SINGAPOREANS are sending five times more feedback to the Government than they did in 2006, with the amount of feedback input including e-mail messages and online forum postings making its biggest-ever surge last year, in the wake of watershed elections.

That momentum has also carried on to the first three months of this year, with transport and immigration issues dominating the concerns of those talking to Reach, the government agency in charge of gathering feedback.

Last year, feedback input it received soared to 52,000, up 62 per cent from 32,000 the previous year and an even more massive jump from 9,400 in 2006, when the previous general election was held.

This increase, Reach chairman Amy Khor told The Straits Times, was “a clear indication that more people want to have a say in decision-making in matters that affect their lives”.

She attributes the growth to heightened public interest and awareness in policy issues, part of which resulted from the general and presidential elections last year. Notably, the average monthly input rose from just under 4,000 before the general election in May, to more than 4,500 in the months after.

The trend seen in public feedback also supports observations that Singaporeans are becoming more vocal, especially after last year’s general election.

Dr Brian Lee, head of UniSIM’s communication programme, believes that Singaporeans are now more open and vocal with their views on social and political issues.

“At the time of the general election, they were eager to express their views and concerns. It is a sign that people are more willing to engage in public debate,” he said.

Indeed, Reach officials notice that contributors have been increasingly frank, not only in online channels but also at face-to-face dialogue sessions.

“Once they know that there are online feedback channels like Reach, they will not hesitate to post their feedback without any fear,” he said. “They also know that their constructive views will be heard and be factored into policymaking.”

Feedback to Govt shoots up after GE 2011

According to Dr Lee, feedback contributors are also more willing to engage in robust dialogues, not just with the Government, but also with each other. “The conversation has changed in that it is no longer two-way,” he said.

“It is now multiple conversations going on at the same time.”

That, she added, was a good thing, as it shows Singaporeans are more open and vocal with their views on social and political issues.

She also credited the steady growth in public feedback to stepped-up efforts by Reach to engage the public, as well as the growth of online social media.

“People have a platform to express their views and engage in healthy discussions,” she said.

With the average monthly input hitting 6,000 so far this year, feedback numbers look set to hit record levels.

Said Dr Khor: “There is a momentum to such things, and the more people speak up, the more others wish to or are emboldened to join in the debate.”