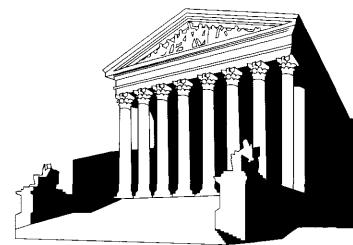


Pedestrianisation



Pedestrians in Hong Kong are on the move. Several recent and past events have refocused attention on the alternating plight and delight of walking here. This month our regular contributor J.A. McInnis looks at the issues and the choices.

Pedestrians – why have we been treated so badly?

At a recent local conference, *Modern Transport in Hong Kong for the 21st Century*, Fred N Brown suggested an answer to this question. He said: 'the complex answer is that pedestrian networks and space are part of an overall urban system involving land use, building disposition and design, active and passive use of space, environmental quality, social and economic needs; as well as being a fundamental component of the transport system. We, the community, have not comprehensively addressed the vital role pedestrian movement networks and space have in contributing to the functioning and quality of life of our community. Worse, when comprehensive ideas have been developed they have been allowed to become fragmented and lost as other more pressing needs prevent integrated networks being implemented'.¹ So what are some of the reasons favouring pedestrian-friendly approaches? Walking is environmentally friendly, affordable, efficient, and healthy among other things. Walking can facilitate community needs and aspirations. It can bring people together and of course move them apart in ways other transport modes simply cannot. However, and despite these advantages, pedestrians have been treated badly. To understand some of the reasons for this we can look to both past and recent events.

Bypassing Pedestrians

Two separate tragic traffic accidents within weeks of each other in August and September of 1997 highlighted the pedestrian cause once again. The accidents - the first of which involved a dozen people being hit by a police car, and the second, the same number being hit by a bus — renewed calls for pedestrian footbridges to be built at so-called traffic black spots on Queen's Road and Wyndham Street, and at the junction of Nathan Road and Mongkok Road. The accidents, and the subsequent discussion arising as a result of them, revealed real weaknesses in the planning and approval processes for pedestrian footbridges.

To return to that planning process, it is surprising to note that an entire footbridge system for the Central district was planned by the Government in the early 1980's. It is disappointing however, that as a result of omission, poor planning, and lack

of enforcement, the agreements that would have put the bridges in place were either not finalised with developers and building owners at the critical times, or simply left to languish and forgotten about. The best and most recent example of this was the planned footbridge between the China Building and the Entertainment Building, that was never built for reasons that remain unclear.² Today, there are still some seven footbridges planned for the Central district that have not yet passed the drawing board stage, and it is debatable whether any more than two of these are ever likely to be built. Given this state of affairs, how can the plight of pedestrians be improved?

The New Approach

Fred N Brown argues³ in favour of a comprehensive approach to pedestrianisation with networks and thoughtful space usage through a wide range of measures, treatments and facilities. Brown notes that Hong Kong, with its high population density and parts of a network already in place, is an ideal place for promoting these developments. Further development of mechanised modes, such as the Central/Midlevels escalator, in conjunction with other measures, could combine to provide a highly effective system. In addition, the introduction of traffic calming measures could change the way streets are planned and utilised in such ways as would enhance the overall safety, quality of life, and services in the affected areas. While occasional arguments in opposition to pedestrianisation have been raised (e.g. traffic congestion, policing issues, its affect on businesses etc) the experience in Hong Kong has not shown them to be significant. For instance, the pedestrianisation of Temple Street; and the Sunday closings of Tung Choi and Nelson Streets in Mongkok and Bowring Street in Jordan, can all be regarded as relatively successful. Based on the past record of pedestrianisation in Hong Kong, and some of these more recent experiences what can we anticipate in the not too distant future?

Plans Afoot

Plans are afoot to step up pedestrianisation in Hong Kong. At present it is anticipated that a section of Russell Street as well as a section outside Times Square in Causeway Bay will become pedestrian malls. New footbridges linking Portland Street and the Mongkok KCR over Sai Yee and Bute Streets have been

approved; and enforcement action is being contemplated in response to the delayed construction of footbridges between the Entertainment Building and both the China and Central Buildings. In addition, a short time ago the owners of Central Tower were denied a permanent occupancy permit and given some 18 months in which to build new footbridges. In Tuen Mun a cycle track system has been partially built with a combined cycle/pedestrian footbridge recently approved as part of the overall plan. Similarly, in the new Telegraph Bay Development, which would form part of the Cyberport, there are extensive plans for pedestrian networks and once again a small cycle track. Increasingly these are the types of developments that citizens expect from their planners and developers. Strong local public support can easily be inferred not only from calls for such moves, but also from the complete absence of any objections to them.

What more can the Government do?

There is still more the Government can do. It can recommit itself more publicly to taking into account pedestrian needs. It can accelerate the process of developing new planning standards and guidelines for the provision of comprehensive new or redeveloped areas, or under outline development plans. Once done, Government can see that all available means are pursued to ensure that the guidelines are used and respected. It can seek to guarantee that commitments by developers or others toward pedestrianisation are protected in lease conditions. It can encourage such developments through

favourable premium terms or plot ratios. Conversely, once deals are struck, the Government can, and should, seek to prudently enforce them. At present, the redevelopment of Swire House is a case in point. Thus given recent changes to the plans for 11 Chater Road which involve dropping the original planned dedicated pedestrian ground floor public passage, alternative measures should be firmly in place to ensure pedestrian traffic flow. At present footbridges are planned to connect 11 Chater Road to both Prince's Building and the Landmark, and once again this should be guaranteed at a minimum. Lastly, the Government can ensure that pedestrians are fully and fairly taken into account in its own ongoing current studies, notably the Comprehensive Transport Study 3 and the Rail Development Study 2. In these ways, as one looks ahead, the future situation for pedestrians could only then improve. Ideally the motto as we look ahead should not be *bypassing pedestrians* but *pedestrian bypasses*. ■AAC

- 1 Fred N. Brown, Chief Executive of MVA Group, Pedestrians - "Need for a New Approach", a paper presented at the Modern Transport in Hong Kong for the 21st Century Conference, 30 April 1999.
- 2 Evidence given by Robert Pope to the Public Accounts Committee on 20 April 1999 and referred to the SCMP, 21 April 1999, p 6.
- 3 See endnote 1 above.

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