

## **Central Waterfront and Tamar**

### ***Road-Air Nexus*** ***Why make a bad case worse?***

**Dr Bill Barron**

Hong Kong University of Science & Technology

**3 April 2006**

The following is a summary of the presentation to the Planning, Lands and Works Panel of the Hong Kong Legislative Council.

#### **1. Issues are about more than Tamar**

1.1. The Central Waterfront Development as represented by the Central Outline Zoning Plan is about more than just building government offices at Tamar – it is also about adding 770,000 m<sup>2</sup> of new commercial space to an already very density developed Central.

1.2 These new commercial developments will move at least 25,000 jobs into Central from elsewhere in Hong Kong. The development of new commercial buildings do not create new jobs post-construction – but merely shift existing jobs from other locations.

#### **2. Heavy traffic – delete gains from CWB**

2.1 By the Government's own analyses, by adding more density at the Central waterfront, it will lead to almost as much (and under some conditions more) traffic than the Central-Wanchai Bypass is expected to handle.

2.2. In other words government plans will have the effect of throwing away much (and possibly more than all) of the traffic gains from building the Central-Wanchai Bypass. Legislators need to question whether this is good planning.

2.3 Furthermore, if government later sells the land for private developers to redevelop the Central Government Offices (Lower Albert Road) and Murray Building (Garden Road), the new developments will almost certainly be of

much greater density than they are today and will add even more traffic to Central. The sale of the land could happen in just a few years (4-5 years). How will government deal with added traffic needs? It has made public no projections beyond the coming ten years. *Will it lead to further reclamation despite denials today?*

### **3. Canyon effect cannot be discounted**

3.1 In addition to more surface traffic, the new buildings along the waterfront will block air flow and lead to a street canyon effect with heavier pollution build-up. Nitrogen Dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) levels could easily double. NO<sub>2</sub> harms respiratory tract and lung development.

### **4. Roadside pollution in Central is already very bad**

4.1 Air quality at roadside in Central is already poor. If the government does not re-set its planning priorities, as can be seen from its insistence on the existing Central Outline Zoning Plan, air quality in Central will get very much worse.

4.2 Already the 24 hour average AQO for NO<sub>2</sub> at Central roadside was exceeded 1 in every 6 days in 2004.

4.3 The government has recently claimed that air quality in Hong Kong is getting better due to its efforts. In 2005, the situation was less bad than in 2004 but because of very heavy rainfall – not government action.

### **5. Valuable land for highways and roads – result of poor planning**

5.1 The new land created at the Central waterfront is extremely valuable land. In collaboration with Civic Exchange, we measured how much of the area bordered by IFC II, HKECC, Connaught/Harcourt/Gloucester Roads, and new Shoreline will be given over to highways and roads. Our calculation (see attachment) shows approximately 1/3 of the area will be for roads.

5.2 We also measured the maximum distance from the waterfront one would be from these highways and roads. In the future, if the Central Outline Zoning Plan is allowed to proceed, you will be about 125 meters from a major road.

This is approximately the distance from Chater Garden to Stature Square. Our concern is that air pollution and road noise will be the waterfront's visitor's constant companions.

## **SUMMARY**

The undesirable traffic-congestion-air quality impacts from the Central Outline Zoning Plan are the result of poor planning and wrong priorities setting. The government needs to retrace its steps by reviewing the Central Outline Zoning Plan so that valuable land at the waterfront can be put to higher use than for highways and roads. Planning needs to ensure public health and environmental considerations receive their proper attention otherwise Hong Kong residents will suffer directly and visitors will continue to regard Hong Kong as smog city.