

CLEAR THE AIR's Position on Route 7
LegCo Transport Panel Meeting 21 September 2001

CLEAR THE AIR, a Hong Kong charity whose objects are to promote action and awareness on air pollution, is opposed to the building of new highways when less polluting and more efficient transport modes are available. The Government's proposal to build a 4-lane or 6-lane highway, Route 7, along the western shoreline of Hong Kong Island runs counter to their oft-stated transport policy to reduce the demand for road-based transport and promote railways instead.

"Railway will form the backbone of the future passenger transport network" Third Comprehensive Transport Study (CTS3), 1999

"If the number of vehicles continues to increase, the benefits our mitigating measures bring will be eroded. So, we have to ensure that our transport strategies and land planning are consistent with the principle of sustainable development." The Chief Executive's Policy Address, 2000.

Building a new highway will inevitably attract more road users and hence produce more air and noise pollution. Most of the traffic predicted to use Route 7 will be private cars and taxis. The highway will affect the most vulnerable members of our society since the area affected has many hospitals, schools, elderly homes and residences. These vulnerable members will be exposed to additional and unnecessary health effects of air pollution.

If the Government is to take the problem of air pollution seriously it has to address the impacts that its long term and strategic transport planning have on air quality. It makes no sense to spend HK\$1.4 billion on technical measures to clean up air pollution from individual vehicles, while encouraging more vehicles by the provision of more roads.

There is no room for complacency. The Strategic Environmental Assessment for CTS3 showed that vehicle emissions will increase across the SAR due to the increase in the vehicle fleet¹ In the worst case, annual average concentrations of nitrogen dioxide and RSP are predicted to increase in most areas, with North West New Territories, Sha Tin and West Kowloon worst affected. The predicted deterioration in air quality in North West New Territories is attributed to growth in cross border (to mainland China and back) and local traffic and the associated provision of extensive new highway infrastructure (our emphasis). Even under a scenario in which stringent vehicle emission standards are assumed, traffic represents a significant source of pollutants in many areas (WSA, 1999).

¹ Wilbur Smith Associates Ltd (1999) Third Comprehensive Transport Study. Strategic Environmental Assessment Technical Report. Government of the HKSAR Transport Department.

Rather than waiting for the inevitable decline in air quality due to the building of new highways, a pro-active Administration should be pre-empting the problem, and looking at more sustainable ways to increase accessibility for Hong Kong's residents.

A railway serving the main population centres of Aberdeen, Ap Lei Chau and Wah Fu, while initially costing more in terms of capital costs, would provide long term benefits in terms of a more efficient transport system, avoided health costs, better access for residents and visitors to amenities in Southern District and lower negative environmental impacts. We urge the Government to look at the long term implications of Route 7 and consider all possible alternatives while there is still time.