

Accountability: Making Pedestrianisation a Government Priority

Problem

Most citizens are pedestrians in their daily lives, yet the pedestrian environment presents many problems – air quality may be poor, the physical environment may be untidy or in poor condition, pedestrians may be squeezed into inadequate space with poor movement and in competition with vehicles or unauthorised land users.

Public opinion is very positive about improvements that have already been made, and Government has developed various visionary schemes to improve the pedestrian environment further. We believe that any socio-economic analysis of pedestrian schemes will clearly demonstrate substantial benefits, far in excess of the costs incurred. But implementation is foundering because of inadequate accountability, fragmented responsibilities and a failure to address various vested interests

Proposal

We **propose** that you adopt the following package in the 2009 Policy Address:

- (a) Explicitly recognise **the importance of the pedestrian** environment for our citizens, and accords pedestrians the same status as vehicular traffic in planning, evaluating and implementing projects;
- (b) Designate a **policy secretary to be accountable** for coordinating a revitalised programme to improve the pedestrian environment, including ensuring that all concerned Bureaux and Departments share a common vision, work to the same programme and allocate sufficient resources (additional or by redeployment) to this end;
- (c) Set out the **revitalised programme** to cover;
 - (i) **Connectivity**, meaning the ability for pedestrians to move freely along demand lines within and between areas.
 - (ii) **Pedestrian Areas**, meaning the improvement of the street environment through the implementation of a range of measures from pavement widening to the introduction of well managed “Pedestrian Priority Zones”.
 - (iii) **Quality**, meaning ensuring that pedestrian facilities are made as attractive and safe as possible, for example by minimising level changes and implementing people-friendly street furniture.

Further details on the proposed revitalised programme are in the Annex.



Accountability: Making Pedestrianisation a Government Priority An Outline Revitalised Pedestrianisation Programme

Detail

- (a) **On connectivity**, walking is a healthy and environmentally-friendly form of transport. If we have a well-planned walking network, i.e. in a weather-proof and interesting/comfortable environment, then people will be willing to walk longer distances. Good walking links encourage people to use public transport. In particular we should do all we can to attract people to use the off-road, clean railway system, to achieve the policy objective of 60% market share for rail by 2030.

The Government should develop an approach comprising:

- (i) **Public Area Networks** - such as the walkways from Exchange Square to the Star Ferry (North) and Shun Tak Centre (West), and the walkways connecting Wanchai MTR station with North Wanchai, via Immigration Tower, to the Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Public Area Networks are under planning following the commitments made in the 2008 Policy Address (Causeway Bay, Mong Kok and Yuen Long). However, long-standing plans to improve the connectivity between Wanchai North and Citic Tower, and from Shun Tak Centre to the West remain unfunded.

- We **propose** that Government expand the 2008 Policy Address programme to develop further Public Area Networks. The first might be to develop a comprehensive network within and between Central and Wanchai, including funding the planned Wanchai North/Citic Tower and Shun Tak/West Hong Kong connections.
 - We **propose** that Government incorporate the requirements for Public Area Networks in residential and shopping areas into the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines and into the Transport Planning and Design Manual.
 - We **propose** that Government further review possible locations to introduce off-road facilities such as the Mid-levels Escalator, to identify a programme of such facilities to be introduced within the next 5 years.
- (ii) **Private Area Networks** - such as the walkway system in Central which connects various commercial buildings (Princes Building, the Landmark, Worldwide House, IFC etc).

In Central, the Private Area Network links with the Public Area Network to provide more comprehensive, seamless connectivity across large parts of Central. The Private Area Network is attractive and air-conditioned, and brings much pedestrian traffic into the commercial buildings.



- We **propose** that Government take the initiative to plan Private Area Networks, so that when redevelopment occurs Government may require developers to include the necessary facilities in their plans. The first areas for such a study may be Causeway Bay and Mong Kok.
- (iii) **Quality** – for connectivity, it is essential to avoid/minimise changes in level as these are very difficult to negotiate for the disabled, the elderly and those with children, pushchairs, goods and shopping. Also, underground passageways are generally less attractive than open air connections, as they tend to be rather boring and some find them threatening as they are closed-in.
- Where changes in level are necessary, we **propose** that careful consideration should be given to ameliorating measures, i.e. ramps, lifts, escalators, with a view to finding the most user-friendly. Consideration may also be given to relaxing the planning guidelines for such facilities.
 - Where possible, we **propose** that connecting walkways be open- air rather than underground. Where this is not possible, we **propose** that special attention be paid to design features, with commercial facilities and other attractions to make them feel more attractive and safer.
- (iv) Drivers for Area Networks include transport interchanges, railway stations, popular tourist facilities such as the harbour front, commercial centres, popular venues such as the Jockey Club, Victoria Park, or redevelopment especially in cooperation with the Urban Renewal Authority.
- (b) **On pedestrian areas**, many cities have developed extensive pedestrian schemes dedicating road space to people who can enjoy a good environment, including cleaner air, without competing for space with vehicles. Such schemes promote vibrant city streets, with thriving businesses, and a better quality of life for citizens.

The Government should develop:

- (i) **Pedestrian Priority Zones** – there are a number of areas with very heavy pedestrian traffic – Central, Wanchai, Causeway Bay, Tsim Sha Tsui, Mong Kok and, somewhat different in nature, Stanley. Government has implemented various improvements in these areas, and developed quite visionary plans for further improvements, either through the Planning Department or the Transport Department.

However, while much has been done, there are major obstacles to further substantial progress. First, some stakeholders object to change. Second, the enforcement departments (Police, FEHD, Lands) are not ready to commit the necessary resources to maintain order in these areas, which are very attractive for unauthorised users, e.g. hawking, illegal extension of business premises, etc.



These areas are nevertheless very valuable, and should provide quality environment and facilities to the thousands who pass through every day.

- We **propose** that Government develops an ongoing ambitious programme to implement extensive pedestrian projects, including full- and part-time pedestrianisation, in the heavy pedestrian traffic areas noted above. This would include a review of the various proposals for improvement either through Area Improvement Plans (Planning Department) or other pedestrian plans (Transport Department). These areas should be designated as “**Pedestrian Priority Zones**”.
 - We **propose** that Government develop **regulatory standards** to apply within designated Pedestrian Priority Zones, and ensure that proper enforcement arrangements are put in place, either through the concerned Government Departments, or through contracting out arrangements. A possible framework for such stronger regulation is at the Appendix. It is for consideration whether general enforcement teams should be developed under a lead Department, with authority to act across the whole range of regulated activities (from parking to hawking).
 - Where there are objections from stakeholders, we **propose** that **greater political will** be applied to resolve them, and if necessary changes be implemented on an incremental basis to secure buy-in.
- (ii) **General improvements to pedestrian facilities** – these would range from the simplest of measures – e.g., more green time for pedestrian phases at traffic signals and shorter cycle times, to widening of sidewalks, reduction in poles and obstructions on sidewalks, widening of pavements at junctions, traffic calming and so on.
- We **propose** that Government develop an ongoing programme of areas to study for minor improvements, for example Happy Valley, Jordan, the centre of Tai Po town, the centre of Tsuen Wan.
- (iii) **Quality** – for pedestrian areas, the quality of the environment is critical to ensuring the attractiveness of the area.
- We **propose** that special attention be given to sympathetic design of the various schemes, in particular of the street furniture, rest areas, shelters, and other facilities. In addition, we **propose** that thought be given to the sort of activities which should be licensed within the pedestrian area, with appropriate stalls, street performances, and other activities permitted where these will add to the vibrancy and interest of the streets.



APPENDIX**Illustrative regulatory framework for Pedestrian Priority Zones**

- (a) Where possible introduce total or part-time vehicle bans (it may be necessary to permit loading and unloading activities, preferably at off-peak times; or desirable to implement progressive bans on certain groups of vehicles e.g., older more polluting vehicles);
- (b) Incorporation of space sharing concept among various road users, including pedestrians, vehicles and cyclists;
- (c) Strict enforcement against illegal parking/waiting/hawking/land use;
- (d) Strict standards for and implementation of environmental cleanliness;
- (e) High standards of street furniture, signage, paving and road markings and removal of any non-essential signs or obstructions;
- (f) Encouragement of creative uses of larger pedestrian areas, e.g., art displays, street musicians, etc.

16th June 2009

