

Central Phase III / Wanchai Phase II Reclamations Controversy

Submission to LegCo Joint Panel

**Conservancy Association**

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INTRODUCTION

1. The crux of the current controversy over reclamations in Central and Wanchai stems from the Court's interpretation of the Harbour Protection Ordinance at the Wanchai case (Society for Harbour Protection vs Town Planning Board) in which the Court imposed three tests for all reclamations of the Victoria Harbour. The three tests are: (i) there must be overriding and compelling present need; (ii) there is no alternative to meet the need and (iii) there should be minimal damages.
2. While the Town Planning Board is launching an appeal to the Court's ruling in the Wanchai case, the Conservancy Association (hereafter CA) has no intention to make comments on the Court's ruling. However, the Court's ruling has aroused public debate over the necessity to further reclaim of the Harbour. We notice that the public has demonstrated a clear aspiration of protecting the harbour. The CA is of a strong opinion that no matter what the result of the appeal, seeking public consensus on harbour reclamation is most vital to settle the dispute and realign the community.
3. The CA has been a long-time advocate of minimum harbour reclamation ever since the Port and Airport Development Strategy and the Metroplan were first published in 1989. Over the years numerous submissions were made to the authorities to urge for scaling-down of proposed reclamations. In this current discussion, the CA again would like to offer the following to the consensus building process.

JUSTIFICATIONS OF RECLAMATION

4. We understand from the Government's web page that the original plan for the Central Reclamation is to accommodate the following facilities:
  - a. Central-Wanchai Bypass
  - b. Road P2 network
  - c. Reprovisioning of existing waterfront facilities (e.g. pumping stations providing cooling water for buildings in Central, Star Ferry piers and Queen's Pier)

- d. A military berth for the People's Liberation Army
- e. North Hong Kong Island Line
- f. An extended overturn tunnel for the Airport Railway and Tung Chung Line
- g. The land made available for the above items will provide an opportunity for a vibrant waterfront promenade for the access and enjoyment by the community

After many reviews, in particular, in the light of the Court's ruling over the Wanchai case, it comes to our knowledge that Government only maintains justifications a) and g) of the above for the Central reclamation phase III.

- 5. As such, the CA's submission will focus on the discussion of these two justifications. We shall examine these justifications and alternatives without reclamations.

#### THE NEED FOR BYPASS

- 6. The Bypass was first proposed to be a 6-lane facility in the final report of the Hong Kong Second Comprehensive Transport Study issued in May 1989. The Study adopted many assumptions. The more important ones were (a) an annual growth in GDP between 5% to 6% from 1988 to 2001; (b) an average household income of HK\$11990 in 2001 and (c) a population of 6.3 million in 2001. It was then projected that the Bypass would carry 112,000 passenger car units per day in 2001 with the volume to capacity ratio of 0.8 (i.e., the road would be 80% full). It was concluded that the Bypass would be required by 2001 and the completion of the Western Harbour Crossing by the mid 1990s would allow the Bypass to be deferred until the late 1990s.
- 7. In the final report of the Hong Kong Third Comprehensive Transport Study (CTS3) issued in October 1999, Government confessed that some of the projections in the previous study are obviously flawed. By 2016, the population was estimated to be between 8.2 to 10.1 million; the annual GDP growth rate was projected to have 2.4% to 4.9% up to 2016 and the average household income would be that of 1997 level or 30% higher. The Bypass was re-scheduled to be completed in 2010.
- 8. Now, there have been a number of major changes since the CTS3. The annual GDP growth rate and the average household income are far below the projected figures, even the most pessimistic ones from 1999 to 2003. Most importantly, the Bypass should be linked to the Green Island Reclamation

Development to the West through Route 7 and the Wanchai Reclamation to the East, with many residential and commercial developments where the traffic was to be generated. It is understood now that Government has given up the Green Island Reclamation and all commercial developments on Central and Wanchai Reclamation. Furthermore, there was a strategic link, i.e., Route 10, bringing traffic all the way from the Border Crossing to Green Island through Lantau Island to this Bypass. This Route 10 was shelved under the strong objection of the Route 3 operator. In essence, all the basic assumptions for the need of the Bypass have changed. Certainly, the justifications of the Bypass require a serious review. Apart from many other assessments, the most crucial one is the cost-benefit analysis.

9. The following table (Table 1) provides an estimate of the cost comparison of the Bypass construction.

Table 1 : Cost comparison of some recent committed highway projects

Road	Road length (Km)	Construction cost (HK\$billion)	Construction Cost (HK\$billion/km)
Shumzhen West Corridor	3.2	2.88	0.68
Kam Tin Bypass	1.3	0.153	0.12
Deep Bay Link (North Section)	4.0	1.716	0.43
Central-Wanchai Bypass	4.0	15.235	3.81

Source: Web pages of CED and HyD

10. Taking the CTS projection of traffic flow of 112,000 passenger car units per day (this figure is probably over-estimated because of the non-existence of Green Island Reclamation and other commercial developments in Central-Wanchai reclamations), the cumulative benefit for travel time saving is estimated to be around HK\$ 0.17 billion per year, it means the cost return period of minimum 22 years. This level of return is normally unacceptable for highway projects.
11. One may still argues that the current congestion level in Central still warrants such a huge investment. However, is the current congestion level in Central is really unacceptable? The mean travel speed in the peak hour is around 20 kilometre per hour in Central. The mean speed in congested urban areas in Europe varied from 10 to 16 kilometre per hour (Andre and Hammarstrom, 2000).
12. The Bypass would only help the through traffic which does not enter Central. It does very little help to local traffic which requires getting into the narrow

streets of Central. If road frontage activities persist as is, congestion will persist along these roads.

13. If the argument to build the Bypass in order to raise the level of service of a few roads in Central (where the level of congestion is not a widely perceived problem) stands, will Government apply the same principles to alleviate the congestion problems along Nathan Road and many other major roads in the Territory which the traffic speed is same or below that in Central?

#### THE ALTERNATIVES TO BYPASS

14. There are many alternatives to ease traffic congestion in Central. To name a few, they are:
  - a) To fully utilize the Western Harbour Crossing (WHC). This Crossing was built to attract traffic from Central so as to ease the congestion level in Central and Wanchai. Now that few traffic are using this Crossing mainly because of the huge differentials of toll charges among the three tunnel crossings, with the WHC the highest. Government should try every means, including buying back the WHC, in order to resume the function of this crossing;
  - b) To construct the MTR western extension from Sheung Wan to Kennedy Town. The extension will at least save large number of buses plying through Central to and from Western District;
  - c) To construct the recommended hillside escalators from Central to Mid-levels. The Central Traffic Demand Study recommended constructing 7 hillside escalators for residents in the district so that they can walk to work instead of taking a transport. The first escalator was proved to be very successful. There are still many private car and buses plying between Central and Mid-levels adding to the traffic load in Central, it is high time for Government to reconsider building the remaining 6 recommended escalators;
  - d) To construct large bus-bus interchanges at the fringe areas of Central. This will help consolidate the bus routes getting into and through Central and thus reducing the traffic load; and
  - e) To restrict the load/unloading times in Central. The curb-side loading/unloading activities in Central generate many congestion problems. These activities can be restricted to be performed at night when Central is all quiet
15. Apart from measures like those listed above, one of the more effective measures is electronic road pricing (ERP) which Hong Kong spent hundreds

of millions dollars to experiment. ERP is now being implemented in Singapore and London. In fact, the last report on ERP study in Hong Kong did confirm the benefits of such a system and recommended implementation of the system as soon as possible, with wide public consultation. The then Secretary for Transport should be condemned for not accepting the Study recommendations and consequently wasted the taxpayers' money.

#### THE NEED FOR PROMENADE?

16. Prior to the commencement of Central Phase III reclamation work, there was a promenade all along Central to Wanchai. Now, the promenade outside Tamar is used as works areas, depriving public access. The current reclamation projects actually destroyed the existing promenade and try to rebuild a new promenade.
17. The existing promenade stretches from the piers on Central Reclamation Phase II to Star Ferry Pier, Queen's Pier, Tamar and Golden Bauhinia Square outside the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. The Star Ferry Pier and the Queen's Pier accumulate many memories and are heritages of Hong Kong, thus, have been the major attractions along the whole promenade. The newly proposed promenade gets rid of these heritages and is doubtful whether it can remain as a point of attraction.
18. The CA is of a strong view that the existing promenade should be substantially upgraded instead of being replaced.

#### CONCLUSION

19. The CA is not persuaded by the Government's justifications for the reclamations in Central and Wanchai and cannot support this projects.