

City Talk



The lack of efficient walkway systems in Kowloon Bay often results in crowded streets.

LET'S WALK THE WALK ON CITY CENTER CONGESTION

As city centers become increasingly congested, road space and car parking spaces may no longer be adequate for the huge number of commuters and visitors.

It is not physically possible to provide car parks for everyone who works in a multi-story building on top of providing sufficient parking for visitors.

Modern town planning advocates pedestrian-access-only areas, hoping it can do away with vehicle traffic in city centers, minimize congestion and reduce air pollution.

I have not personally seen a successful application of such pedestrian zones in other cities, but I have seen its failure in Tsim Sha Tsui east when it was planned as a pedestrian precinct back in the 1970s.

Tsim Sha Tsui east was developed from Hols Wharf and other godown areas into a new commercial district, comprising offices and hotels. The Hong Kong government decided on an innovative system to ban private car access to the area.

As it happened, well-dressed couples in tuxedos and gowns and high-heel shoes found it rather uncomfortable to walk a kilometer from a car park to a hotel ballroom and very soon public pressure forced the government to reopen the area for vehicle access.

What was left were narrow roads, not designed for the heavy volume of traffic and so the area remains a difficult one to get to.

A similar situation almost occurred in Causeway Bay and there is still no solution for the road congestion in that district on the near horizon.

To make a "vehicle-free" district work effectively, we either need an efficient system of pedestrian walkways, or an efficient form of minibus transport to distribute commuters from transport interchanges and car parks.



Nuts and bolts

Edmund Leung

The pedestrian walkways in Central seem to be serving a useful purpose, as most commuters can get from MTR stations to their plush offices through air-conditioned passages, all the way from Admiralty to Ice House Street.

The exact opposite is the case in Kowloon Bay, where the lack of an efficient pedestrian walkway system forces commuters to walk on the streets to get to their places of work.

Shuttle buses from Kowloon Bay station to Megabox and KITEC partly relieved the situation, but proved inadequate for the whole district.

I believe the solution lies in planning for the people with particular emphasis on their daily living habits.

For Hong Kong, as a 24-hour city, there are a lot of social activities throughout the day and in the evenings.

The hot and humid weather in the summer also discourages office staff and party-goers from taking to the streets.

Railway-based commuting remains the most efficient way to transport large volumes of people and railway stations must be built near busy commercial areas.

All-weather pedestrian walkways can efficiently provide access from subway stations to offices.

Car parks should be built at various parts along the perimeter to allow those who wish to drive to leave their cars outside the busy area, but there must be efficient links to the center.

These include walkways, shuttle buses, road access for taxis and vehicles for the handicapped.

Veteran engineer Edmund Leung Kwong-ho casts an expert eye over Hong Kong's iconic infrastructure