

8 August, 2001
Hon. Mrs Miriam Lau Kin-yeec,
Chair,
Legislative Council Transport Panel,
Legislative Council Building,
Chater Road,
Central

Fax: 2121 0420

Dear Mrs Lau,

Transport Panel Meeting on Route 7 on 21 September

I am writing on behalf of The Duchess of Kent Children's Hospital at Sandy Bay.

I understand that the Transport Panel will be discussing Route 7 at a public hearing on 21 September. While I cannot be present at the meeting I would like my views to be presented at the meeting.

The announcement by the Transport Bureau that it intends to build a major new road into Southern Hong Kong is a major set back for the Government's policy to introduce effective air quality controls. The decision to build a new road network will predictably be to the detriment of the health of the population of Southern district and Hong Kong in general.

I would like to urge the Legislative Council Transport Panel members to reconsider their support for Route 7, either in its current or original form, and support a railway to Pokfulam instead.

The choice of a roadway in preference to other clean transportation options amounts to a total rejection of the overwhelming evidence, from both local and international studies, that air pollution from traffic emissions damages the health of everyone and is a major cause of avoidable morbidity, mortality and health care utilization and costs.

The development of a new major highway system will further extend Hong Kong's air pollution problems, which are dominated by petrochemical derived road vehicle emissions, into an area which, so far, has been relatively protected from this source of contamination.

The Transport Bureau's decision has particularly serious implications for the health of many people in Pokfulam district which has a high density of schools, higher education institutions, hospitals, rehabilitation centres and sports facilities on the sea board adjacent to the routing of the proposed road network and its extensive interchanges. The inevitable increased exposure of young people to air pollutants, not least those engaged in activities which increase pulmonary ventilation, is totally unacceptable given what we know about the effects of air pollution on respiratory health in Hong Kong.

In addition, the sick, the infirm and the aged are all at increased risk of the adverse effects of the most common air pollutants, including lung and heart disease and other bad health outcomes. Route 7 will therefore be the direct cause of an increase in symptoms, illness episodes, health care costs and premature death in the population residing in the areas it traverses.

Other health impacts from roadways include noise, stress and trauma. They are well-described and again predictable with a high level of precision.

From a public health view point there is no question that the Bureau's decision to build more roads will be detrimental to the health of the community which they purport to service.

From studies undertaken by independent experts it is clear that a medium capacity rail serving Aberdeen, Ap Lei Chau and Pokfulam is both viable from both an engineering and financial point of view. This rail could run from:

- (i) Admiralty to Aberdeen and Ap Lei Chau with a spur line to Cyberport, OR
- (ii) Sheung Wan via Cyberport, Wah Fu, Ap Lei Chau, Ocean Park in a circle and back to Wanchai or Admiralty.

Studies show that most of the construction cost, along with all operation and maintenance costs, would be met by fares and property development opportunities, not taxpayers' money as would be the case for Route 7. In contrast, if the Government pushes ahead with Route 7, it will make a rail line highly uneconomic in the future.

A railway will not only cost taxpayers less it will provide a speedy and efficient service, with travel times from Aberdeen to Admiralty of about 10 minutes. It will also lessen congestion and will produce less noise and air pollution. Route 7 on the other hand would seriously add to congestion in Central and bring more vehicles into the area.

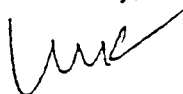
Overall, more people will benefit from rail. Unlike Route 7, which will primarily serve those in private cars and taxis, rail will serve a much wider range of the community.

Since Route 7 is not expected to be completed until 2010, existing roads and current improvements provide sufficient capacity for some more years, which allows for time to build a railway, which will benefit the whole of Hong Kong. This is in line with the Government's own goals to provide rail-led transport.

Hong Kong now needs a new and different approach to environmental health and the proposal for Route 7 should be rescinded.

Finally, may [I/we] suggest that future decisions on transport developments of this type are based on a formal comparative review of road and rail options?

Yours sincerely,



Prof. Keith DK Luk
Hospital Chief Executive,
The Duchess of Kent Children's Hospital.
& Chair Professor,
Dept. of Orthopaedic Surgery,
University of Hong Kong

c.c. Members of the LegCo Transport Panel
Dr Louis Hsu, Chairman of Hospital Governing Committee and
Chairman, The Society for The Relief of Disabled Children