

LETTERHEAD OF GREEN LANTAU ASSOCIATION

URGENT - BY FAX AND POST

Mrs Miriam Lau,
Chair & Members,
Transport Panel,
Legislative Council,
8 Jackson Road,
Central

17 January 2001

Dear Mrs Lau,

Widening of the Tung Chung Road

The Green Lantau Association (GLA) understand that the Legislative Council Transport Panel will be meeting on Friday to discuss possible alternatives to the proposed Lantau North-South link. The Government is now focussing on widening of the Tung Chung Road as its priority due to the high costs of alternative tunnel options, as well as the implications for a twin 2-lane tunnel on traffic and development pressure on South Lantau. GLA has already written to the Country & Marine Parks Board about some issues of concern relating to the widening option. We hope that members will take these concerns into account in your discussions.

1. Gradient

The Government had previously rejected on-line widening of the Tung Chung road due to steep gradient of the Tung Chung road and the need to satisfy a 10% gradient according to Highway standards. However, it should be noted that this gradient is just a guideline, and can be relaxed as appropriate. Indeed, many existing roads in Hong Kong fail to meet such standards. Even when building new roads the government has been known to relax the standard. When constructing the Ngong Ping road in the early 1990s the Government relaxed the standard over a short distance in view of the steep topography and the desire to avoid unnecessary hill cutting and filling.

While we appreciate the need to maintain safety standards, GLA believes that other factors may compensate for the steep gradient - such as lower traffic speeds, restricted road access, warning signs, and if needs be, traffic calming measures.

2. On line vs off line widening

While the Government is referring to its current plans as on-line widening, from what we can understand much of the road will be off-line. In other words, a new road rather than widening of an existing road. The further the road deviates from the existing alignment, the greater the amount of earthworks and construction that will be required and the greater the damage to the surrounding country park.

The Highway standard road width is 3.5m per lane plus 1m for a footpath. This would require an 8m-width carriageway plus additional land for works. The current width of the Tung Chung road is 4m and in some places it is already 10m wide. The main sections that remain to be widened are the bridges. Therefore once the bridges are widened, the road will already be nearly 2 lanes for much of its length. Therefore GLA does not see the need for any off-line widening. GLA believes with careful design and construction that there is sufficient space to widen the road on-line for the whole alignment.

3. Additional budget for tender

We hope that the Government is not opting for the Tung Chung Road widening because it is the cheapest option. We are also concerned about the general supervision of government road works on Lantau. GLA is about to submit a complaint to the Ombudsman about Highway Department's and their consultants, Mouchel Asia Ltd, for poor supervision for construction of a road at Sham Wat, Lantau.

GLA hopes the Government will depart from its usual practice of awarding tenders to the lowest bidder for this special case. GLA hopes that members will recommend the Government to consider increasing the tender price by 20-25% to allow for more sensitive design and construction which includes proper supervision and ecological and visual monitoring and audit.

4. Evaluation of additional traffic generated

In the original Tung Chung widening feasibility study a number of traffic demand scenarios were considered. It was concluded that both the prohibition system and the Closed Road Permit (CRP) System needed to stay in place to avoid high traffic volumes and illegal parking on South Lantau. There is already a growing problem of illegal parking in South Lantau. GLA considers that the CRP and some prohibition system needs to stay in place once the widening is completed.

GLA also considers that the government should carry out an evaluation of the additional traffic 'created' by the new widened road and the resulting additional development pressure on South Lantau.

Members may not be aware of the lax planning controls that exist on South Lantau. Although an Outline Zoning Plan for South Lantau exists, because of a legal anomaly this plan is unenforceable. Therefore before the widening is completed, GLA would like to see an amendment to the Town Planning Ordinance to make South Lantau OZP enforceable. This should be done as a separate but simple amendment to avoid it being delayed by the more controversial amendments that have been presented to the Legislative Council.

We hope that these points can be taken into consideration during your deliberations.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,
For the Green Lantau Association.

Fabian Pedrazzini

c.c Members of the Legislative Council Transport Panel