



Story of a Metro Man: Challenges and Innovative Solutions in Developing Urban Rail Transit Network (A)

The birth of the Central City Metro project

Studying points

Students are expected to experience the decision-making methods of the top leaders of a government agency and to learn through this case discussion, thereby further elaborating their sense of leadership for the future.

Basic information

- Region: South Asia
- Issue: Planning and Implementing Urban Transportation Projects
- Key words: Urban transportation, leadership, public relations
- Country: Lotusland
- Year: 200X

Characters

Characters	Description
Dr. Phoenix (Main character)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chief Engineer of the National Railway of Lotusland (NRL) ● Asked to be the first President of newly established Central City Metro Rail Corporation
Mr. Lark	Spokesperson for Central City Metro Rail Corporation

Abbreviations

CMRC	Central City Metro Rail Corporation
NCR	National Capital Region
NRL	National Railway of Lotusland
OSV	On-Site Visualization
USD	US dollars

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Summary

In early February 200X, Dr. Phoenix was about to tell the Chief Cabinet Secretary whether or not he would accept an offer to become the first President of Central City Metro Rail Corporation (CMRC) to be established in the following year. Central City, the capital of Lotusland, was heavily congested due to rapid urbanization. However, the city was not equipped with efficient urban mass transit system. With this background, Central City Metro Project was planned and CMRC was about to be established for the planning and implementation of the project.

Key questions in reading this case

Students who will assume the position of the President Phoenix, are required to discuss the following:

1. What are the causes of problems occurred in North City Metro project?
2. What are the lessons learned from the failure of North City Metro project?
3. What are conditions proposed by Dr. Phoenix when accepting the position of the first President of CMRC?
4. Are failures which happened in North City Metro project could be found in your country? Please explain with its reasons.

It was February 7, 200X. Dr. Phoenix was preparing for an afternoon meeting with the Chief Cabinet Secretary, during which he would tell the Secretary whether or not he would accept an offer to become the President of Central City Metro Rail Corporation (CMRC) to be established in the following year.

Dr. Phoenix was about to retire from his position as Chief Engineer of the National Railway of Lotusland (NRL) where he had worked as an engineer for over 35 years. Dr. Phoenix had been involved in many difficult railway projects, the most challenging of which was North City Metro, the very first metro project of Lotusland. It took more than 20 years to construct just 17 km of underground railway in North City. Following this difficult experience, both the people of Lotusland and the NRL began to consider the completion of underground metro projects in Lotusland as an impossibility.

1. Traffic congestion in Central City before the Metro project

Central City in the 2010s. Following the development of many neighboring cities around the metropolis, the Central City National Capital Region (NCR) became one of the largest urban agglomerations not only in the country but also globally, with a population of 15 million. Large-scale migration from across the country, especially from rural areas happened at the fastest pace in the history of the country. Rapid economic growth and urbanization created severe congestion in Central City, making life there very difficult. Commuters who were not wealthy enough to own private vehicles had to wait for jam-packed buses and sometimes spent more than two hours commuting to their workplaces. Those who were able to travel by private car still experienced the same congestion, though they spent less time commuting overall because they were also able to afford to live closer to their offices. According to one study carried out by the Planning Department of Lotusland, daily traffic costs in Central City NCR was almost USD 100 million. To make matters worse, air pollution caused by these private vehicles, buses, taxis, and mini-taxis became worse and worse, resulting in Central City having some of the worst air pollution in the world.

Back in the 1960s in Lotusland. In 1969, an urban railway transport master plan was formulated for two major cities in Central City and North City. Prior to this, travel within Central City was largely dependent on buses. Unlike other cities in Lotusland, a suburban railway system was not in place. In Central City, construction of a ring railway was proposed. Although the ring railway was expected to serve as a commuter train service, due to the inconvenient access to stations and the poor integration with other transportation means, it was not a favored means of transportation for citizens.

As the economy grew, the working population of the metropolis increased rapidly, and in the absence of a mass transportation system, the use of private vehicles became widespread. Increased disposable income and development of new residential areas for the migrant population in neighboring areas also contributed to the proliferation of private vehicles. This caused severe congestion on the roads as the urban infrastructure was not designed to accommodate this volume.

Against this backdrop, there was an urgent call for better transport solutions in Central City. Building a mass rapid transit system in the metropolitan area, which had problems such as traffic congestion, resulting economic losses, and air pollution, became one of the highest priorities for the country. Economic managers discussed the project and it was highly debated within Parliament, which even issued a resolution to plan, commence, and complete such a project immediately. This resolution called for a mass public transport system able to transport a large number of people without further exacerbating traffic congestion and street pollution.

2. North City Metro failure

The experience with the construction of the North City Metro project was also a major deterrent behind the delay in introducing the Metro system in Central City. North City Metro was developed as Lotusland's first subway under the Master Plan. Although the plan was formulated with the assistance of the former Soviet Union, the construction period was delayed by nine years and finally completed in 1996, due to significant delays in construction and cost overruns. It took more than 20 years to build a 17-kilometer subway. The delayed project also caused tremendous inconvenience to local people due to the prolonged construction underway throughout the city. After such an experience, the

urban planners in Lotusland were not inclined to plan another metro system anywhere in the country.

During the construction stage, North City Metro encountered a number of problems, including:

- (1) Delays in the acquisition of land for depot, railway, and stations.
- (2) Diverting complex utilities such as water supply and sewerage, telecommunication and electricity networks, buried underground at the construction site, were solely handled by each utility company. Since these diversion works were not well synchronized with the construction work of metro project, therefore taking forever.
- (3) Limited work space around the construction site and long transport times of materials and equipment due to traffic congestion, resulting in poor work efficiency.
- (4) Increased congestion due to frequently incomplete construction work that left unearthed sections of the construction site open. People in North City described this as “North City’s open heart surgery”. Intended to solve traffic congestion, the never-ending construction on the subway instead made congestion worse and caused further inconveniences in North City.
- (5) Several fatal accidents that occurred during the construction.

The executing agency, the North City Metro Corporation, had been assigned a senior Lotusland civil service official as head of the organization. Although communication with the central government was good overall, there were many interventions, including many from state government, central government, and politicians concerning each decision on project planning and implementation. As a result, decision-making was slow.

In addition, the rotation of bureaucrats within the agency meant the President of the Corporation changed every two to three years. While new leadership can always consider the project from a new perspective, this turnover caused issues with ownership and the establishment and diffusion of the corporate mission.

All of this led to the perception among citizens and policy makers that constructing a subway in Lotusland was impossible.

3. Establishment of Central City Metro Rail Corporation and its first President

Against this backdrop, the Central City Metro project was finally launched. The questions were now: (1) what kind of organization can implement this nearly impossible project and (2) who should lead it? The Central Government and the Central City Government had a number of meetings on these issues, after which they identified Dr. Phoenix, later called the Metro Man, who was involved in a number of important railway projects in Lotusland as an engineer of the National Railway of Lotusland. Dr. Phoenix had a reputation not only for his technical skills but also for his management capabilities.

They approached him and had several meetings with him. With his retirement approaching, he was beginning to think about returning to his hometown of southern Lotusland. Dr. Phoenix declined the offer at first. However, since he was well aware of the critical importance of the mass rapid railway project in Central City, he reconsidered and had almost decided to step into the role of President of the new corporation, to be established in the following year.

In a meeting with Chief Cabinet Secretary on February 7, 200X, Dr. Phoenix was planning

to accept the position with some conditions he had prepared to present to the Chief Cabinet Secretary at the meeting. Dr. Phoenix was anxious to learn whether these conditions would be accepted by the Secretary or not.

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