



**Legislative Council Panel on Transport
Special meeting on 5th January 2016**

Submission by Hong Kong Tramways

Re: Proposed increase in fixed penalty for congestion-related traffic offences and implementation of an Electronic Road Pricing Pilot Scheme in Central and its adjacent areas

As Hong Kong is walking towards transforming itself into a more sustainable and liveable city, giving more priority for public transport must be the future trend. Recently the community is engaging in an active discussion on seeking practical ways in tackling the serious road traffic congestion. In fact, demand-side traffic management schemes are becoming the norm in the world's leading cities; either by increasing the cost of car usage or by reducing the space allocated to cars /posing constraints to car usage (or both). Cities like London, Paris, New York, Singapore, Beijing, Seoul have all adopted such demand management schemes, using different methods. The corollary of this demand management measures are an encouragement in the use of public transport; and a different trade-off giving more space and/or financial resources to public transport means. We believe that HK is facing similar (or in fact more acute) traffic congestion challenges as in other world leading metropolis, and therefore traffic management measures should be actively considered.

As a major public ground transport service provider on the island side, Hong Kong Tramways experiences impediments in operation efficiency especially during peak traffic hours. Actually, the commercial speed of tram could go up to 21.7 km/h, e.g. on the exclusive tram lane at Admiralty, but the average commercial speed of trams (including time at stops, traffic lights, etc.) is now only about 8 km/h. Tramways' commercial speed had been decreased by 20% over the past 5 years because of increasing congestion. This increases almost proportionally our operating costs, decreases our carrying capacity and our attractiveness, and exposes our citizens to dangerous levels of pollution caused by idle engines exhausts.

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The Company would therefore welcome any policy to relieve ground traffic congestion so that passengers using public transport could enjoy quicker, smoother and greener rides. While acknowledging the technical complexities and divergent views regarding the introduction of a congestion charging scheme, we are supportive of traffic demand management measures in general. According to Government's paper, the Transport Advisory Committee ("TAC") has conducted a study to identify the factors contributing to road traffic congestion in Hong Kong and put forward recommendations to the Government that "Electronic Road Pricing ("ERP") is an effective traffic management tool to tackle localized traffic congestion and that the Central District is a suitable location". In this connection, we welcome the idea of congestion charging in principle. We would therefore support a pilot scheme in Central.

On the other hand we believe that traffic congestion must be approached in a holistic manner and that there can be some "quick wins" that could be considered now in order to enhance the space and operational efficiency of the city's road surface transport. For example:

- Unregulated curb side activities are reducing the usable space of the roads and causing traffic bottlenecks. As the inside lane is occupied by illegal parking and waiting vehicles, loading / unloading activities are forced to take place in the second lane, rendering only one lane left for through traffic in a three-lane carriageway. We advocate stepping up enforcement of traffic violations. In order to have continuous deterrence effect automatic surveillance technology should be explored to bring about persistent enforcement effects, similar to red light and speeding.
- We support resuming more tram and bus-only traffic lanes for encouraging people to use public transportation. With the opening of the WIL and the new Central-Wanchai bypass, which will free up more road space in the busy traffic areas, it will definitely be conducive to achieve the highest efficiency use of road space by introducing more priority measures to facilitate public transport, including resuming more tram dedicated lanes and synchronizing traffic lights.

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- We recommend encouraging on-street loading and unloading outside peak hours - Measures should be taken to provide incentives to encourage operators and traders to carry out the loading and unloading activities outside peak hours.
- Recently, some professional and community groups have proposed to rezone Des Voeux road Central largely to a pedestrian with an environmentally friendly public transport system. Tramways is of the view that by giving more priority to public transport and promoting green environment, this proposal is a good vision for the city.

Tramways therefore believes that it is in the interest of the sustainable development of our city to actively study on how to achieve such initiatives, to prioritize the measures according to their effectiveness and public acceptability; and to implement the necessary measures or proposed pilot schemes the soonest. We welcome providing input to this public discussion.

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