



TRUST, TRANSPARENCY KEYS TO SUCCESS

The Tuen Ma line, the first phase of the Shatin to Central link, opened on Valentine's Day, linking Ma On Shan to east Kowloon.



It opened without much fanfare but deserves praise for having hardly any breakdowns or other unwelcome events.

It provides a long-needed alternative route to get from the southeastern New Territories to east Kowloon, and relieves congestion at Kowloon Tong.

We eagerly await the completion of the next phase, which will extend from Kai Tak, through Sung Wong Toi to Hung Hom, to complete a network covering southeast Kowloon, and eventually provide a new link to Admiralty.

This project, like many infrastructural projects all over the world, has suffered costs and time overruns.

However, we do see a lot of others being completed on time and within budget. The difference has to do with effective project management.

This reminds me of a presentation by James Blake at the Institution of Civil Engineers two years ago.

Blake was secretary for works just before 1997, and responsible for the complex airport core projects. He then took up senior management positions in Kowloon-Canton Railway Corp, seeing through the MTRC/KCRC merger.

His main message was: fit for purpose, command and control, and trust and transparency.

I believe they enshrine the principles for success in any project.

Fit for purpose has to do with effective planning to ensure a project will serve the community effectively.

For a railway project, the alignment, station locations and efficient transport exchange are the key to success.

Availability of resources at market competitive rates are vital elements.

Command and control is the ability to organize project execution to ensure continuous progress without delays.

Project managers must take active and full responsibility to lead and direct the construction team, anticipating hiccups and instructing timely measures to prevent costs and time overruns.

Trust and transparency is the essence of success. Project managers and builders must have mutual trust, and when problems arise, the whole team must not hide them but communicate the issues for prompt action.

Bitter experience teaches us whenever a mistake has been made and identified, the joint efforts of all will resolve it in time.

Holding the problems close to one's chest would only allow them to fester and deteriorate, and the greater the delay in addressing the key issue, the longer the time it will take to resolve it, often resulting in significant extra costs.

I see in Britain they have revived the High-Speed 2 rail project.

Like many others, including the Channel Tunnel, costs and time overrun have caused concern, but in the end, trust and transparency, which include the community, will help to complete the project eventually, if executed with effective control and demand.

The project management principles as described may look simple and old-fashioned but, like classical music, they never become obsolete with time.

This is something that artificial intelligence or advanced computerized programs cannot provide.

Let us hope the professionals will continue to strive to the utmost, working with conscience and diligence, to ensure future infrastructural projects will be executed with effective command and control, to minimize future overruns.

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