

City Talk



NO WAY WE ENGINEERED LANTAU TOMORROW

Land shortages have always been a critical issue here, but our ancestors had been creating land over the past two centuries with great success.

Over 70 percent of our commercial properties and 50 percent of our residential blocks are built on reclaimed land.

To combat the acute shortage, the government has come up with a Lantau Tomorrow plan to sustain our growth in population and commercial activities.

I find it illogical and unfair of a recent internet news item to allege this project is created to ensure continuous employment for the 30,000 engineers here.

First, the project is conceived by the government, not by our professionals.

Second, of the professions involved in the plan, it is the task of the planners and the economists to conceive the idea.

Architects, surveyors and engineers then implement the project.

Engineers are at the downstream end of the process, but they are important as the final outcome, be it reclamation, the transport and public utilities infrastructure, and ensuring efficient operation, are the work of the humble engineers.

The report alleged that the 30,000 engineers in Hong Kong are in need of future work and came up with this project so they'd be continuously employed.

This is utterly untrue and unreal.

That 30,000 figure was apparently plucked from the total membership of the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers.

But over half of these are students.

Engineers with the qualifications and training necessary to perform duties independently number only around 10,000.

Besides, there are some 20 engineering disciplines, about half of which are not connected with infrastructure work.

These engineers may be specialized in innovation and technology, industrial and



Nuts and bolts

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manufacturing, biomedical, chemical, power and gas utilities, and other fields.

My estimate of the number of professional engineers employed in developing and maintaining our city's infrastructure would be less than 5,000.

With infrastructural projects held over in the past few years from the backlog of approval by legislators back on track, there is an acute shortage of experienced engineers.

The consulting and contracting sectors are facing an acute shortage, as many competent and experienced professionals have joined government service.

Lantau Tomorrow is a long-term project likely to span the next 10 to 20 years.

The number of engineers working on it is likely to be about 300, much less than 10 percent of the sector in the infrastructural part of the engineering profession, and therefore that project alone will not have any serious impact on employment.

To single out engineers as the driver of the project is probably faint praise for the contribution of one of the professions.

Engineers are vital in that activity chain, but definitely not the only one that will be affected by lack of development.

The lack of adequate land affects everyone in Hong Kong, especially those underprivileged ones who have to live in subdivided flats.

Engineers may help to alleviate this by applying effective technologies to come up with land but must not be blamed for creating self-interests.

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