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Headline: Tech fix for city woes

Tech fix for city woes

ON THE RECORD: New complaint channel promises faster solutions, writes **Karnjana Karnjanatawe**

Shortly after Chadchart Sittipunt became Bangkok governor almost two months ago, he encouraged Bangkokians to report problems in their area directly to authorities through "Traffy Fondue" — a channel which uses artificial intelligence (AI) technology to manage complaints sent in to the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA).

Accessible through the Line messaging app, the platform will help transform the way BMA tackles city residents' problems as it automatically sorts out residents' complaints by topic and forwards them directly to relevant authorities to resolve, the governor said.

Traffy Fondue was developed by Wasan Pattara-atikom — a senior researcher with the National Electronics and Computer Technology Centre (Nectec), under the National Science and Technology Development Agency — who never thought the platform would be this popular, he said in an interview with the *Bangkok Post*.

WHAT IS TRAFFY FONDUE?

Traffy Fondue is a channel through which Bangkok residents can report problems in their area directly to the relevant agencies through the Line app.

We found it to be the most accessible for Bangkok residents compared with other apps, as most people in the country have it on their phones.

To report a problem, residents won't need to download a different app — they can simply add @traffyfondue and submit their complaints immediately.

It was our dream that many people would someday use our tool to report the city's problems.

Bangkok is a big city, and it would be impossible for officials to be aware of every problem in all parts of the city. With input from the public, problems can be quickly identified and fixed, which will lead to a more liveable city for all.

HOW DID THE PLATFORM CAME TO BE?

Traffy Fondue was developed as a part of the Phuket Smart City project back in 2008. At that time, my team developed Traffy Fondue along with a platform called Traffy Waste to improve waste management, and Traffy Transit which provides public bus information.

Four years ago, we were told to choose one platform to develop due to budget limitations, so we chose Traffy Fondue because it is highly scalable and it can be repurposed for different needs with near zero cost. That way, when a new organisation wants to use Traffy Fondue, we can offer the service to them right away.

WHY DID YOU NAME IT TRAFFY FONDUE?

Traffy comes from the word "traffic", while Fondue is derived from the Thai word *fongdu*, which means "to report".

We wanted a softer, more versatile name — we figured no one would use the platform for other purposes if it was literally named "report traffic problem" — so we chose Traffy Fondue instead, as it still sounds like *fongdu* to a Thai speaker.

This is important because the channel can be used for numerous other things, including pet registration, to request tree trimming and to report fire hydrant faults.

HOW DOES THE PLATFORM WORK?

After adding Traffy Fondue's Line ID, users can report problems in their areas, such as broken street light bulbs, uneven footpaths or flooded areas, right away. They can also follow up on their report and check if the relevant party has taken any action.

Using AI, the system will sort out the complaints by topic and forward them to the relevant agencies. The platform matches geographic information stored in each complaint's metadata to a map, which enables authorities to "see" where the problem is.

"In the future, there will be separate functions which will allow users to see the progress of their complaints.

WASAN PATTARA-ATIKOM
TRAFFY FONDUE DEVELOPER

WHO CAN USE TRAFFY FONDUE?

The platform can be used by anyone, including companies, factories, hospitals or schools.

Our first private user which was Nava Nakorn Industrial Estate in Pathum Thani in September 2019.

Today, we have more than 3,000 organisations in the public and private sectors that use Traffy Fondue, including City Hall.

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HAS TRAFFY FONDUE BEEN WELL-RECEIVED BY BANGKOK RESIDENTS?

Local residents know their area best, as they are the ones who walk the streets of the city they live in.

Since Mr Chadchart urged residents to use the channel, the number of complaints we received jumped by 60 times, forcing us to expand our database 10 times to date in order to accommodate all the complaints.

As of yesterday, City Hall has received over 102,500 complaints through Traffy Fondue, about 44% or 45,120 of which have been resolved.

Over half of the complaints are related to city infrastructure, such as roads, footpaths, street lighting and utility cables, flooding, as well as waste collection.

A complaint generally takes about nine hours to resolve and about 80% of complainants were satisfied with the service — drawing praise from Mr Chadchart, who expressed his confidence that the channel will help expedite the delivery of public services.

HOW DO YOU WANT TO FURTHER DEVELOP THE PLATFORM?

I want to make it even easier for people to report problems in their areas. In the future, there will be separate functions which will allow users to see the progress of their complaints without having to message the automated system, as well as add to reports that are filed by other people.

I also want to see the channel used by hospitals, schools, factories, condominiums, companies, municipalities or tambon administrative organisations in many provinces. The platform will streamline the process and improve their service delivery.

HOW MUCH WOULD IT COST TO ADAPT TRAFFY FONDUE FOR OTHER PURPOSES?

We do not charge for any services. It is a public service that Nectec has supported since the start. In this fiscal year, we received funding from the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Research and Development Fund for Public Interest for the first time to continue the project.

Any organisation can ask us if they want to adapt Traffy Fondue. We also provide free training and maintenance.

At present, we are seeking volunteers to help further develop Traffy Fondue.

The volunteers do not have to have an IT background, just a keen interest in the platform. They can contact traffy.in.th for more details.

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