

Submission to the Legislative Council, 14 November 2006

Kai Tak is unique – it has a long coast line without roads along the waterfront. This is unique in Hong Kong's harbour.

However, in the plan for Kai Tak is not clear how we use this unique scarce public resource.

There are 3 issues I like to raise:

- The location of the cruise terminal and multiple hotel complexes and the related transport services;
- The lack of protected waters and land reserves for marine supporting uses
- Controls over the planned developments.

How responsible is it to stick a large industrial operation (cruise liner home port) plus a large number of hotels on the tip of the runway?

- This is as far away from tourist destinations (Chep Lap Kok, TST, West Kowloon, The Peak and Central) as possible in the harbour (what is the impact on tourist experience?)

- No adequate sustainable transport services are provided for – only vehicular support is catered for – entirely in contradiction to the Third Comprehensive Transport Study, calling for rail as the backbone for Hong Kong's transport (What is the cost on the environment?)

- The result is the construction of high capacity roads (what is the cost?) along the scarce virgin (no roads at this moment) waterfront on both sides of the runway. Yes, one of them will have a roof, which may make it visually attractive to nearby residents but air, noise and safety issues make active use of this open space impossible, and the distance between the roof and the water render this area useless as a land water interface. (Again, what is the opportunity cost?)

- the road network between Kai Tak and the destinations I set out earlier are already congested and there are no solutions are in sight (What is the cost of adding traffic?)

- to ensure uninterrupted vehicular capacity between the tip of the runway and main roads nearby, a second link is required with a bridge to Kwun Tong, which in itself requires reclamation (remember, there is a presumption against this!)

- to maximize capacity of the existing (and any new) bridges over the nullah (and I assume because there is no management expertise within highways department) the use of draw bridges have been excluded from the plan. This will then restrict marine uses of the nullah for marine uses (What is the cost of this? What is the opportunity cost of this?)

Note that we do have alternative locations for cruise terminals and hotels, not in the least TST and West Kowloon, where dredging and reclamation would equally be required, and the many other locations identified by developers in their response to a Government tender – yet to be disclosed!!! Equally the Planning Department has gathered a long list of alternative uses for the runway during the consultations.

The issue of the Cruise Terminals location has moved from a planning study to a political approval without a full and transparent cost and benefit analysis of the alternatives.

Let me move to the second issue, which need to be addressed.

The nullah is a 'natural' weather protected water - a minimum requirement for typhoon shelter, marinas, safe berthing of smaller vessels, etc. Creating protected waters elsewhere in the harbour will require reclamation for breakwaters. Additional protected waters could be created with additional breakwaters on the south side of the runway.

A Marine Department study completed in 2005 shows that we have just enough typhoon shelter capacity – this is excluding pleasure craft. This also excludes the need for sheltered water for other uses such as berthing, docking, water sports, marinas and the increase in tourism marine uses such as harbour cruises and water taxis. These uses of protected waters are needed to preserve and maintain the harbour as a safe haven for vessels. This is not just the Oxford dictionary definition of a harbour, it is Hong Kong's cultural heritage, embedded in the name of our city!!

In addition to protected waters, we need to allocate land reserves for marine supporting uses. These are needed for land water interfaces such as landing steps, piers, slips to launch boats, mooring and docking facilities. They are also needed for club houses for marinas and sports centers, dragon boat racing platforms, pier buildings and parking facilities, handling areas, ship shops, etc. What is more, such harbours and ports active and full of different type of vessels are tourists attractions in themselves, specifically when they include facilities such as seafood restaurants, alfresco dining, and other commercial uses.

Honorable members, none of these have been included in the plan.

It is your duty to make sure these are included so as to ensure that the harbour continues its economic and social function as a safe haven for vessels. Or look at this way, active marinas, ports and harbours are great attractions for residents, kids and tourists alike.

Finally ... Planning controls.

It is unclear from the plans how the Government will put adequate development controls in place. Will we have again podium style buildings, which leave the streets dead? Will we again maximize land sales and developer gains by allowing the creation of wall type structures, curtain buildings? What measures are being put in place – not just promises, but true control over urban planning, urban design and building design? How will the development of Kai Tak demonstrate that we have learned from our failings in West Kowloon, Wanchai and Central North, and elsewhere around the harbour, and throughout the territory where our laissez faire in planning controls have lead to an urban environment and quality of life, far removed from that of what a world class city ought to aspire too?

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