


PI/LEGCO  
22/08/2007 10:35

To Winnie WY CHENG/LEGCO@LEGCO  
cc  
bcc

Subject Fw: Proposed changes to Lantau Ferries

History:  This message has been forwarded.

----- Forwarded by PI/LEGCO on 2007/08/22 AM 10:34 -----



"dawnandjon"

2007/08/21 PM 11:47

To <kfcheng428@gmail.com>  
cc <pi@legco.gov.hk>  
Subject Proposed changes to Lantau Ferries

I know you have probably received loads of e-mails about the proposed changes to the Lantau/Peng Chau ferry service which must be so tiring; I rarely write on these matters but am concerned enough to do so having returned from holiday and heard about the proposed changes to the ferries from Mui Wo.

I live in Cheung Sha and use the ferries, my car and buses; currently I am unclear what information and data these proposed changes have been based on. How have residents and users of the transport been involved in looking at possible choices and what consultation has been held with the residents of Peng Chau and Lantau?

I don't want to suggest everything continues as it does now (to be honest I'm not convinced it works, as you will see in some of the points below) but I would like to share some thoughts/observations and ask some questions:

- **TOURISTS** - Hong Kong has a thriving tourist industry (we are told with millions of visitors each year). I am always amazed at the number of buses that stream over the Tung Chung to Lantau hill each weekend, bringing people to see the Buddha and Tai O. I often wonder why people don't come by ferry instead - it's so much nicer. I believe one of the reasons is that it is much easier to go by road. For instance, the number 11 bus leaves Tai O every 15 minutes for Tung Chung; the no. 1 leaves much less frequently and is not even timed to ensure it makes the ferries going to Central. I know from experience that people give up waiting for the bus to the ferry and catch the one to Tung Chung that is leaving 'now'.

This implies that the current ferry service does not meet needs. Changing it to be even more inconvenient will not help this situation. Any proposed changes should encourage people to take the ferries rather than the buses - not the opposite. I do not believe the proposed changes will help this situation. Many tourists come to Lantau compared to other island other communities - they also tend to travel in opposite directions to work commuters therefore providing opportunities for revenues throughout the day, not just at peak times. This surely presents an opportunity?

- **PEAK TIME TRAVEL** - The ferries in the morning are full and not very frequent. I prefer a fast ferry in the morning to get to work (commuters generally don't seem to take the slow ferries). However given there are only 3 of them between 7am and 9am (compared to over 15 from Discovery Bay within the same time period), if I miss one and need to be in by a certain time I have to take a bus or drive over the hill. I know other people do the same. I've felt for a long time that more frequent ferries would help encourage use of the service, rather than reduce it.

We need to understand why people who work in Central/on Hong Kong island do not currently take the ferries - for me it is definitely the lack of frequency under the existing schedule.

- **OTHER PEAK TIMES** - I find it odd that peak time is only considered to be 7am-9am - maybe I missed this is in the government paper? What about all the secondary school children who return home in late afternoon (if you remember the Mui Wo secondary school has closed and there is no international secondary school on the island - therefore many more secondary school children need to go off Lantau). Children already travel 2-3 hours a day to get to their

schools - they are going to be even more tired and potentially isolated from joining in school activities if they have to travel for longer. This then becomes another reason for people with teenage children to move off Lantau to be able to send their children to a school locally (it's certainly a question for us when we reach that stage and I know people who have left for this reason).

Similarly the ferries between 6pm and 7.30pm which I regularly get always have several seats taken in every row. Isn't this period also a peak hour? Will the ferries have enough seats for both Lantau and Peng Chau residents?

- **ENVIRONMENT AND CONGESTION** - If the ferries start to become less convenient I will give up trying to catch them and drive instead. This will not increase, but decrease current revenues. Others I believe will do the same. The side product of this is that more cars will be on the roads. Obviously this does not help already congested Hong Kong roads or the environment. Is that supporting government policies?
- **COMMUNITY AND DEMOGRAPHICS** - Public transport is meant to support the community which it serves. That often means it is not profit making and in many parts of the world, public transport is subsidised. Ultimately making decisions about the ferries is also making decisions about the willingness to support a community and government commitments to providing alternatives to polluting cars and congested roads.

Lantau demographics have changed over the last few years and there is a more complex market than previously - you have people who carry goods, well paid commuters, school children and people who need access to services not provided on the south of Lantau (eg. hospitals, dentists, chemists, medical specialists). I'm not sure one solution fits all groups and some of these groups will find alternatives (including leaving the island).....

- **LONG-TERM PLANS FOR LANTAU** - I also wonder how these proposed changes fit with the proposed rejuvenation of Lantau - the Lantau concept plan (what happened to that)? How can reducing the existing service invigorate an economy? Where is the investment the government talked about only a few years ago? Lantau has unique and wonderful qualities - the nature, peace and lack of low rises make it special to both the residents and visitors. Lantau needs both these groups to thrive and after the poor economy in the early 2000s and SARS, Mui Wo felt like it was gathering some life again. What a shame to take that away..... Lantau doesn't want tower blocks and shopping malls but there is the potential to create something quite different and unique in Hong Kong, something sympathetic to the community and environment and something that will attract tourists. It seems a lack of imagination might be the biggest obstacle to achieving that.

#### **A SOLUTION ADDRESSING SYMPTOMS OR CAUSES?**

I would like to see some data that can then be discussed with representatives of the community - data that explains current travel routes both residents and tourists take, data that helps to analyse the rationale for the proposed changes. Are there really no alternatives? Why is not looking at how to promote the ferry service, marketing it and making it a viable alternative to a crowded, nausea inducing and smelly bus a possibility?

Cost cutting is rarely the answer; the proposal intends to reduce the existing service, not improve it and sadly this only encourages (or forces) people to find alternatives. I don't think this will be solution to increasing revenues or volumes.....

The ferries don't seem to be a problem or a solution on their own; they seem to be symptomatic of a bigger issue. What is needed is more dialogue, transparency and listening to both sides to help to find alternatives and potentially a better solution. What are the community and government trying to achieve; what is best for Lantau as a whole and how can the ferries best serve those needs?

I don't pretend to have the data to back up my arguments; however I do expect the Department of Transport to have data to support what they are proposing and would be interested in understanding more about what this is.....

If you would like to contact me about any of the above, I'd be very happy to discuss it with you. Thank you for listening (reading).

#### **SAD BUT TRUE**

If the ferry times change I will drive to work (but I don't want to).....

Regards,

Dawn De Morgan