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Panel on Transport Meeting on 22 January 2010

Background brief on improving pedestrian environment

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the efforts made by the Administration to improve pedestrian environment and summarizes the major views and concerns expressed by members of the Panel on Transport (the Panel) on the subject in the past.

Background

2. Pedestrian circulation is one of the fundamental planning considerations in transport and land use planning. The Administration has been supporting separation of pedestrians from vehicles through pedestrian schemes and grade-separated pedestrian walkway systems. Such measures ensure that adequate pedestrian linkages are provided between major activity nodes, minimize conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles, reduce traffic volume and associated air pollution, and provide a better walking environment for pedestrians.

Pedestrian walkway systems

3. Well-planned pedestrian walkway systems can provide safe, uninterrupted and pleasant passageways for pedestrian movements whilst reducing conflicts between pedestrians and vehicular traffic. The Administration has been actively exploring the feasibility of providing pedestrian walkway systems in various districts. In view of the growing number of requests from the public for the provision of hillside escalator links and elevator systems, the Administration has also proposed an assessment system for the provision of these pedestrian facilities to provide a more comprehensive set of objective and transparent evaluation criteria in determining the merits and priority of proposals on these facilities. The Panel was briefed on the proposed assessment system at its meeting on 22 May 2009.

The Administration agreed to update the Panel on the finalized assessment system and the assessment outcomes in due course.

Pedestrian schemes

4. The Administration commissioned a consultancy study on the development of pedestrian schemes for built-up areas in 1999, and in early 2000 identified a number of crowded and more polluted spots in Causeway Bay, Mong Kok and Tsim Sha Tsui (the three priority areas) for the development of such schemes with the following objectives –

- (a) To improve pedestrian safety and mobility;
- (b) To promote walking as a transport mode;
- (c) To discourage access for non-essential vehicles;
- (d) To reduce air pollution; and
- (e) To improve overall pedestrian environment.

The above objectives are achieved through beautification of the areas, diversion of vehicular traffic to the periphery, and introduction of traffic management measures to minimize the impact of traffic diversion.

5. Over the years, the Transport Department (TD) has extended pedestrian schemes to areas other than the three priority areas such as Central, Wan Chai, Jordan, Sham Shui Po, Stanley, Yuen Long and Shek Wu Hui. Details of the schemes presently under planning are given in **Appendix I**.

6. Implementation of pedestrian schemes does not mean permanent closure of many of the streets of the areas concerned. Instead, the general concept is to reduce the overall vehicular traffic and divert some traffic from the core areas so as to establish pedestrian activity areas in places where pedestrian volume is high. Under the schemes, streets are classified according to the level of priority given to the pedestrians into full-time pedestrian street, part-time pedestrian street and traffic calming street (formerly known as mixed priority street), details of which are set out in **Appendix II**.

Factors considered in developing a pedestrian scheme

7. Whilst pedestrianization is desirable from pedestrian and environment standpoint, pedestrian schemes would entail some costs in terms of causing inconvenience to certain sectors whose activities would be affected, e.g. more restrictions on the delivery of goods to shops in the pedestrianized areas; cancellation of on-street parking spaces in the areas; and relocation of pickup/drop-off points for public transport. As such, to ensure net gain to the

community, the Administration would need to implement pedestrian schemes in phases, and consider the following factors in developing a pedestrian scheme –

- (a) Whether there are pedestrian capacity or safety problems;
- (b) Public demand and land use, e.g. whether there are shops or places of interest which would attract pedestrians and tourists to the area;
- (c) Environmental and amenity considerations; and
- (d) Impact of pedestrianization on vehicular traffic in the vicinity and the servicing of buildings.

Views and concerns expressed by the Panel on pedestrian schemes

8. The Administration briefed the Panel at its meeting on 25 February 2000 on the objectives and the general concept adopted in devising pedestrian schemes when pedestrian schemes for the three priority areas were proposed. While in general supportive of the schemes, members expressed a number of views and concerns.

9. In recognition of the impacts of pedestrian schemes on the areas concerned, members were keen to ensure the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of consultation with the affected parties. They also stressed the importance of early notification to enhance acceptance. The Administration assured members that every effort would be made to consult all affected parties. In the case of Causeway Bay, for instance, a district working group had been set up to coordinate views from all related departments on the overall impact of the proposal on the area. Consultation with residents, shop owners and public transport operators, as well as district organizations and trade bodies would then be conducted through various channels. At members' request, a report on the outcome of the consultations on the pedestrian schemes for the three priority areas was subsequently provided to the Panel.

10. Some members also expressed concern about pedestrian schemes' impact on the livelihood of taxi and minibus drivers. The Administration assured members that the trade would be consulted through TD's regular meetings with representatives of the trade.

11. Noting that part-time pedestrianization might necessitate loading and unloading activities at midnight, members were concerned about the impact so arising on residents. The Administration responded that where Causeway Bay was concerned, it was envisaged that except for exceptional cases, most of these activities would occur between 7:00 am and 12:00 noon.

12. Some members were also concerned that existing traffic congestion in the areas concerned might be aggravated by the part-time pedestrianization of certain streets. The Administration explained that in calibrating the transport models for assessing the overall effect of the schemes, it had already taken into account the associated traffic diversions and impacts so arising.

13. Noting that vehicular traffic would not be restricted in traffic calming streets, some members queried whether the intended objectives of improving the environment and traffic flow could be achieved as additional vehicular traffic might be diverted from full-time and part-time pedestrian streets. They therefore opined that the number of traffic calming streets should be minimized. Some even opined that the designation of cul-de-sacs with limited access might be more effective in limiting vehicular traffic. The Administration explained that efforts had already been made to minimize the number of traffic calming streets. However, these streets were necessary to allow access to car parks in residential and commercial buildings, etc. It was hoped that with suitable design features, non-essential traffic in those streets would be discouraged. As to the designation of cul-de-sacs, the Administration explained that practical difficulties were involved in allowing authorized access.

14. Certain members also asked how the effect of pedestrian schemes on traffic, air quality and environment would be assessed, and whether an assessment would be made on the level of reduction in vehicle emissions after the implementation of the schemes. The Administration then explained that it would be very difficult to quantify the localized impact of the scheme on a single area. But generally speaking, with vehicular traffic being diverted and separated from pedestrian activities, air quality would improve creating a better overall environment.

15. Since the Panel meeting on 25 February 2000, the Administration has been updating the Panel on the progress and details of pedestrian schemes. Members have noted the public's call for proper management of pedestrian streets to guard against illegal shop-front extensions and hawkers, objections to the schemes from certain District Councils, and Police complaints about street management problems in pedestrian streets. They have also noted the increase in complaints from shops about their business being affected by serious obstruction in pedestrian streets caused by people staging shows and talks, or conducting exhibitions and promotional activities. Recently, there were incidents of corrosive fluid being thrown from a height onto pedestrian precincts. To address this problem, the parties concerned have already organized relevant publicity and public education activities, installed closed-circuit television systems, commonly called the "sky eyes", in pedestrian precincts, and helped nearby buildings, in particular those old buildings which have not formed owners' corporations, to enhance security and improve the quality of building management.

Latest developments

16. At the suggestion of the Panel on Development, members agreed to discuss the policy initiative to improve the pedestrian environment in business, shopping and leisure areas with heavy pedestrian flow at the Panel meeting on 22 January 2010. The Administration also intends to report to the Panel on the result of the consultancy study on improving pedestrian environment. Members of the Development Panel have been invited to join the discussion of this item.

Relevant papers

17. A list of relevant papers is in **Appendix III**.

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Pedestrian schemes presently under planning

At the Panel meeting on 23 October 2009, when the Administration briefed members on the transport policy initiatives featured in the 2009-2010 Policy Address, members noted the Administration's plan to take forward the pedestrian schemes in Causeway Bay, Mong Kok and Yuen Long town centre as described below.

2. Where the pedestrian schemes in Causeway Bay and Mong Kok were concerned, the Administration reported that the Transport Department commissioned in March 2009 a consultancy study on pedestrian environment improvement projects for Causeway Bay and Mong Kok. The study had resulted in some preliminary conceptual alignment plans. In the plan for Causeway Bay, there would be a pedestrian subway system running from Victoria Park through the central commercial and shopping areas of Causeway Bay to the vicinity of Happy Valley. As to the plan in Mong Kok, the existing footbridge system would be extended to join the Mong Kok and Mong Kok East MTR stations as well as the heart of the district with the vicinity of Tai Kok Tsui. The feasibility studies on the conceptual plans were then underway. The Administration planned to consider such aspects as the traffic, environment and engineering feasibility and put forward specific proposals by end 2009 for consultation with the relevant District Councils and the public.

3. For the pedestrian scheme in Yuen Long, the Highways Department (HyD) commissioned a consultant to organize a public engagement exercise during July and August 2009 to collect public opinions. In September 2009, HyD also appointed an engineering consultant to work out feasible improvement measures taking into account the opinions collected earlier, and a public forum was then planned to be organized in end 2009 or early 2010. The consultant would consider the public opinions to be collected when formulating preliminary improvement measures for further consultation with the public (including the Yuen Long District Council). The study was expected to complete in 2010.

Types of pedestrian schemes

(a) *Full-time Pedestrian Street*

In full-time pedestrian streets, pedestrians have absolute priority. Vehicular access is restricted to emergency services only but service vehicles may be allowed in specific periods, for selected locations.

(b) *Part-time Pedestrian Street*

In part-time pedestrian streets, vehicular access is only allowed in specific periods. In order to minimize vehicular access to the area, there is no on-street parking space. However, loading bays are provided for loading and unloading purposes.

(c) *Traffic Calming Street (formerly known as mixed priority street)*

In traffic calming streets, footpaths are normally widened and on-street parking spaces are reduced as far as possible. Taxi stands and green minibus stands are only provided if relocation is not practical. There is no restriction to vehicular access. However, vehicles are slowed down through the use of traffic calming measures, such as speed tables, kerb build-outs, sharpened corners, road narrowings, gateways, etc

Improving pedestrian environment

List of relevant papers

Date of meeting	Committee	Minutes/ Paper	LC Paper No.
25.2.2000	Panel on Transport	Administration's paper on "Pedestrian Schemes"	CB(1)1041/99-00(03) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr99-00/english/panels/tp/papers/a1041e03.pdf
		Supplementary paper on "Pedestrian Schemes for Mong Kok and Tsim Sha Tsui" provided by the Administration	CB(1)1279/99-00 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr99-00/english/panels/tp/papers/a1279e.pdf
		Supplementary information on "Outcome of Public Consultation on the Pedestrian Schemes for Causeway Bay, Mong Kok and Tsim Sha Tsui" provided by the Administration	CB(1)1932/99-00 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr99-00/english/panels/tp/papers/a1932e.pdf
		Minutes of meeting	CB(1)1233/09-00 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr99-00/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp250200.pdf
17.1.2001	Council meeting	Dr Hon YEUNG Sum raised a question on designation of pedestrian precincts	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr00-01/english/counmtg/hansard/010117fe.pdf
23.5.2001	Council meeting	Ir Dr Raymond HO raised a question on designation of pedestrian precincts	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr00-01/english/counmtg/hansard/010523fe.pdf

Date of meeting	Committee	Minutes/ Paper	LC Paper No.
21.1.2005	Panel on Transport	Minutes of meeting	CB(1)953/04-05 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr04-05/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp050121.pdf
19, 20, 21 and 22.3. 2007	Finance Committee	Report on the examination of the Estimates of Expenditure 2007-08	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/fc/fc/minutes/sfc_rpt.pdf
23, 24, 25, 26 and 27.3. 2009	Finance Committee	Report on the examination of the Estimates of Expenditure 2009-2010	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/fc/fc/minutes/sfc_rpt.pdf
10.6.2009	Council meeting	Hon LAU Kong-wah raised a question on Incidents of Objects Being Thrown from a Height onto Pedestrian Precincts	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/counmtg/hansard/cm0610-translate-e.pdf

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