



Mr Samuel Lim was part of a Land Transport Authority team that redesigned MRT station signage, which is now used at three stations on the Thomson-East Coast Line. ST PHOTOS: GIN TAY, KUA CHEE SIONG

School project turns into job to redesign MRT station signs

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Seven years ago, during a term break, Mr Samuel Lim took on a job located near Outram Park MRT station.

On his train trips, the then design communication student at Lasalle College of the Arts noticed that commuters transferring to another line would take an escalator up, only to realise it led them out of the station.

That was the start of his journey to redesign MRT station signs.

But what began as a final-year project for school became real-life work for Mr Lim, whose ideas were noticed by the Land Transport Authority (LTA).

He joined the agency in August 2015 and spent five years in the signage team in its architecture division.

The new MRT signage featuring his team's work was unveiled at the first three stations on the

Thomson-East Coast Line that opened this year – Woodlands North, Woodlands and Woodlands South.

After the redesign, the stations' signs are neater with less clutter, exit codes are in yellow, icons are more user-friendly, and a new map of the MRT network is in place.

Mr Lim, 29, said the confusion he witnessed at Outram Park station is just one example of how design can influence decision-making and impact people's lives.

The same sign tells commuters to turn left to exit or go straight to connect to the North East Line, and he said most people get confused or take a while to process the information.

One problem was that the signs were too wordy, said Mr Lim, who moved last month to the Public Service Division's Innovation Lab to take on a new role as design lead.

"It's impossible to fit so many landmarks on signs because people are looking for different places. So as more requests from the public come in, you'll see paper signs



Mr Lim said that as part of his research, he focused on more complex MRT stations like Dhoby Ghaut (above), which he visited more than 20 times.

all around the stations."

For several months when he was in school, he would take the train almost daily, observe commuters, and hop on and off at different stations.

He would also focus on more complex stations like Dhoby Ghaut, which he visited more than 20 times for research. "I was working on the project as if it was a real system. It couldn't just be conceptual, I needed to backup every proposed change," he said.

The first step was to break up the clutter of text and categorise the purpose of different signs – to inform, direct and confirm.

This means that informative signs could have more text, but people look for other signs to get directions quickly. The last type of sign confirms that people have taken the right route.

To ensure that direction signs are easier to follow, Mr Lim used more icons instead of text. If people need more information,

they can refer to a board at the side using the icons.

"The idea is that we minimise the text on top. Then we consolidate the additional information at the bottom or the side," he said.

Another change is that numbers are used for the exits, in place of letters.

"Numbers are more universal, whereas letters are not – you don't have the equivalent of A or B in Chinese," said Mr Lim.

"Also, at one glance, you can see, for instance, that this station has seven exits. It tells you how big or small the station is."

Mr Lim also played around with colours – yellow worked best as it had not yet been used on any MRT line, and the colour also stood out.

He also had a hand in the new MRT network map that was launched last year.

Ms Tan Swee Lin, LTA's studio head of architecture under the Infrastructure Design and Engineering Group, said: "When Samuel joined LTA, he was young and fresh, and brought a lot of new ideas with him."

"In the five years he was with us, Samuel rewrote the Transit Signage Manual, standardised the graphics, selected a new font... all to improve the legibility of the signage in transit facilities."

LTA has not confirmed when or whether existing signage will be replaced with the new designs.

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