

## **Compelling and Present Need for Central-Wanchai Bypass**

The letter from Michael Leung of Sha Tin published in Talkback on 16 February mentioned that some in the community have cast doubt over the effectiveness of the Central-Wanchai Bypass (CWB) in tackling the traffic congestion problem in Central and Wanchai Districts. Let's remind ourselves of the justification for CWB.

To most if not all in the community, growing traffic congestion in Central and along the Connaught Road Central/Harbour Road/Gloucester Road corridor is obvious. The corridor is already saturated and cannot cope with the anticipated traffic growth. Other east-west secondary corridors, such as Hennessy Road and Queensway, are also heavily congested. The capacity of these roads is constrained by traffic signals and kerbside loading/unloading activities of goods vehicles, buses and taxis.

The objective of CWB is to take traffic away from Central and Wanchai to alleviate congestion on the existing road networks and to cater for the anticipated traffic growth. If CWB is not built, congestion along the corridor will spill over onto neighbouring roads in Central and Wan Chai, eventually creating gridlocks. Travelling by car from Rumsey Street in Central to Causeway Bay during the busy hours now takes about 15 minutes. If CWB is not built, that is expected

to increase to 45 minutes by 2011. With CWB, it will be reduced to 5 minutes.

Some have suggested that Electronic Road Pricing (ERP) can replace CWB. ERP can complement CWB, but cannot replace it. It would be unfair to ask those who want to by-pass the Central Business District to pay. Implementation of ERP needs to be supported by alternative routes or bypasses that have sufficient capacity to receive the diverted traffic generated from those wishing to avoid entering the charging zone. This points to the need for CWB. Without the Bypass, ERP alone could not effectively reduce traffic within the charging zone.

This is not to say that ERP will not be pursued. We are actively exploring whether and how ERP could be implemented in Hong Kong. In further studying the issue, we are taking into account all relevant considerations, such as privacy, charging level, vehicle growth rate, cost implication to road users, impact on business and technological development, etc. We will also consult the public on any proposals to be drawn up.

There is a compelling and present need for CWB. On the other hand, we are in complete agreement with the view that it is important to protect Victoria Harbour, which is an invaluable natural asset of the people of Hong Kong. We will

continue to work closely with the Harbour-front Enhancement Committee, other relevant bodies and members of the community and will minimise the extent of any reclamation required. We would abide by the Protection of Harbour Ordinance and the Court of Final Appeal's judgment on reclamation.

Thomas Chow

Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works