

Hong Kong Institute of Planners

Route 7

Submission to the LegCo Panel on Transport

Introduction

1. The Hong Kong Institute of Planners (HKIP) welcomes the decision of the Transport Bureau to review the alignment and extent of Route 7. However, there is concern that the review has been carried out without due reference to the future planning context for the Pokfulam area and Southern District. There is concern that the proposal will not enhance the long term accessibility of the Aberdeen/ Ap Li Chau area and Southern District generally.

Insufficient Information

2. The proposed alignment is put forward based on a Strategic Review. However, there is little information provided as to how the Strategic Review was carried out and the criteria used. For instance, the basis of the assumptions used for the traffic build up on Pokfulam Road in terms of development in various locations are not available, and whether the long standing moratorium on increasing the density of private development was assumed to be still in place. There is no indication as to whether consideration was given to the relationship of this decision to the on-going "Planning and Development Study on Hong Kong Island South and Lamma Island".
3. There is also no indication given as to why the section of Route 7 to be placed in tunnel as shown on Plan B attached to the previous LegCo Paper was selected and whether the environmental benefits of this small portion of tunnel was sufficient, or whether a longer tunnel in a completely different location would not have been a better option.
4. It is hoped that additional information could be made available in relation to these points.

Relationship to Policy Statements and Study Findings

5. There are recommendations in the Third Comprehensive Transport Study (CTS -3) and the Second Railway Development Strategy (RDS-2) which appear not to have been addressed in making the decision to reduce the length of Route 7. From these sources it would seem as if the following principles would apply:-
 - (1) Land use, transport and environmental planning would be closely integrated;
 - (2) Priority would be accorded to railways;
 - (3) New passenger lines are required to serve existing urban areas not presently linked to the rail system, such as the Aberdeen-Wong Chuk Hung-Ap Lei Chau area. A stand-alone scheme for a railway linking Central to Southern District was identified and should be investigated for implementation if planning parameters change significantly.

Environmental and Sustainable Development Considerations

6. CTS-3 indicated that environmental conditions in terms of air pollution and traffic generated noise would be unacceptable in 2016. Benefits of short term air pollution reduction measures now being introduced were predicted to soon be lost. Expanded utilisation of railway was one of the means for achieving a lower rate of increase in pollution.
7. The Sustainable Development Study (SusDev21) proposed a system for considering sustainable development criteria in Government decision making. This approach was indicated as being accepted by Government and it would have been appropriate to use such an approach in re-assessing the Route 7 proposal.

8. The published "Environmental Report of Transport Bureau, Transport Department and Highways Department 1999/2000" includes the following Environmental Statement/Policy

"The Transport Bureau, The Transport Department and the Highways Department are committed to providing transport infrastructure and services in an environmentally acceptable manner to ensure the sustainable development of Hong Kong".

Planning and Development Study on Hong Kong Island South

9. The Government is currently undertaking a study on the potential development of Hong Kong Island South. The results of that study will determine the potential for additional development in the area and should be related closely to the provision of transport infrastructure. The fundamental relationship of land use planning and transport planning has been recognised as important, but there is no evidence that the decision to reduce the scope of Route 7 involved this important principle.

An Appropriate Time for the Proper Reconsideration of Accessibility

10. The reassessment of Route 7 should have been carried out in the context of a comprehensive study that looked at the land use implications and the environmental implications, and it should have used sustainability criteria. It should also have made reference to the policies mentioned above in paragraph 5.
11. The assessment should have related to the total accessibility of the Southern District and should have assessed the railway option. If railway is to be the real focus of future transport, the reduction in scope of Route 7 should have resulted in a railway option being promoted as the main passenger link, and then the need for additional road infrastructure determined.
12. If rail is to be the main basis for future transport development then the assessment of the rail option should have been looked at in relation to what was necessary to make it a viable option. Alternative means for funding should have been investigated, and it may even be appropriate to transfer any savings from a reduced Route 7 to assist in funding the construction of the railway.

Reassessment Welcomed

13. The reassessment of the Route 7 project is welcomed. However, there is scope for such reassessment to be done on the basis of the policy statements and studies made in the last few years, as well as the policy commitment for sustainable development. This would give full consideration to all of the aspects which the public now expects to be addressed when implementing major transport infrastructure. The revised proposal for Route 7 does not guarantee that it is the best investment of public funds when attempting to ensure improved accessibility to South Hong Kong Island in a long term and in sustainable manner.

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