

因地制宜 以民為先

學者懇請政府認真研究新高鐵方案

廣深港高速鐵路香港段的建設成本大升，引起全城關注。即使項目造價從原來預算的395億元「只上升」至652億元，按每公里造價比較，已經是目前全球最貴的英法跨海隧道高鐵的三倍。我們同意建設高鐵以加強香港與內地融合，但選定方案時必須考慮成本效益，如何避免擾民以及令社會大眾公平受惠。

政府建議把高鐵總站設於西九龍，是令成本大升的主因，兼且引起社會大眾各方的憂慮：接駁困難、路面擠塞、受惠人少、浪費土地、車費高昂、妨礙西九文化區發展等。普羅市民更關注「西九總站方案」會否進一步推高市區樓價及變相剝奪新界發展和就業機會。

近日，一個包含了過去二十年來為政府出謀獻策的鐵路、交通和規劃專家所組成的「新高鐵專家組」，提出了「貫通南北方案」，估計能就廣深港

高速鐵路香港段的建設節省數以百億元計的投資，令數百萬香港居民和旅客更方便，以及避免遷拆菜園村或其他大型村落，把對居民及社會影響減至最少。

我們認為，高鐵工程事關重大，政府不應草率拒絕考慮新方案。由於政府掌控所有技術數據，最佳辦法是由專家組與政府成立聯合督導小組，聘請獨立顧問深化方案，然後盡快向市民公開交待不同方案的利弊。以兩、三個月的時間換來減少遷拆擾民及節省數百億元的機會，而節省的大筆公帑足以紓緩很多迫切的貧窮、民生和環境問題，絕不應輕言放棄。

我們深信，虛心研究、客觀求證是市民對政府官員的起碼要求。今次事件不是單一的工程決策，更是對政府管治素質的考驗：如何能做到善用公帑、不偏不倚和以民為先。萬望政府三思！

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People first, as Local Needs prevail

Academics' Appeal for Government to consider the New Express Rail Link Option

The substantial increase in construction costs of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link has drawn widespread public concern. Even though some would say that the cost "has *merely* gone up" from HK\$39.5 billion to HK\$50 billion, per kilometer speaking it is already three times that of the Eurostar through the Channel Tunnel, the current holder of world's most expensive express rail link. While we agree to building the Express Rail Link to meet the needs of integration between Hong Kong and the Mainland, due consideration must be given to the cost-effectiveness of the project. The solution should not cause unnecessary disturbance to the general public, and must maintain fairness and be beneficial for all.

The Government's suggestion to locate the Express Rail Link terminus in West Kowloon is the main cause for the surge in construction cost. This also arouses wide-ranging concerns from different sectors of the society, on the difficulty in interchange, congestion of road traffic, limited number of beneficiaries, wastage of land resources, high fares, and adverse impact on the West Kowloon Cultural District project, etc. Moreover, most people on the streets would be worried that the "West Kowloon Terminus" Option may trigger further escalation of property prices in the urban areas, while depriving job opportunities in as well as the overall development of the New Territories.

Recently, an alternative plan for the Link, known as "Integrated Option", was proposed by an "Express Rail Link Expert Group" made up of experts in railways, transportation and planning who have been advising Government on these specialist areas for the past two decades. Under the new Option, it is estimated that tens of billion of dollars can be saved from the public purse, while making it more convenient to travel for millions of local residents and tourists alike. More importantly, adopting the Integrated Option will not require Government to remove and pull down the Choi Yuen Village or any other rural villages of the size. Indeed, it will substantially reduce the negative impacts on both the local residents and the society at large.

The Express Rail Link is a project with very significant implications for Hong Kong. We think the Government should give the new Option due consideration before making a final decision. Since all the technical data are in the closed domain of the Government, the best way to proceed is to set up a "Joint Steering Group" comprising of experts from the Government and the Expert Group. It will then commission an independent consultancy study for a proper assessment of the proposal. Members of the public will be fully informed of the study results and be allowed to understand the pros and cons of the

two proposals. In our view, it is definitely worth spending two to three months' time for this assessment, in exchange for the opportunity to avoid the removal and clearance of the local villages, or any other disturbances to the community. The huge amount in public money thus saved could then be used to address the poverty, livelihood and environmental issues of Hong Kong.

We do believe that there is a strong expectation in the community for Government officials to base their judgement on objective and evidence-based research. This incident is by no means a single case of engineering decision. It is a test of the quality of governance: on how and whether the Administration has used public funds wisely, made decisions without partiality, and put public interests as its foremost agenda.

In conclusion, we urge the Government to consider seriously the Integrated Option initiated by the Expert Group!