

HONG KONG INTERCHANGE STATION EXPRESS RAILWAY LINK PROPOSAL

On behalf of Professional Commons and our panel of experts, I would like to welcome everyone to our presentation this afternoon on the most important topic of the direct Hong Kong link to the national express railway system.

Few of us would contest the need for and value of ensuring a direct rail link from within Hong Kong to the national express railway system which has its southern hub at Shibi, 18 metro stations southwest of Guangzhou.

And most, if not all of us, would be concerned that this link is designed to be as cost effective and efficient as possible.

If you live in Tuen Mun, Yuen Long, Tin Shui Wai, Fanling, Sheung Shui or almost anywhere in the New Territories you will not want to traipse down to the wilderness of West Kowloon, only to go back up to pretty much where you started off before you could be heading out to join the national express system. Nor would you be enthusiastic to be whisked down to West Kowloon on your return, only to have to traverse hundreds of yards of terminal concourse and be propelled up as many as 15 floors and down as many as 12 floor levels so you could find transport to take you back pretty much the way you came and on to your home.

Scarcely fifteen years ago Hong Kong spent of billions of dollars moving tens of millions of cubic metres of landfill to create the West Kowloon reclamation as one of the core Chek Lap Kok airport projects and is now confronted with the prospect of spending hundreds of million dollars more to remove millions of cubic metres from that same reclamation so it can pour hundreds of tons of concrete to create a terminus in a place that is a dead end.

Do we really want to see Hong Kong in the Guinness Book of records as having built the world's most expensive express railway on a per kilometer basis and by a significant margin too? I rather think not.

But this is what the Government is promising to deliver to us in a project that is stupidity bordering on lunacy.

This project brings into sharp perspective an important governance issue and that is the clear and pressing need for a well defined system of public consultation for core infrastructure projects. The Government has an abiding tendency to blast forward with large ticket core infrastructure projects presented as economic manna from the heaven of Upper Albert Road, the panacea for the people for any economic Armageddon we might be facing, with out any public consultation, not even one of its cosmetic public consultations, which it engages in with ears firmly shut.

There is rarely a single right or correct solution for any issue. Each has many variables and the right solution depends on which set of variables are considered by different people or different groups of people to be the most important to them. It often seems as if the key criteria for the Government, in an infrastructure project, is how many million tons of concrete can be poured and how big a cost overrun can eventually be generated.

Therefore it is critically important that the Government conducts a thorough public consultation and presents with its proposals social impact assessments and economic impact assessments as well as environmental impact assessments. And it is also time that some of our senior officials learned the meaning of words, an HK\$80 billion economic return on a HK\$39 billion investment, as it was estimate for the project cost when this gem of economic appraisal was uttered, over a 50 year period for an economy with an annual GDP of HK\$1.6 trillion is by no stretch of even the most inventive imagination a huge economic return.

Our panel of experts will now show with hard facts and irrefutable logic that Hong Kong can provide a direct link into the national express railway system, that is far less costly than the Government's proposal, less than half the cost, that will deliver this with reduced over total times for the large majority of commuters at a lesser total journey cost for everyone and that will leave a far less adverse environmental impact.

So let me now hand you over to objectivity and sanity.