

Letterhead of HONG KONG AMATEUR ROWING ASSOCIATION

26 October, 1998

Legco Panel on Planning, Lands & Works
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Hong Kong

Dear Sirs,

South East Kowloon Reclamation

Thank you for inviting us to submit our views on the proposals gazetted by the government on 4 September 1998 for the development of the Kai Tak Airport site. We have studied the plans and explanatory notes and object to the government's proposals for the following reasons: -

1. If Kai Tak is developed according to government's plans an opportunity will have been lost to create a major city centre amenity area for recreation and sport.
2. The plans are not in accordance with the Chief Executive's vision for Hong Kong, of emulating New York and London. They are basically for more of the same sort of development that has blighted so much of Hong Kong's urban landscape. The area should be developed with completely new planning concepts in mind, to create a prototype for Hong Kong's development in the next century and kept largely free from motor vehicles.
3. The area should not be used to house 320,000 people. Instead, a smaller number of people should be housed and the main focus of development should be on providing facilities for sport and recreation for the benefit of the population as a whole. In particular, the nearby areas of Kwun Tong, San Po Kong etc. need access to generous areas of open space and recreational facilities.
4. While we support the provision of stadia in this area, at this stage we object to the proposed 'international' stadium, because the explanatory notes contain so little information that it is impossible to assess its purpose and viability. More specifically, we consider that the provision of any major sports facility should be in accordance with an agreed master plan for the development of sports facilities and the development of sport, Hong Kong has no such plan at present, therefore there is a risk that the new stadium will be another white elephant similar to the present Hong Kong Stadium, or that it will not fit into a master plan for sport when one is prepared.
5. If Hong Kong is to develop itself so as to emulate New York and London, it must bid to host major games such as the Asian Games, East Asian Games and Olympic Games. The Kai Tak site is an ideally situated area on which to build many of the sports facilities that would be needed. The Chief Executive in his recent policy address said that Hong Kong should become the preeminent city in Asia. It follows, therefore, that we must host the Asian Games and city planning must provide for the required facilities.
6. A protected basin should be created in a parklike setting in which rowing, dragon boating and canoeing can take place. These sports are growing in popularity and regattas and regular activity held in an area where people are naturally present will help promote the sports concerned and provide something of interest for people to watch.

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7. The central harbour area should be developed for recreational use, in particular sailing activity should be expanded. At present the only sailing facilities in the harbour belong to the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club, so are inaccessible to the public. A major dinghy and keel boat base should be built to allow many more people to sail on the harbour. This will also make the harbour more visually attractive.
8. A common complaint of visitors is that Hong Kong is boring and that there is nothing to do. The Olympic rowing course at Toda in Japan is periodically used for mini-power boat racing, which is massively popular, attracting huge crowds, perhaps because of the betting which is allowed on the races. If a similar facility was provided at Kai Tak the Jockey Club could operate the betting. Mini-power boat racing would be an attraction for visitors.
9. The south-east end of the runway should be preserved for light aircraft use in conjunction with the proposed aviation academy and museum. If this use is considered incompatible with the wider use of the area for sports, then we would suggest locating the aviation activities elsewhere. Alongside the runway, small passenger-carrying sea planes could be allowed to operate, ferrying visitors to outlying islands and scenic areas. (see attached letter to the editor SCMP, 3 October 1998)
10. Roads in the area should be kept to the absolute minimum and vehicular access confined to essential services, deliveries etc. Pedestrian access throughout the area should be by some form of electrically powered tram, monorail, or light rail system connecting with the nearest MTR station. Public footpaths and cycle tracks should be provided throughout the area.
11. The area should be comprehensively landscaped with trees, lawns and gardens. Selection of vegetation should be designed to encourage wild life such as birds and butterflies.
12. The area of reclamation should be smaller because as more of the harbour is reclaimed, the circulation of air within the harbour area is weakened and urban area air pollution becomes worse. This fact appears to be unknown to government planners.
13. The government's plans for the waterfront are boring, unimaginative and demonstrate a lack of understanding of what Hong Kong needs. The waterfront should be an interactive area where land and water meet, not where they are kept apart. A variety of water based activities should be provided, in addition to those already mentioned, such as a maritime museum featuring replicas, or originals, of the craft that used Hong Kong's harbour in bygone days, a yacht marina, piers for boat trips round the harbour, a floating night club, floating restaurant, etc.
14. A number of hotels should be provided, which will be needed if the proposed sports facilities are built.

We trust that our views will be of assistance to the members of the panel and we are, of course, available to elaborate on any aspect if requested.

Yours faithfully,

Robert L. Wilson
President

