

Harbour-front Enhancement Committee
Sub-committee on Wan Chai Development Phase II Review
Expert Panel Forum on Sustainable Transport Planning and Central-Wan Chai
Bypass
Submission to the Expert Panel

Herewith is an independent personal opinion with respect to the planned Central and Wanchai Bypass for consideration by the Expert Panel Forum.

Attached is an opinion submitted to Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau in February 2004 which supports the implementation of the CWB. I also recently provided an independent assessment of the surface roads on the Central Reclamation III under the auspices of the Society for the Protection of the Harbour (Town Planning Board, August 5th 2005) and again made clear my opinion on the CWB.

My opinion remains unchanged and is independent of Government or other interested parties and is presented again to the present forum.

In short my opinion is that I support the CWB as part of an integrated land use/transport/environmental strategy for Hong Kong Island and the Harbour Area as it resolves a number of pressing environmental and transport issues and presents a range of opportunities to rearrange the usage of scarce landspace to raise the social, economic and amenity value of the waterfront areas and adjacent hinterland for residents, workers and visitors.

I do not support the CWB if its purpose is solely to cater for uncontrolled growth in traffic on Hong Kong Island.

I wish to emphasise some points more relevant at this time in order to clarify the arguments and issues which must be addressed by the Forum.

1. The CWB was conceived as part of a land use/transport/environmental strategy for Hong Kong Island North as long ago as the early 1980s. Its justification, function and designs must support the integrity of such a comprehensive sustainable development strategy - it is not just a traffic relief route.
2. The usage of the very costly CWB must be maximised to secure maximum benefit to surface transport and environment, which means:
 - Diverting through traffic
 - Providing easy access/egress in Central North, Wanchai North and Causeway Bay

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The present scheme for the Wanchai/Central section does not achieve this and has missing links and will be underutilised. The Wanchai/Causeway Bay section is under review and therefore the opportunity remains to optimize the design. The Government is inviting comment and should respond accordingly.

3. The CWB is an urban distributor/bypass not an expressway. An expressway standard road is not needed in the heart of the CBD on Hong Kong Island – that is US influenced 1960’s thinking. HyD/TD need to rethink their design approach with more open minds focussed on the broader objectives.
4. If at all possible, the yet to be finalised Wanchai/Causeway Bay section of the CWB should be underground/depressed in the interests of protecting the long term value of the waterfront and harbour as a whole. A full cost/benefit should be carried out and published by Government. Many cities are tearing down elevated eyesores in their CBDs and waterfronts.
5. Surface roads on the reclamation should be minimised and downgraded as far as possible and maximum priority given to pedestrians and bringing the people to the waterfront. The scale of such roads is directly linked to the function and design of the CWB and to the scale of new development. No proper assessment has been presented by Government to date. The TD report submitted to this Committee fails to refer to these issues and Road P2 in any detail.
6. As regards “Sustainable Transport Planning”, Transport Department should have presented a comprehensive public transport and pedestrian strategy for the reclamation areas integrated with the existing north foreshore of HKIs. The TD report presented to the forum is a road traffic report and reflects traffic congestion relief thinking, pays lip service to public transport, pedestrians and the environment and seriously sells short the role of the CWB in an integrated land use/transport/environmental strategy. In this regard it is totally inadequate. The Forum should review the CWB on a comprehensive basis and require the Government to provide the necessary information.
7. The need for Demand Management incorporating ERP should be judged on its merits regardless of the CWB, linking the two simply muddies the water. The CWB will not be in place until 2012 or much later as things stand. According to Table 4.5 of the TD report the East-West Corridor is already

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saturated and by interpolation to their disturbing 2016 forecasts there will be severe congestion if not gridlock well before 2012 and well before the opening of the CWB. Clearly according to TD's own analysis, action is essential before CWB, and ERP could be one component of a demand management strategy. An early implementation of ERP could take a number of forms and should not be written off because there is no bypass.

8. Without the bypass, under ERP all parties seem to assume that all traffic using the scarce roadspace of Central may need to be charged, whereas with a bypass the option exists not to charge through traffic. This may be politically more acceptable but it is not a technical feasibility issue. In fact bypass traffic may still be charged in a broader ERP strategy for usage of scarce roadspace on Hong Kong Island. Conversely, before a bypass is in place, it may still be possible to utilise ERP to charge differentially and allow through traffic, which is already channelised through Pedder Street underpass and Harcourt Road flyover, free passage. It should be noted in Singapore ERP is not just a cordon system, charges are made on selected arterials where there are no bypasses or alternative routes.
9. Also the London scheme is an "Area Licensing Scheme" where a daily charge is made for the right to drive within the Charge Zone during the Charge Period. Whereas the Singapore scheme is a "Cordon Crossing Scheme" where vehicles are charged each time they cross the cordon around the Charge Zone (or at certain isolated charge points) during the Charge Period. Singapore charges taxis, London does not. Therefore as noted above ERP can take many forms to achieve different objectives.
10. Furthermore care should be taken in comparing London data and HKSAR data to make sure comparisons are like with like. In particular it should be noted that rail carries 70-80% of trips into Central London but less than 50% into Central Hong Kong.

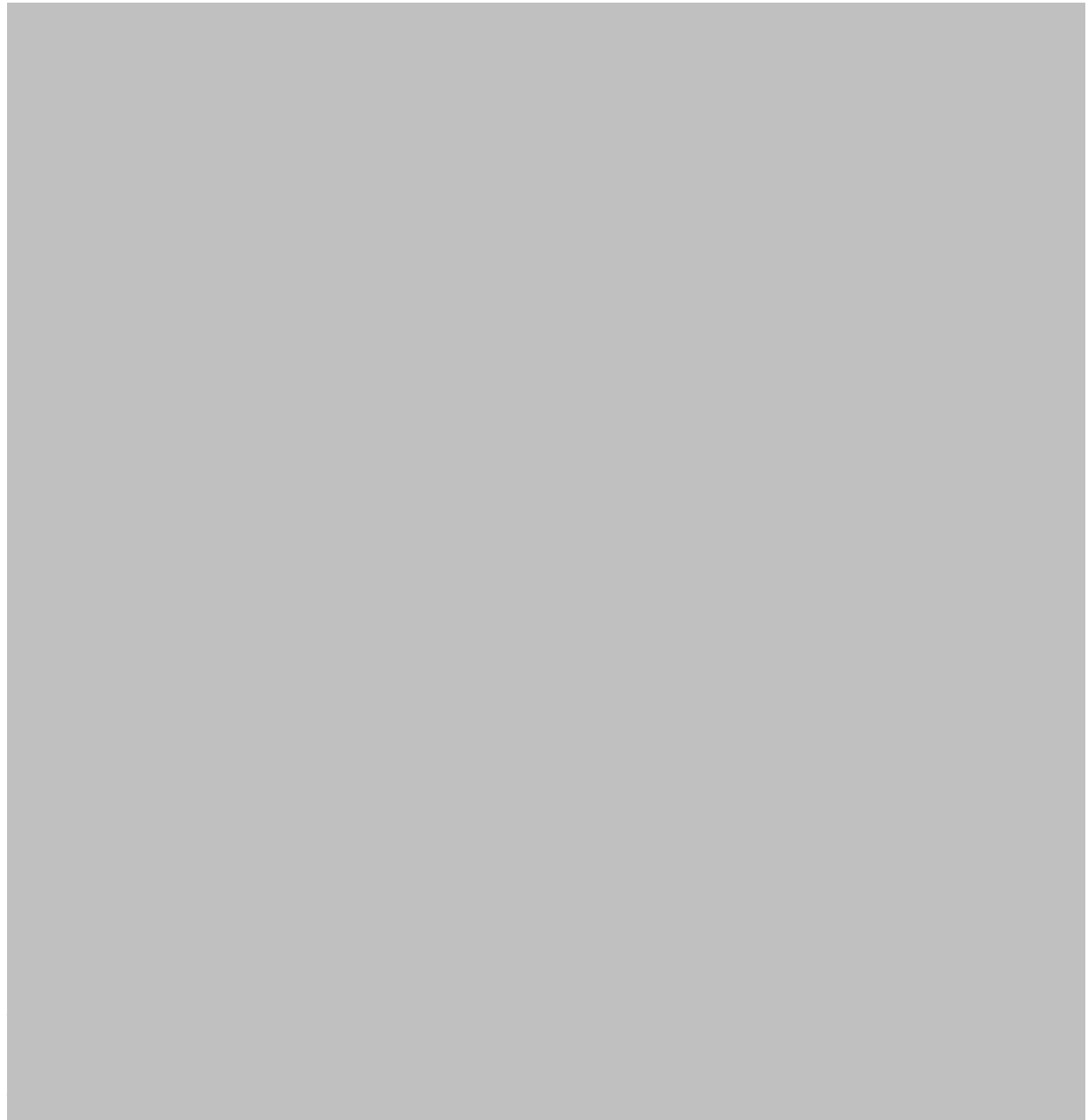
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April 2004

CENTRAL AND WANCHAI BYPASS (C&WB)



Qualifications and Experience



Expert Opinion



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Background

The C&WB was originally conceived as an integral part of a land use/transport strategy prepared for Central and Mid-levels in the early 1980s. A phased strategy was endorsed at that time including the following key components:

- 1 Upgrading of Connaught Road/Harcourt Road/Gloucester Road incorporating Rumsey St Flyover, Pedder St underpass, Harcourt Rd Flyover (CR/HR/GR corridor) and associated traffic management measures throughout the CBD.
- 2 Pedestrian and environmental networks including the internationally admired elevated networks and Mid-Levels escalator plus proposals for pedestrianisation and traffic calming including parts of Queens Road Central and side streets.
- 3 Public transport priority corridor for buses and trams through Des Voeux Road Central
- 4 Development of the MTR mass transit system providing off street public transport
- 5 The development of the C&WB permitting traffic and environmental relief of existing roads and opening up opportunities for the further expansion of pedestrian and environmental management schemes and restructuring of on-street public transport.

Items 1 to 4 were implemented in the 1980s and have provided the CBD with high level of accessibility over the past fifteen years or so. The C&WB was recommended for timely implementation in the 1990s following completion of the upgrading of the CR/HR/GR corridor. The bypass was subsequently scheduled for phased implementation in coordination with plans for railway development in conjunction with planned reclamation and was slated for opening around 2010, very substantially later than originally envisaged.

North Hong Kong Island

The CBD of Hong Kong is now established as home to the leading financial centre of the region, as well as a commercial and tourist district and is a flagship for Hong Kong to gain recognition as a World City. However in recent years the environment and image of the CBD has deteriorated to a large degree due to the growth in road traffic concentrated in the existing canyon streets and to the continued delay of the

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C&WB preventing implementation of further planning, transport and environmental improvements. The prospects for the future are as follows.

- Redevelopment and urban renewal in old established areas south of Connaught Road/Harcourt Rd/Gloucester Road
- Completion of development plans on the existing Central reclamation: Exchange Square, IFC 1 and 2, Airport Railway, hotel and waterfront developments.
- Economic recovery following five years of recession, especially with the financial sector located in Central enjoying a return to high activity levels.
- Major increases in tourism generating travel to/from Hong Kong Island

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In short there will be substantial increases in travel by all modes to the north foreshore of Hong Kong Island and the CBD in particular. Of key concern is the growing traffic to and from the existing, recently completed and committed developments at Central reclamation originally planned on the basis of new road links to the east including the C&WB. With the already protracted delay to the C&WB, the travel and environmental prospects for the CBD are as follows:

- Worsening traffic congestion along the main east-west corridor of Connaught Rd, Harcourt Rd, Gloucester Rd, already evident in recent weeks as the economy picks up.
- Increasing risk of grid-lock to/from Central reclamation threatening the accessibility of the Airport Railway, ferry piers, public transport terminals, key tourist facilities and the CBD generally
- Substandard air quality, noise levels and physical environment at street level
- Deteriorating operating conditions for public transport
- A waterfront with poor access to and environment for pedestrians

Such prospects are far from consistent with the image of the CBD of a World City

The Role of the C&WB

The C&WB plays a key role in achieving strategic land use, environmental and transport development as illustrated is **Figure 1**. It is not and should not be seen just as a road to meet future traffic growth. It is an essential component for the overall revitalization of the CBD through a comprehensive planning, transport and environmental strategy. The bypass will bring the following benefits and opportunities:

- Provide new access/egress to Central reclamation and north Wanchai and a high standard, largely underground, bypass extending from the Western Harbour Tunnel to the Island Eastern Corridor connecting though to the Eastern Harbour Tunnel.
- Divert through traffic from the congested main east-west corridor of Connaught Rd, Harcourt Rd, Gloucester Rd releasing space for district access traffic and for public transport priorities
- Enable the diversion of public transport and general traffic to the main east west CR/HR/GR corridor permitting more of the roadspace in the busy

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shopping, commercial and leisure streets in "old" Central to be made people-dominated through area-wide pedestrianisation and traffic calming schemes.

- By improving pedestrian accessibility promote the use of public transport generally and work towards traffic free areas in the CBD.
- Provide a traffic free waterfront to complete the pedestrian network for the CBD
- Play a major role in alleviating the sub-standard physical environment of the CBD

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From the foregoing it is evident the C&WB is not just for traffic growth, indeed it can form a key component of controlling traffic volumes entering the CBD in two ways. First it provides a bypass thereby reducing vehicular flows and associated emissions of fumes and noise in the CBD surface streets. Secondly it can facilitate the introduction of road pricing or similar restraint measures by separating through traffic from terminating CBD traffic thereby offering motorists a bypass route to any restraint or charging zone. At present the interaction of through traffic and terminating traffic is a major cause of congestion in the CBD. Setting aside the commercial issues, the bypass also offers the potential to manage cross harbour traffic by promoting the use of the Western Harbour Tunnel instead of the congested Central Tunnel. This is not possible today since Connaught Rd eastbound is a major bottleneck creating serious egress problems for the existing Central reclamation (which the C&WB will relieve) and could not absorb more traffic.

Surface Roads

The current plans also include a new surface road (Road P2) which should provide district level connections to development between Central and Wanchai reclamations. The scale and configuration of this road should be consistent with the adjacent development levels and as such should be minimized in the interests of the amenity value and environment of the waterfront area. Furthermore the road network configurations in Wanchai North should be reviewed to seek to promote the diversion of surface traffic to the underground sections of the bypass in order to gain maximum traffic and environmental relief.

Summary

The C&WB is an essential component for the land use/transport/environmental revitalization and development of the CBD. The original planning for the bypass envisaged completion in the 1990s. The protracted delay in implementation is already causing degradation of the environment and accessibility in the CBD, affecting the image of Hong Kong. It is essential that the bypass is implemented as soon as possible in order to gain the many planning, environmental and transport benefits it offers and to resolve the mounting environmental and traffic problems in the CBD.

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