

Reconstructing Urbanscape

– Research Report on Development Strategies of the Hong Kong “Secondary City Centre” and the Hong Kong Section of the Hi-Speed National Rail Network

Executive Summary

The Professional Commons
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Executive Summary

Despite the “Ten Major Infrastructure Projects” listed in the 2007 Policy Address have been magnificent in scale, they are unlikely to meet the needs of overall development, regional development as well as the long-term developmental needs of Hong Kong. The Professional Commons suggests that **the overall and long term development strategies of Hong Kong should be envisioned based on new growth points in the economy, realigning with the flow of capital and people, and readjusting the spatial development across the territories.**

1. Revamp of the Outdated Planning Strategies Based Upon Victoria Harbour

Judging from a planning perspective, the Hong Kong SAR Government (hereafter “the Government”) has upheld the planning strategies of colonial rule, i.e. the majority of development projects have been built along the shores of Victoria Harbour. Among the “Ten Major Infrastructure Projects”, the West Kowloon Cultural District, the Kai Tak Development Plan, the South Island Line of the Mass Transit Railway (MTR), the West Island Line (Eastern Section), the Shatin-Central Link and the Hong Kong Section of Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link [hereafter the GZ-SZ-HK Express Rail Link (HK Section)] will bring in an additional flow of people to the metro core. The geographical mismatch between residence and working opportunities is problematic. As many as 60% of the working population in Tuen Mun, Yuen Long, and the North District, have to commute on a cross-district basis, and those working in Hong Kong Island and Kowloon constitute 30% of the working population. It is obvious that **the planning strategies based upon Victoria Harbour as the core are unsustainable.**

Given that the development of New Territories North has been neglected for

years and many residents living there came from other communities or from the Mainland, **insufficient employment opportunities in the new towns, coupled with the high transport costs, undermine the chance of the under-privileged for upward mobility and leads to a vicious cycle of prolonged poverty.** Even “special industries” (that is industries which are not polluting, technology intensive and high value-added industries, such as research industries) have been designated for development in the three “New Development Areas” of Kwu Tung North, Fanling North and Ping Che/Ta Kung Leng (the “Three-in-One Scheme”) and in the Hung Shui Kiu New Development Area in Yuen Long, they will not generate much employment opportunities. Hence, a large number of residents might still need to travel hours to the metro core area for job opportunities, or even be subjected to unemployment. It is obvious that the Government is still unaware of the real problems in territorial planning, and therefore will continue to replicate its previous failures.

2. Development Strategies of the “Secondary City Centre” in the New Territories

The Government should have foresight in the formulation of the development strategies for Hong Kong through adopting a more forward-looking and holistic approach, taking into account of the cooperation between the Mainland and Hong Kong and other alternatives in economic development, rather than confining to individual planning parameters such as the population, land use, infrastructure, etc. It would be important to nurture different levels of “City Centres”. The metro core shall maintain the status as the most prominent business centre in the territory, while a number of Secondary City Centres should be developed beyond the metro core. The Government should help develop regional economic centres which could provide relatively inexpensive offices and commercial premises out of the metro core in a bid to house local small and medium-sized enterprises and companies engaging in Mainland trade.

A regional development strategy should be in place to encourage new investments in specific areas. Under a “regional” based taxation system, economic incentives such as different tax credits and concessions, reduction of rates and Government rents, etc. should be available to service the policy goal. The minimum resident threshold required by the Government for the provision of community facilities and services shall be lowered in the New Territories, as the residents of public housing in the New Development Areas are mostly come from the grassroots who might have lost their community network and family support due to the

relocation. Such inadequacies may result in greater demand for public services.

3. New Opportunities Brought about from the Construction of the High-speed National Rail Link

At present, many cross-boundary infrastructure projects between Guangdong, Shenzhen, Hong Kong and Macao are negotiation, including the Lok Ma Chau Loop, the GZ-SZ-HK Express Rail Link, and the Hong Kong-Macau-Zhuhai Bridge, and the rail connection between Hong Kong and Shenzhen Airports. **Against this background, the Government should expedite its review on the overall planning strategy of Hong Kong, and accord high priority to the development strategies of the New Territories and the planning of the GZ-SZ-HK Rail Link.**

As the initial stage of the High-speed National Rail Link is scheduled to be completed by 2013, the Government should aim at synchronizing the completion date between the GZ-SZ-HK Express Rail Link (HK Section) with that of the Mainland section. By doing so, it will enable a direct rail connection between Hong Kong and the major cities in the Mainland, and to facilitate the immediate connection with the Pearl River Delta Inter-city Express Rail Network. We also hold the view that the reduction of construction and operating costs is of utmost importance too.

To this end, **Kam Sheung Road should be developed into the terminus of the Hi-speed National Rail Network.** It would be advisable to (1) construct the terminus under the Kam Sheung Road West Rail Line station and its immediate surroundings (the existing car park) and (2) construct this section of the railway to Futian, Shenzhen through tunneling, in order to reduce the environmental damage to the minimum.

When the SZ-SZ-HK Rail Link (HK Section) and the Northern Link are completed, it is likely for Kam Sheung Road to serve as a major transport hub connecting the East and West of the New Territories, and between Hong Kong and the Mainland. In terms of rail transport, the headquarters of the West Rail Line and the Kam Sheung Road station are already located there. The planned Northern Link will connect Kam Sheung Road station with the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line and the East Rail Line. Moreover, it only takes 8 minutes to Tsuen Wan, and 29 minutes to the Hong Kong Station in Central. In terms of the road transport, the Kam Sheung Road station is served by 23 minibuses and bus lines, and a number of highways are connecting between the station and different areas of Hong Kong. **4. Kam Sheung Road**

Secondary City Centre

Should Kam Sheung Road be developed into a “Secondary City Centre”, its span shall be extended to Au Tau at the North, to Yuen Long in the Northwest, and to the Pat Heung Depot at the South, and grow into a “Kam Sheung Road-Yuen Long-Au Tau Secondary City Centre Core Area” (hereafter the “Core Area”). It would be of equal importance to ensure that the conservation areas, such as the Tai Lam Country Park, are being well protected and preserved. To ensure the vibrancy of the new “Core Area” as well as to alleviate the employment problem for the residents nearby, it would be advisable for the “Core Area” to perform some of the city functions listed below:

- **Mainland-Hong Kong Business, Trade and Exhibition Centre:** Proximity of an exhibition centre to a transport hub would help create a clustering effect and promote the development in trade. There is also a massive demand for exhibition and event hosting services among the 3 million residents in the New Territories and they would be a major source of potential users.
- **Hotel Hub:** Placing various types of accommodation facilities, such as three to four star hotels, guest houses, and service apartments for short-term rental, for different types of tourists.
- **Regional Headquarters for the Government:** Reprovisioning some of the government office towers originally located in the Wan Chai can help strengthen the governance in the New Territories.
- **Cultural and Arts Facilities:** A mid-level regional cultural centre could be established to provide learning and training studios for cultural activities, performing arts venues, or even a large-scale library of a “central library” status.
- **Residential Development:** Many models of residential development can take place, including service apartments, low density residential units, and large scale housing compounds.
- **University Town:** The “Hong Kong 2030” Study has previously identified Kam Tin/Au Tau as a suitable location for a “university town”.