

Central Waterfront and Tamar
Traffic, Congestion and Air Quality

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

1. Hong Kong deserves a great waterfront

1.1 Save Our Shorelines is primarily concerned with the waterfront experience in Hong Kong because the city's shorelines are one of the city's greatest natural assets.

1.2 The people of Hong Kong deserve good and sensitive urban planning and design that show case the city's stunning natural surroundings so that residents and visitors can enjoy an incomparable waterfront experience. To achieve this end, planners need to get the right mix of economic activities and to provide clean and healthy environment.

2. What's wrong today?

2.1 Unfortunately, Hong Kong has an outdated planning process and set of priorities that compromise the city's shorelines and harbour-front, resulting in an extremely poor waterfront experience for residents and visitors. Not only is our waterfront experience aesthetically ugly, it is also unhealthy, as roadside air quality and the overall noise are very poor.

3. Outdated planning process

A key problem in Hong Kong's planning process is that within the Government's planning system, town planning is made subordinate to highways and roads planning. This is a well-known and long-standing issue. Legislators will recall the unofficial members of the Town Planning Board going before them when they scrutinized amendments to the Town Planning Ordinance in recent years urging the planning process to be changed so that highways and roads planning would be made subordinate to the overall town planning process and not be given the priority that it has today.

Frames 4 and 5 of our power-point presentation uses government road plans to show specific problem areas that are likely to be severe and will impact the entire Central waterfront experience.

Frame 4 shows the problems from in front of City Hall to IFC Two. The highway "P2" has 6-lanes and at places will have more in order to provide for slip roads. There will be a large bus terminal at ground-level sitting beneath the raised "Groundscraper", as well as a mini-bus terminal. The air pollution there will be severe.

Frame 5 shows the problems at the Tamar and HKCEC end. Government road plans show there will be many highways and roads converging there. Indeed, there are 13 lanes converging in one location! Thus, the immediate areas near Tamar will be not only aesthetically poor but people outdoors there will also be affected by bad air

quality. While the Government says there will be open space at Tamar for public enjoyment, our concern is that the area will be unhealthy enough that the public will stay away.

4. The current best is not good enough

Frame 6 shows Bauhinia Square. This was an area specially designed to show the Bauhinia monument. However, it is clear that its proximity to vehicles make it a less than attractive and healthy place. This is a result of planning that gives roads priority and other aspects of town planning a lower priority.

5. Worse is yet to come – subordinate pedestrians to vehicles

The current plans for the Central waterfront will in fact subordinate pedestrians to vehicles. With the packing in of even higher density along the waterfront, more highways and roads will be built. In the case of the highway P2, which is a high-capacity highway, there will be no pedestrian crossings possible. Pedestrians will be forced to go to the waterfront by means of raised walkways at the Wanchai-end, and through the “Groundscraper” at the IFC-end.

The elimination of at grade walking for pedestrians represents a unique Hong Kong planning solution that is a direct result of giving priority to roads over town planning. This methods runs counter to planning in other World Cities where planning provides for as much at grade pedestrian experience as possible. Without a review of the entire Central Outline Zoning Plan, it would be impossible to revise all the problems related to the plan.

5. Air pollution will be an even more serious problem in Central

Frames 8 and 9 show how specific aspects of the Central plan will compound air pollution.

Not only will there be the canyon effect caused by trapped air pollution between buildings, but air quality will also be negatively impacted by sub-optimal urban design that traps pollution. These include the combination of raised walkways, the bus and mini-bus terminals at the “Groundscraper”; and the tunnel-like effect pollution traps created by walkways and buildings at the “Groundscraper”. Where the highway coming from Western will join the Central-Wanchai Bypass and the roads/traffic arrangement near the IFC and the new Star Ferry, the air quality and aesthetic experience will most probably be poor.

SUMMARY

We urge legislators to view the government’s plans for Tamar to be viewed within the context of the entire Central waterfront. We do not believe it is possible to improve the waterfront experience by piecemeal and ad hoc measures for the sake of expediency. For the best long-term results, a review of the Central Outline Zoning Plan is necessary. Furthermore, legislators must press the government to carry out a new EIA on air quality for the whole Central area. The existing assessments were based on outdated information and application of the wrong model. It would be irresponsible of the government not to re-do the air quality EIA in view of the severity of the problem in Hong Kong.

Only by carrying out a review of the Central plans can legislators and the public be assured of having a chance for Hong Kong to have a world class waterfront.