



香港城市設計學會
Hong Kong Institute of Urban Design

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By email: iiso@devb.gov.hk

Ms Au Kit-Ying, Brenda

Head of Invigorating Island South Office

Invigorating Island South Office,

Development Bureau

Unit 703, 7/F, South Island Place, 8 Wong Chuk Hang Road, Hong Kong

Dear Ms Au,

Re: Response from the Hong Kong Institute of Urban Design on:

Pedestrian Environment and Traffic Improvements to Bring Vibrancy to the Wong Chuk Hang, Aberdeen Waterfront and Ap Lei Chau North Areas – Feasibility Study.

On behalf of the Hong Kong Institute of Urban Design, we would like to submit, on the attached file for your consideration our response on Pedestrian Environment and Traffic Improvements to Bring Vibrancy to the Wong Chuk Hang, Aberdeen Waterfront and Ap Lei Chau North Areas – Feasibility Study.

We are also pleased to meet relevant officers to further explain the contents therein if necessary.

Should further information be required, please kindly contact me or Ms. Cherry Lau, our Senior Administrative Officer at 2235 9057.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barry Wilson', is written in a cursive style.

(Barry Wilson)

President, HKIUD

Hong Kong Institute of Urban Design Limited

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Response from the Hong Kong Institute of Urban Design on:

Pedestrian Environment and Traffic Improvements to Bring Vibrancy to the Wong Chuk Hang, Aberdeen Waterfront and Ap Lei Chau North Areas – Feasibility Study.

Public Engagement Digest – December 2022

The HKIUD is broadly supportive of the four broad strategies adopted by Invigorating Island South Office (IISO) in the Conceptual Master Plan (CMP), focused on: - Enhanced Connectivity and Walkability; Improved Urban Environment; Unleashed Urban Potential; and Enlivened District. The Institute considers however that the CMP presented under the Feasibility Study manifestly fails to deliver on these worthy strategies, primarily for being underwhelming in its ambition, reinforcing out of date urban concepts, investing in decorative and cosmetic interventions, and containing inherent conflicts between these strategies and the aims of the Feasibility Study.

1. *Establish interconnected public realm with integration of blue-green features to enhance connectivity and walkability.*

1.1. Within the study area the public realm consists of three main elements – the roadway, the footway, and the waterfront. Integration of the roadway and associated parking with the other public realm areas is the aspect currently attracting most attention from cities globally as they seek to address higher quality living conditions. Hong Kong Government has become increasingly aware of the strong scientific evidence linking serious and costly health issues with roadside air pollution and this should be of particular concern in congested city street conditions found in the study area, not to mention the psychological stress resulting from noise and safety issues. Emissions include particulates from diesel engines, NOx, volatile organic compounds, carbon monoxide and benzene. The 2020 Hong Kong Emission Inventory Report indicates that the road transport sector is the largest local air pollution source, where 47% of carbon monoxide emission comes from roadside transportation and the concentration levels at roadside air quality monitoring stations reflect pollution at street canyons with busy traffic. The proposals under the study take no initiatives to address these critical issues and in fact promote pedestrian activity adjacent to high speed polluting roadways such as Aberdeen Praya Road and Wong Chuk Hang Road.

1.2. Addressing road space provision, access, and speed in order to address the above, and then integrating public realm functions within previously dedicated road space, has generally then been the starting point for major world cities

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in creating fundamental improvements, connectivity, and enlivened urban environments, especially in the current climate of technological and environmental change. Within the Feasibility Study these issues are not discussed, and contrastingly urban improvements are often highlighted by “traffic improvements”, indicating a fundamental lack of appreciation of what creates an improved public realm. Even with its “traffic improvements” as a key feature of the CMP, there is surprisingly no reference made to the Hong Kong Roadmap on Popularisation of Electric Vehicles announced in 2021s, setting out the long-term policy objectives and plans to promote the adoption of EVs and their associated supporting facilities in Hong Kong.

1.3. No consideration is given, or metrics provided, in relation to meeting specific demographic needs and trends. An ageing society such as in Hong Kong cannot accept a business-as-usual approach and needs inclusive responses to personal access and walkability that meet the needs of older people in particular. This needs to go well beyond “repaving” works to significantly reduce mobility barriers and enhance walking affordances. The Study continually refers to ‘pedestrian friendly’ but doesn’t appear to properly comprehend the issues surrounding this or to understand the how to achieve it meaningfully. Provision of an at-road-grade crossing does not necessarily improve walkability nor meet the expectations of a globally informed society.

2. *Improve Pedestrian Connectivity and Traffic Circulation*

2.1. There is an inherent contradiction in the aim to improve both pedestrian connectivity and traffic circulation, which are essentially in direct opposition. Grade separated solutions have historically been used to address this issue and a range of new traffic solutions, including restricted access, street calming measure, speed restrictions, and shared spaces are being continually trialled internationally. Hong Kong remains a global laggard, continuing to promote car ownership, urban parking and higher road capacity whilst adhering to traffic planning concepts from another millennia. The city is out of touch with global standards on street design and with the ongoing transport revolution adopting shared, remote and micro-mobility solutions. Supported by a vast range of new technologies, there has never been a better time to rethink urban space approaches to meet the potential vehicle needs of both the current and next generations.

2.2. Vehicle registrations in Hong Kong have continued to rise steadily since the turn of the century at a rate of about 3.5% per annum and evidenced a 34% increase over the decade up to 2021, with over 926,000 registered in that year.¹ The size of the Territory has not increased over this period however.

¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/725035/hong-kong-registration-number-of-all-the-vehicles/>



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Contrastingly vehicle sales in the US and the UK peaked in 2016²³, despite them being predominantly far less dense than Hong Kong. HKIUD holds that the most effective way to undertake urban traffic improvements is to restrict private car access, reduce parking provision and prioritise walking and social mobility infrastructure in urban centres. The Feasibility Study does not actively aim to address these fundamental issues.

3. Enhance Public Open Spaces and Waterfront Areas

3.1. The majority of the work is small-scale landscape enhancement to existing green resources and promenade areas. The Institute will certainly not object to investment in landscape improvement, yet no clear landscape strategy is provided for the district in terms of how it can meet sustainable design requirements in mitigating environmental emergency and “Reinforcing District Identity”. In fact, generic, high maintenance “greening” appears to be the default, without generating target metrics towards drainage capacity, air quality enhancement, biodiversity, heat island effect, carbon absorption, or reference to an integrated green infrastructure masterplan to drive the project rather than a grey infrastructure neighbourhood.

3.2. A great number of the proposed works are so small in scale that it is surprising that they should be included in such a study, rather than be part of expected annual works programs. Removal of fences and fabric upgrading works are welcome and common sense approaches that should not need highlighting through a masterplan.

4. Support Existing and Planned Developments

4.1. Insufficient information is provided on how critical and sufficient green infrastructure and pedestrian connectivity will be provisioned – through lease conditions, setback, or guidelines for instance. Without an integrated and forward-looking green infrastructure masterplan, that clearly structures development around that provision, the network may well remain piecemeal and subservient to other development needs.

5. Reinforce District Identity

5.1. In supposing that the existing identity needs reinforcing, there is a presumption that this identity is a wholly positive one. It might however be suggested that the three study areas are very different, with distinctive histories, characters, and identities, not all of which are necessarily desirable going forwards. The Study should clearly identify these divergent urban

² <https://www.statista.com/statistics/199974/us-car-sales-since-1951/>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/vehicle-licensing-statistics-2021/vehicle-licensing-statistics-2021#new-vehicle-registrations-overview>



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characters and aim to enhance the positive and local attributes with clear strategies, whilst identifying areas for potential refocus or character remediation within those strategies. No such character identification is demonstrated within the Study and provision of varied and robust identity enhancement strategies are absent.

5.2. The New Urban Agenda was formed as an outcome document at the United Nations Habitat III Conference in 2016. It aims to provide reference points on urban systems and physical form of our urban spaces to facilitate equity and access to the benefits and opportunities that cities can offer. It is unclear how the Study aligns with this guidance or indeed the global requirements of our times. It provides no targets, no metrics, no timelines – no imperatives.

Summary

Whilst the HKIUD supports the overall aims of IISO, we do not consider that the Study meets these stated aims, being fundamentally unambitious in its vision for the District. Aberdeen or “Hong Kong Tsai” is where the name of Hong Kong came from. It is rich in history as well as local traditions and activities; the history and traditions of the place should be leveraged. In considering a combined traffic and pedestrian environment, a great opportunity exists for significant change for the better, however this opportunity has not been realised though the rudimentary, business-as-usual approaches adopted, approaches that fail to address the root problems both within the study area and the wider societal context. The investments presented represent a low expectation, they rely on outmoded solutions with limited proven benefit in Hong Kong and fail to inspire the necessary greater investments required in the area, necessary to meet global standards through technology, equity, and wellness standards. Also concerning is the adoption of generic terminology throughout the study, utilising greenwashing aspirations to conceal a lack for formative approaches.

HKIUD recommends the following considerations to address the fundamental structural conflicts and avoid investment in the proposed superficial ‘facelifting’ proposals: -

- Demonstrate a greater understanding of the uniqueness of the context and particular needs of the local demographic in creating public space of special quality and character;
- Prioritise the requirements of green infrastructure above road infrastructure in creating better, healthier, and more vibrant places to live;
- Rethink the approaches given to the vast amount of public realm currently zoned as road, to provide safer, more equitable, and more attractive public functions offering a greater return on investment;

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- Provide clear metrics that align with the UN New Urban Agenda to measure the performance of IISO strategies;
- Highlight the public investment measures that might act as a catalyst for further betterment through private sector support;
- Undertake a fundamentally much more ambitious vision for the study area measured against time, investment and return, which reflects its uniqueness and importance, not only as a local residential and commercial area but also a quality tourist destination and recreation hub.

We hope that our critical comments above highlighting our disappointment with the study will spur IISO to consider the proposed investments against a global context, one in which Hong Kong needs to position itself against other international cities competing for international talent and investment by providing the highest quality health and living standards to both residents and visitors alike.

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