Sustainable Transport—A Strategy for Hong Kong
23 February 2002
Workshop Summary

On 23 February, Civic Exchange and the Asia Foundation hosted a full-day public forum on sustainable transport in Hong Kong. This forum was part of a larger year-long project. During the first phase of the project, two international transport experts visited Hong Kong with the brief to develop a “vision” of sustainable transport in 2030. These “visions” were meant to stimulate local discussion. The forum provided an opportunity for the two international consultants—Dick Rooks (the Netherlands) and Richard Gilbert (Canada)—to present their ideas and distribute their written reports. These reports are now available in Chinese and English at www.civic-exchange.org.

The forum also presented a range of other ideas. The Transport Department presented their “vision” of sustainable transport, as did Bill Barron (University of Hong Kong). Fred Brown (MVA) and Hung Wing-tat (Hong Kong Polytechnic University) gave brief responses to the presentations, sparking an animated question and answer session. During the question and answer session and subsequent small group discussion, a number of themes began to emerge:

• **Hong Kong has a strong base for improvement:** Hong Kong has one of the most sustainable, impressive transportation systems in the world. 89% of passenger trips are made by public transport and only 11% by private vehicle, a reversal of the situation in many other affluent cities. Compared to other cities, Hong Kong also has relatively low energy use per capita for transport. There is a 16-fold difference between Hong Kong (6.5 gigajoules per person) and Atlanta, the city with the highest energy use (103.3 gigajoules per person).

  Taken individually, Hong Kong transport companies are excellent. By any standard, the KCRC and the MTR Corporation are among the best public transport companies in the world. These advantages, coupled with Hong Kong’s wealth, put it in a good position to become an important sustainable transport model for the world.

• **Disturbing trends and the need for cleaner transport:** Despite these advantages, Hong Kong’s transportation system generates significant pollution. Worldwide, Hong Kong has the highest spatial intensity of carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds and particulate matter. Noise is also a major but neglected problem. Both noise and air pollution are poised to increase with population growth, increased cross-border transport and growth in private car ownership.

  To check these trends, there was consensus that transport needs to become cleaner over the next thirty years. Nearly all the participants agreed that rail use must increase, in keeping with the government’s plans. Road pricing may be one way to shift passengers and freight from crowded highways to rail. However, some participants believed that highways will remain necessary to transport freight and for tourists.
Most participants also advocated increased use of electric vehicles, although there was disagreement about the viability of widespread use. There were calls for government to re-visit the trolleybus study as a first step towards further electrification. Combined with the current electric tram system, trolleybuses could help make Hong Kong Island into a “green island.”

- **Need for integrated planning:** There was consensus that land use planning must become better integrated with transport and environmental planning. Used in the Netherlands for the last fifteen years, an integrated approach seeks to make decisions based on the best interests of society, rather than the interests of any single group or vested interest. For example, consultant Dick Rooks suggested that the MTR could be used to transport freight at night. From the MTR’s perspective, this currently does not make commercial sense because “externalities,” such as road congestion and air pollution, are not priced. However, it may make sense from a wider societal point of view.

Planning from a societal standpoint may also mean re-examining rail financing. Hong Kong gives no subsidies to rail for either operating costs or construction of new infrastructure, putting it in an unusual position among the world’s cities. Rail is often viewed as an environmentally friendly alternative to road transport, but the self-financing requirement makes rail expansion difficult. To a large extent, all of the profitable routes are already built. However, participants pointed out the need to monitor subsidies to make sure they don’t lead to shoddy service.

As part of an integrated approach, Hong Kong should re-examine its definition of competition. As currently defined, competition leads to duplication of routes and unnecessary congestion. Rather than have different operators on the same route, the Government could invite bids for a route and subsequently monitor company performance through benchmarks. In particular, road transport and rail transport should be seen as complementary rather than competitive.

Integrated planning also means better coordination between transport companies. Although Hong Kong’s transport companies are pockets of individual excellence, transport interchanges tend to be poor. For example, there is only one inconvenient interchange between the MTR and KCRC. To address this problem, several participants suggested a merger of the MTR Corporation and the KCRC.

- **Need for improved pedestrianization:** There was broad consensus that Hong Kong needs to create walkways and pedestrianize congested areas to make walking more inviting. Many short trips could be eliminated if walking was a pleasant, viable option. Several participants also mentioned bicycles as an excellent means of sustainable transport. With planning, biking could also become a feature of Hong Kong life.

- **Need to plan for the entire Pearl River Delta region:** As the border becomes more porous, many participants pointed out that transport planning needs to be better coordinated with the Mainland. In the 2030 time frame, cross-border traffic will be critical, particularly for freight. It was suggested that a separate study should be done to examine passenger and freight transport in the Pearl River Delta region. This scope of this study might include a re-examination of the desirability of becoming a logistics hub.
for the Pearl River Delta. While some participants felt that Hong Kong should follow Rotterdam’s example in logistics, others felt that the economic value of being a transshipment hub is questionable and Hong Kong should examine other options.

- **Need increased political literacy and increased public involvement in decision-making:** To move forward on sustainable transport, Hong Kong needs increased political literacy, accompanied by a sense of social responsibility. Concerned citizens need to become politically literate. They need to understand how public decisions are made so they can better participate in the political process. Public education about the political landscape is a critical part of this process.

In addition, the Government must consult citizens when making policy decisions. Route 7 is an example of how the public is currently marginalized from the political process. Despite polls that showed a public preference for rail, the Government has gone ahead with plans to build Route 7, a major highway. In the future, the Government needs to involve stakeholders earlier in the decision-making process and take their opinions more seriously.

In the next phase of the project, Civic Exchange will incorporate these themes and other comments from the forum into a final report on sustainable transport. The report will be published in May and sent to workshop participants. It will also be available at www.civic-exchange.org.
APPENDIX

During the afternoon session, the workshop split into four groups. With the aid of a facilitator, these groups delved more deeply into select topics. The following is a summary of the small group discussions and the subsequent large group wrap-up session.

**Group 1: Financing and Pricing—How to Create Incentives for Sustainable Transport**

**Facilitator: Tom Masterson**

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<th><strong>Challenges</strong></th>
<th><strong>Strategies</strong></th>
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| -shared definition of “sustainable”  
-a safe, quick transport system that functions without poisoning the environment  
-a methodology to measure benefits of sustainability  
-integrated, holistic planning approach that includes scenario planning and is open to all transport modes  
-flexible planning approach | -no more viable self-financing rail projects  
-road lobby stronger than rail lobby  
-is the user pays principle valid?  
-need robust investigation system  
-urban planning and transport planning are uncoordinated | -transport council (road, rail, taxi, car) to get people to talk together  
-better approval process  
-integrated, comprehensive planning process involving all stakeholders  
-those who benefit pay thorough fares, grants and possibly through bonds and taxes  
-capital grants  
-road pricing to support rail  
-early public participation in planning process |

**Group 2: Cleaner Road Technologies—How to Encourage Cleaner Vehicles and Fuels**

**Facilitator: Ivy Ning**

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| -clean air and water  
-efficient, pleasant transport system  
-reduced need to transfer  
-non-motorized transportation  
-rail-connected satellite towns  
-zero-emission transportation | -technology availability  
-legislation  
-high vehicle density and high population  
-social sense of responsibility  
-regional pollution  
-low quality fuels  
-vested interests (power/fuel companies, transport companies, vehicle manufacturers)  
-excessive immigration  
-lack of accepted international protocol (eg. Kyoto Protocol) | -public education  
-more encouragement for people taking initiative  
-better law enforcement  
-improve legislation  
-benchmarking of standards, performance indicators  
-government can be a role model  
-introduce new technologies  
-free government of vested interests |
### Group 3: Transport Mode Coordination—How to Make Interchanges More Efficient  
**Facilitator:** Mark Pixley  

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| -more coordination  
-seamless transition between modes  
-new types of fare collection (trust systems, monthly tickets)  
-unified point to point information system  
-more transfer points  
-integrated systems (so the passenger doesn’t notice the company)  
-information systems | -can’t afford more heavy rail—switch to buses or light rail?  
-are we prepared to pay?  
-can we handle an extra 3 million people?  
-integrating PRD | -pedestrianization—create walkways, footbridges, elevators  
-attraction of interchange area  
-design guidelines emphasizing transfer/mode transitions  
-coordination of fare transition  
-real time passenger information  
-shelter and shade design |

### Group 4: Freight and Logistics—How to Move Freight in a Sustainable Manner  
**Facilitator:** Rita So  

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<th><strong>Strategies</strong></th>
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| -Hong Kong as a logistics hub for the Pearl River Delta  
-rail-based network integrated with the PRD  
-Hong Kong should only import what’s needed | -costs of energy may skyrocket in 30 years  
-to survive, does HK need to produce something of value and not just services?  
-do Chinese ports want to cooperate with HK or bypass HK?  
-is there economic value in being a transshipment hub? Is Rotterdam a good model for HK?  
-impact of WTO?  
-HK is an expensive logistics center because the price of land is so high | -develop systematic, ongoing freight database so that planners have a good idea of the current situation  
-follow Netherlands decision-making process (integrated planning, public involvement)  
-government should investigate the need for a second container port  
-government/a consultant should create an alternative business plan for HK in which HK is not a logistics hub. Then government should do a proper evaluation of alternative possibilities |
Final Group Discussion

**What was interesting?**
- early engagement of stakeholders in planning
- seven generations perspective
- transport council
- Rotterdam as a model for HK
- individual areas of excellence, but not between areas—too much emphasis on competition
- better integrated transport planning (road and rail together)
- clarity of future threats—what are they?
- need for risk-based assessment
- too many stakeholders
- lack of a social sense of responsibility

**What were commonalities between the small group presentations?**
- process of getting stakeholder involvement. This approach will lead to better results.
- HK must integrate with the PRD
- User acceptance—choices are important
- pedestrianization
- better transport interchanges
- government has an important role to play

**What are the next steps?**
- need common definition of sustainable transport
- electronic dialogue on this topic
- economic model to make choices
- discussion with government on the choices
- create critical mass of concern
- multi-prong approach