier, a bustling hub that does not have any MRT planned as yet.

The LTA says the alternative route would entail longer travelling time, higher cost, more land acquisition, and possibly bigger engineering challenges associated with going through a more built-up area. These reasons hold little merit when compared with the benefits of serving a larger community. And if travelling time were such a huge concern, surely we should look to things such as speedier trains, better synchronicity between train and platform doors, and a more sophisticated signalling system?

Admittedly, a diversion will cost more than going straight through the forest. But then again, think of the larger benefit. The higher ridership and revenue that come with a line that serves populated areas instead of an uninhabited nature reserve will pay for the higher cost over the lifetime of the line. So, let's not be penny-wise and pound-foolish.

As for land acquisition, that is something that is unavoidable whenever we build a new rail line. The Singapore Government has never been afraid to acquire land for the larger good. And since it is now paying market rate for properties, the pain of those affected is much less than before.

The same rationale goes for any noise, dust and inconvenience that arise from a major infrastructural project. You cannot make an omelette without breaking a few eggs.

Lastly, engineering challenges. The LTA has never shied from engineering challenges. In fact, from some of the tasks it has undertaken, it would seem that LTA's engineers love challenges. They have diverted canals, moved rivers, excavated below viaducts, built tunnels that are just 70cm away from an existing operating tunnel, diverted a stretch of road more than 20 times, and built retaining walls that go 70m into the ground. They have even built a 10-lane highway under the sea. And for the Thomson-East Coast Line, they are freezing the earth to prevent water seepage while constructing the Marina Bay station.

So, the proposal to have an MRT line bisecting our nature reserve has little to do with a lack of engineering confidence. It has even less to do with saving time or risking more land acquisitions. It may have something to do with keeping construction costs down, but that would be tragic, if true. But for the LTA to even suggest an alignment that goes right past a population centre seems to suggest a failure on the part of planners to see the forest for the trees.

Source: <http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/cross-island-line-debate-misses-elephant-in-room>

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