

Current Planning for the Central Waterfront and Tamar Development Project - Traffic and Environmental Issues

Introduction

1. Reference is made to the letter from Legislative Council dated 16th March 2006 inviting the Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors (HKIS) to express its views on traffic and environmental issues arising from current planning of the Central Waterfront and the Tamar development project. In the following paragraphs, HKIS would address the traffic and environmental issues of the Tamar Developments and then the Central Waterfront.

Tamar Development

2. It is noted that the proposed Tamar development project mainly comprises the Central Government Complex and Legislative Council Complex which are surrounded by an open Civic Place. If the carparking provisions of these two developments are designed in accordance with the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines, it would be around 500 numbers. In simple terms, these would not be significantly more than the total vehicular traffic generated from the existing Central Government Offices, Murray Building and Legislative Council, or any other three large office buildings of similar size in Central. It is thus considered that the vehicular traffic generated from the proposed Central Government and Legislative Council Complex developments would have no significant impact on the total traffic flow of the Central Business District.
3. According to the approved Central District (Extension) Outline Zoning Plan No. S/H/24/6, half of the Tamar site is zoned as “government, institution or community” use, and the remaining half as “open space” use. In line with this Outline Zoning Plan and based on the Government’s proposal, half of the Tamar site will be used to accommodate the proposed Central Government Complex and Legislative Council Complex developments, and the remaining half will be developed as a Civic Place for recreational use by the public. In terms of land-use planning, the development density or plot ratio of the Tamar site is only about half of most commercial developments in the Central Business District.

4. Subject to the further detailed design, it is expected that the proposed Central Government Complex and Legislative Council Complex developments would like an office-type development similar to other commercial developments in the Central Business District. It is thus generally considered that there would have no significant environmental impacts arising from the proposed Central Government Complex and Legislative Council Complex developments.
5. In past years, the Government has strongly promoted sustainable development in Hong Kong. It would be a good opportunity for the Government to demonstrate sustainable and environmental/greening developments in its iconic prime civic core projects. In this regard, HKIS would suggest the Government should impose strict specification requirements on the tender documents to stipulate that the proposed Central Government Complex and Legislative Council Complex developments should be designed, constructed and operated in a sustainable and environmental friendly manner. Any tender who would not able to confront with the relevant specification requirements would be disqualified.
6. In addition, while the proposed Central Government Complex and Legislative Council Complex developments are not the “designated project” subject to the environmental impact assessment under the Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance, HKIS would also suggest that the Government or the tenderers should conduct an environmental impact assessment on their proposed design and construction in order to address any public concern on its environmental impacts.

Central Waterfront

7. It is clear from various transport studies¹ that the existing east-west corridor (i.e. along the Connaught Road Central/Harcourt Road/Gloucester Road) serving the central business district is already operating beyond its maximum capacity. In this regard, HKIS agrees that the proposed Central - Wan Chai Bypass to be built in the form of an underground tunnel within the boundary of the Central reclamation phase III project would be essential as a measure to relieve traffic congestion along the aforesaid east-west corridor. It is also clear that due to its relatively low traffic volumes as aforesaid, the proposed Central

¹ These include the Third Comprehensive Transport Study and the Report of the Expert Panel on Sustainable Transport Planning and Central – Wan Chai Bypass.

Government Complex and Legislative Council Complex developments would not need to rely on the proposed Central - Wan Chai Bypass, which would principally serve as the strategic route between east and west of Hong Kong Island.

8. It is also noted that the 9 sites in the Central reclamation areas (including the Tamar developments) would attract and generate about 4% of the total traffic volume in the Central Business District and that the proposed Central – Wan Chai Bypass would operate at a volume to capacity ratio of about 0.7 by the year 2016. It thus appears that in the short-term and medium-term, the proposed Central – Wan Chai Bypass would have sufficient capacity to cope with the forecasted vehicular traffic flow. However, in the long-term, the Government would need to consider other traffic management measures to tackle the increasing traffic volume.
9. In respect of the planning for the Central Waterfront, one of the critical issues is whether there should be “zero” development within the Central reclamation area in view of the aforesaid traffic condition². As pointed out in our previous submission dated 9th December 2005, there would be a lack of supply of Grade A office space in the Central Business District in the coming years. The inadequate supply, resulting in even higher rentals in Grade A office space would seriously affect the competitive advantage of Hong Kong as an international business and financial centre. Thus, it is considered that halting all developments within the Central reclamation area as suggested by some organizations could not provide a sustainable solution that would be able to properly balance the environmental, transport, land-use planning, economic and social concerns. Rather, HKIS would opine that the Government should adopt a sustainable and holistic approach towards the environmental, transport and land-use planning of the Central Waterfront, taking into account of, and also balancing, all relevant issues in order to meet the long-term economic and social needs of Hong Kong.
10. Within the Central reclamation area, one specific concern is related to the planning of those sites zoned as “Comprehensive Development Area” and “Waterfront Related Commercial and Leisure Uses Only”. HKIS would suggest that based on the aforesaid sustainable and holistic approach, the

² It must be noted that should this planning principle be adopted, it should also consider whether the same planning principle would be applied to other areas or districts with a similar problem. If this being the case, there would be a far-reaching consequence on the whole land-use planning and development of Hong Kong.

Government should work out the detailed planning briefs and urban design framework for public consultation as soon as possible.

Conclusion

11. As expressed in our previous submission dated 9th December 2005, HKIS is generally supportive of the proposed Tamar development project. However, HKIS hopes that the Government will seriously consider its opinions as suggested above.

12. The aforesaid views are related to the traffic and environmental issues arising from the current planning for the Central Waterfront and Tamar development project. HKIS is pleased to provide further views relating to other issues on the Central Waterfront and Tamar development project.

The Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors
29th March 2006