City Talk

The 'Smart City 2.0' plan will propel HK forward into being a city of technology, comparable with the likes of Shenzhen.

WE NEED TO GET GOING WITH SMART MOBILITY

I normally write about projects that have already been completed, but as this is the start of the year, I am going to venture into the future.

The secretary for innovation and technology has rolled out "Smart City 2.0" to propel us forward to being a city of technology. I have confidence that the secretary, Alfred Sit Wing-hang, will be able to lead us forward in these areas.

We may have little hope of beating Shenzhen as a city of technology – as it is already well advanced and 5G communication is already commonplace – but there a lot of areas where we can catch up.

Although the Smart City 2.0 initiative comprises mobility, living, environmental, people, governmental and economic aspects, I will only be commenting on smart mobility here, as it affects our transport infrastructure.

For car drivers, we have already benefited from the GPS system. With Google Maps or AMAP, we are able to enjoy an online navigation system that guides us to the shortest and quickest route to our destination, avoiding unnecessary points of congestion.

But we would also love to be able to check the availability of parking spaces at the nearest car park. To achieve this, we will need cooperation from property owners in releasing their valuable data.

Similarly, for those taking public transport, we already enjoy the convenience of the apps offered by various bus companies and the MTR. But how nice would it be if we had a combined app that allowed us to be able to find out which the most convenient mode of transport is – be it MTR, buses or minibuses.

And when that is calculated, where is the nearest station or bus stop and how much time do we have to get there before the next train or bus arrives?

We may think this information is already available, but there is a lot of room for growth in anticipating next availability transport, especially during rush hour and in the event of emergency situations.

To achieve this, not only do we need running data from these major transport companies, but also their contingency plans in the event of unavoidable breakdowns.

To most of us, the availability of data in the latter case will be much more valuable than routine information which commuters likely already have in their memory.

As people begin to move and live out of town, such traffic information becomes even more valuable, as minibus and bus service intervals will invariably be fewer.

The availability of such data not only helps commuters, but also provides a reliable database for the government to plan new facilities with far greater accuracy.

Such advanced technologies may already exist, but the implementation depends mainly on the availability of 5G communication. Fortunately, the 5G network in Hong Kong is already in place and I expect to see exponential growth in Internet of Things applications for a variety of uses to our benefit.

I can almost hear outcries from those who vehemently wish to protect their privacy and are unwilling to open up their traveling schedules and records for sharing.

But such a selfish attitude will only curb our desperately-needed progress in order to keep up with our neighbors. We may have difficulties in competing with them, but let us not fall behind so far that we may become irrelevant soon.

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