

STH's speech at the 10th Annual Dinner of the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers
(Building Services Division)

Ir (Kenneth) Sin, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening. It is my honour to be here tonight to join you at the 24th annual dinner of the Building Services Division of Hong Kong Institution of Engineers.

With a membership of more than 5 200, the Building Services Division is one of the largest disciplines among the 17 disciplines under the Institution. Whether for transport or housing projects, your members provide the essential services in our construction works. I think it is fair for me to say that you provide the infrastructure for infrastructure. No major transport or housing project can go without such essential services of electrical supply, lighting, fire engineering, facilities management, etc.. Since its establishment in 1987, the Division has played an instrumental role in enhancing the professional standards for your discipline through the exchange of technical information and ideas among its members and other related societies.

Public Consultation and Involvement in Transport Infrastructure Projects

Recently, there has been a lot of public debate over when and how the public should be involved in the development of transport projects. Indeed, the public used to be more interested in what we build, when we build and how will the end product provide convenience to the travelling public, whether it is a railway or road project. Over the years, public interest has gradually shifted from these more "bread and butter" issues of meeting daily transport needs, to more sophisticated concerns such as urban planning, environmental protection, sustainable development and heritage conservation. Better assessment of public sentiments and concerns is thus important to the success (or otherwise) of our projects, and public consultation and involvement have become increasingly important steps in taking forward transport infrastructure developments. Our consultation process has moved with the times, as I will try to explain below.

From our experience, key to public support for a transport infrastructure project is their early involvement from the initial planning stage. In the past, this stage of consultation was more focused on the professional bodies and the relevant District Councils. In recent years, we also place much emphasis on public engagement at the germination stage.

Take the example of the Central Kowloon Route, which is currently under planning. Apart from formal consultation at the Legislative Council and District Council levels, Highways Department, as the project proponent, has maintained close liaison with the host of stakeholders and members of the community. To collect public views and to explain the progress of the project, a number of public forums and focus group meetings plus numerous outreach events were arranged not only for professional bodies, but also the local communities including the trade and hawker representatives operating in the affected area, who have a natural interest in the project. The department has also launched a dedicated web-site for the project and distributed monthly newsletters in the

affected districts including Yau Ma Tei, Kowloon City and Kwun Tong since late 2007. Through these processes, we gained useful knowledge regarding public concerns in such aspects as local culture and heritage conservation, reprovisioning of community facilities, land use planning and environmental issues, which has allowed the department to better address the community's needs and concerns in developing the alignment of the proposal and planning the reprovisioning of affected facilities. Highways Department will continue with this approach in taking forward the ongoing detailed design for the project.

A similar approach is also adopted during the planning and design stages of the Central-Wan Chai Bypass along the northern shore of Hong Kong Island. In taking forward the project, Highways Department has conducted numerous public forums, expert panels, meetings with concerned parties including local community groups, business operators, schools, etc., in addition to the consultations with the Legislative Council, the Harbour-front Enhancement Committee and concerned District Councils. Members of the public and stakeholders were encouraged to actively express their needs and concerns, which had enabled us to formulate a project scheme that eventually gained strong public consensus and support for its implementation. With the project entering construction stage in late 2009, we recognise the importance of securing the continual understanding and support of stakeholders by maintaining close liaison with them, so as to ensure the smooth implementation of the project. To this end, the Highways Department has set up Community Liaison Groups and a project website, distributed newsletters regularly, held briefing sessions for individual housing estates, and organised site visits for local community groups. In addition, two Community Liaison Centres have been set up to further strengthen linkage with the public. The above measures are well received, and work on these fronts will continue.

We do not stop at committees, community level forum and focus groups to facilitate better buy-in and ownership. In the case of the Tolo Highway/Fanling Highway Widening Project, various activities involving local schools were organized from time to time as part of the community engagement activities. Worthy of particular mentioning was a drawing competition in early 2010 involving nine primary schools, with 25 drawings selected as art work design for the hoardings along the footpath within the works area. This was well received by the schools concerned as well as the local community. Similar activities will continue to be arranged to maintain good community relations.

Statutory Processes Allowing Public Involvement

Some of you may think the consultation I have just described already goes to great lengths to collect public views. But these only cover the non-statutory part of the process. Depending on the type of works involved and likely impact, transport infrastructure projects would also need to go through statutory procedures under various ordinances – notably the Roads (Works, Use and Compensation) Ordinance, the Railways Ordinance and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Ordinance – before they could be taken forward. The statutory procedures under these laws place considerable emphasis on ensuring public knowledge about the projects concerned and works involved, allowing ample opportunities for the affected individuals or groups to voice their views,

concerns and objections in an informed way, and ensuring that due consideration be given to such views, concerns and objections before the relevant authority arrives at a decision as to whether a project should be taken forward.

Take the objection-handling process under the Roads (Works, Use and Compensation) Ordinance as an example. Except for projects of a minor nature as defined under the Ordinance, all road works need to go through the gazettal process whereby members of the public would have an opportunity to voice their comments or concerns regarding the proposed works. We value each and every view and “objection” received, and handle them seriously. In particular, the project proponent would contact all objectors in order to understand their concerns, clarify any misunderstanding that may exist over the proposed works, and seek to resolve the objections, if possible. In the event that any objection remain unresolved, the objection will be submitted to the Chief Executive in Council for consideration in accordance with the Ordinance. The objection-handling arrangements under the Railways Ordinance also operate in a similar manner. As regards the EIA process under the EIA Ordinance, every step of the process in respect of all applications under the Ordinance is displayed on the website of the Environmental Protection Department publicly, so as to facilitate the involvement of the public and the Advisory Council on the Environment at different stages. We as project proponent comply fully with the above-mentioned statutory requirements, and ensure that the projects concerned are taken forward in an open and transparent manner.

Conclusion

Equally important to our work in involving the community in our infrastructure development is our partnership with professional organisations like your Division. Your Institution has rendered critical support to Government especially in the implementation of controversial projects as the public places importance to professional and independent views that you offer. In addition, voluntary work by the Institution helps the local community understand in an informed manner the risks involved in our projects and go through otherwise rather difficult technical reports which maybe Greek to the layman. Our work on the transport and housing fronts could not have succeeded without the staunch support of the engineering sector. To stand still is not an option for Hong Kong. However, we must strike the right balance when we take forward development proposals, whether issues of concern that affect individuals, the environment, or whether due account has been given to conservation and sustainability. In arriving at this right balance, your views as engineering professionals will be extremely valuable.

On this note, I hope that the Building Services Division will go from strength to strength, and I wish you, ladies and gentlemen, all the best in your future endeavours. Have an enjoyable evening.

Thank you.

Ends/Tuesday, May 24, 2011