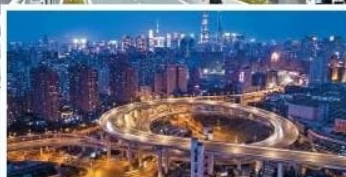


City Talk



Cross Bay Link makes Tseung Kwan O and Lohas Park much more accessible while, right, Nanpu Bridge's spiral makes for a much more gradual descent.



TRANSPORT CONNECTIONS EASIER SAID THAN DONE

The recent opening of the Tseung Kwan O-Lam Tin Tunnel and Cross Bay Link has made access to and from Tseung Kwan O area much more convenient.

With plans to build more road and rail links, we all wish to see more such kinds of transport infrastructure in place to make our commutes easier.

Of new railway links, there are three: an eight-kilometer northwest link from Hung Shui Kiu to Qianhai; a 16-km central link from Kowloon Tong to Kam Tin; and a 3-km extension from Lohas Park to a new Area 137 in south Tseung Kwan O.

There are also three new road links: the 18-km Northern Highway linking Tin Shui Wai through Ku Tung to Lo Wu; the 15-km Sha Tin bypass from Cheung Sha Wan to Tai Po Fan Ling Highway; and the 2-km Yau Tong to Tseung Kwan O link.

When these links are completed, it will bring a lot more convenience to commuters. They may necessitate substantial investments, but the resulting shorter and predictable traveling times will prove to be a plus for our city in the long term.

This might beg the question of why they had not been built earlier if it was simply a matter of connecting districts with a straight line drawn on some site plan and leveling the ground to build them.

I have frequently been dragged into discussions on such issues with many people who cannot understand why we need to spend years planning these routes instead of just going with a straight line, as if on the map with a ruler!

What may seem like a simple link on the map may turn out to be a meandering route, firstly due to the terrain, as the two districts' elevations may not be the same.

Second, to add links in a built-up city-like Hong Kong, we need to avoid excessive relocation of residents or commercial denizens for cost and social reasons.

The latter reason is rather complex as social issues are never black and white.



Nuts and bolts

Edmund Leung

They involve balance and compromise.

But the first issue is a technical matter and much easier to explain and plan.

Those of us who have visited Shanghai will have seen Nanpu Bridge.

It has a deep spiral that takes minutes to negotiate at its west end.

If we wonder why it was so designed, it is the need to lift the bridge so it's tall enough from the city's road level to a high enough elevation to allow ocean-going vessels to pass beneath the bridge's deck.

In Pudong, a district that is comparatively newly planned, it is easy to plan for approach roads that come with a gentle gradient to join up with the bridge by extending the landing point further inland.

In the old city, there was no empty land to allow this gentle slope across the city, and a highway spiral was an expedient solution.

Similar geographical constraints apply to tunnels, but they come in reverse in elevation.

Deep tunnels that can avoid built-up areas often end up reaching the road level a long way away from the waterfront or business centers.

That is another reason why we have so much discussions in planning railway links for east Kowloon in Choi Hung and Sau Mau Ping, and for Happy Valley and east Aberdeen on the Island.

For railways, the pedestrian link back to level ground can be by way of elevators, but this does not work for road vehicles to get from an elevated bridge deck or from an underground tunnel to ground level within a short distance.

Engineers and planners spend a lot of effort on transport facilities. It is not a simple matter of drawing lines on a map.

Veteran engineer Edmund Leung Kwong-ho casts an expert eye over features of modern life