

SAVE OUR SHORELINES PRESENTATION TO LEGCO PANEL ON PLANNING, LANDS AND WORKS AND PANEL ON ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS JOINT MEETING ON 27 NOVEMBER 2003

1. Save Our Shorelines believe that greater access for a wider variety of people is needed to enrich and animate the shorelines and thus to enrich the lives of Hong Kong people and visitors. The integrity of our island geography needs to be respected and not considered as a series of dots to be joined up by land fill.
2. The points listed by the Planning Department's own executive summary of its "Planning Study on the Harbour and its Waterfront Areas" in May of 2003 lists excellent principles for improving the way the Harbour can be enjoyed by citizens and visitors but it generally ignores all guidelines and legislation on limiting reclamation to achieve these. Nor does it mention the intention to construct a highway between Causeway Bay and Sheung Wan or discuss the justification for this road. It should be noted also that many of the promises made by the Government in the past to provide open public spaces have not been kept and such areas have been rezoned for commercial and other uses. What measures will be put in place to ensure that the public will indeed see the Planners dreams of shoreline parks become reality?
3. SOS believes that the Administration should take the opportunities offered by the current Harbour Debate to integrate the works of all the Departments involved in city development to create focused planning policies that will emphasise the importance of the shorelines of Hong Kong rather than treating them as marginal zones that are available for exploitation.
4. Repeated reclamation of the Harbour, and of other shorelines round Hong Kong that provide – at best - limited, sterile and unimaginative public shoreline access and facilities as an afterthought to major infrastructure developments do not meet with current public expectations of civic improvement. At the same time, promises of broad plazas and extended public parks that require the reduction of the very asset that they are designed to showcase seem to miss the point. There has to be a middle ground.
5. Future coastal planning must begin with the premise that the shoreline itself is sacrosanct and must be protected. The terms of the current Harbour Protection Ordinance could not be clearer on this point. Reclaim only where this is essential, unavoidable, and even then reclaim only to the minimum degree.
6. Precede all shoreline development plans with a thorough investigation of the broadest range of alternatives that might render such shoreline works unnecessary – in the case of the Harbour consider Demand-Side Management of the traffic problems as a broader alternative to road extensions, look for ways to provide the walkways and plazas that we need without such extensive landfill.
7. It appears that the figures used to justify the road were based on data from many years ago. Route 7, Route 10, Green Island Reclamation, the Hotel and Commercial buildings on the Wanchai reclamation, a new skyscraper in front of IFC2.... They have all been abandoned. Figures are submitted by the Government for tunnel traffic that exceed even the projections of those tunnel operators – for

which no clear explanation has been given. Figures presented by the Transport Bureau for traffic demand in future show drastic increases over numbers presented by the same teams in earlier reports, but rarely include detailed explanations on how these have been calculated. No new traffic figures have been presented based on the current, real, projected traffic increases to justify the reclamation and yet the only current excuse being given for the extent of that reclamation is traffic demand.

8. It is quite possible that no reclamation for roads will be needed at all. Is it not possible for the Transport, EPD and Health Departments to jointly put together a demand-management traffic scheme that at the same time minimizes air pollution while carrying the maximum number of people to their destinations. User-Pays traffic schemes in several European cities have shown enviable results in the reduction of non-essential traffic, allowing public transport like buses and taxis to run more efficiently on *existing* roads, and reducing the need to build new ones. Why has this option not been fully explored in the Central and Wanchai districts and debated in the public forum? Before irreparable damage is done to the Harbour this option must be fully explored. At the same time, has the impact of potential rail extensions to Western and Southern Districts and the likely reductions in demand on road transport been included in the traffic calculations provided so far?
9. Instead of assuming that repeated extensions of the shoreline are the easiest and cheapest option for land creation start instead with the premise that this is the LAST option that should only be considered when all other options have been tested.
10. Question the process of public consultation – it has clearly not been satisfactory. The public was unaware when earlier, limited, consultations were held that the Governments’ proposals were breaking the law. We need to trust our Government and it should not be necessary for us to say “this is illegal so you shouldn’t do it. The validity of those consultations therefore remains in doubt. Future consultations would have greater value if the Public and Environmental Groups – who have extensive expertise to offer – were involved in the initial planning and discussions rather than being presented with completed development plans at the end of the process.
11. A single coherent and comprehensive policy needs to be set in place, focusing on shoreline issues generally – not just in the central Harbour areas but around all of Hong Kong - which enjoys the backing of the Community AND the Administration together.
12. Ultimately such policies should be governed by laws similar to the Harbour Protection Act and administered by a single, coherent body – not just a Harbour Authority but a Shoreline Authority - working with residents, developers, businesses and with the appropriate government Departments. The Planning Department has already proposed such a body but action to set it up even a simplified version has been slow. We are told that the government does not feel such an Authority would be suitable, but SOS would like to question this.
13. While ignorance, amongst the public and the Administration, of the challenges facing many of Hong Kong’s shorelines remains high, effective communication on the benefits to be generated from coherent and optimal management of our shoreline “resource” is urgently needed. SOS hopes that the opportunities presented by the open debate of the last few months will not be lost and that the Administration will move quickly to establish a dedicated Shoreline Authority that will begin with a careful review of the public’s wishes on protection of Hong Kong’s greatest natural asset – its Harbour

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POSTSCRIPT

14. Here are some examples of cities which built urban highways, then later came to a realisation that their road-building had been a mistake :
15. Seoul is proposing to get rid of the 6-lane Cheonggecheon highway and replace it with a riverscape.
16. Paris is gradually reclaiming the north bank of the Seine by progressively closing an urban motorway,
17. San Francisco has demolished the elevated Embarcadero Freeway and reclaimed its waterfront on San Francisco Bay.
18. During the 1980s in England, there were many campaigns against new road construction. One of the most famous concerned the Newbury Bypass (which was justified by the authorities on the grounds of its "necessity" to relieve congestion in the town). Recently, a report by the local transport authority confessed "there is no consistent pattern of traffic change over the Newbury network as a whole" following construction of the bypass. The development has generated its own traffic and the long-term impact on the town centre is looking deeply negative.
19. "It is now evident that the 'predict and provide' strategy is unsustainable and that new roads only attract more traffic."
The report went on to explain the principles of road pricing, demand management, and need for a "predict and **prevent**" approach to roads. The report also advocated the government should "reduce the number of vehicle journeys by making non-mechanized travel, including travel by foot and by bicycle, more feasible, safe, and pleasant."
20. "What happens when *OUR* proposed new road reaches capacity ? "
21. The answer, within the logic of predict and provide parameters, can only be - "build another one"!