

# **Executive Summary**

## **Direct Investigation Report**

### **The Issue of Idle Flyovers and “Bridges to nowhere”**

#### **Introduction**

The Government’s various development plans are invariably coupled with proposals on land use and planning drawn up to match the needs of the local community and the economy, as well as people’s daily needs. Such proposals include the building of new road networks or improving existing roads to cater for the traffic demands arising from new developments.

2. In constructing a flyover, the overall road network planning and implementation progress would be taken into consideration. Stub ends may be reserved on the flyover to facilitate future expansion of the road network and to mitigate the impact on traffic brought about by the expansion works. In addition, where a development project is implemented in stages, adjacent sections of flyovers or stub ends for future extension may also be built in advance to enable connection with a new road during the next stage of the project.

3. Generally speaking, with respect to road works (including the construction of flyovers), the Transport Department (“TD”) would provide expert opinion on initial road alignments and impact on traffic, while works departments such as the Highways Department (“HyD”) or the Civil Engineering and Development Department (“CEDD”) are responsible for the technical aspect of the construction. Once a construction proposal is confirmed, the works departments would take charge of its detailed design and the management of the construction.

#### **Our Findings**

4. According to the information provided by TD, HyD and CEDD, there are currently 29 idle flyover sections or stub ends on 13 distributors/roads in different districts, and one of them was completed in as early as 1981. All of those road sections and stub ends have been left idle for over ten years, with some over 30 years. Details of those flyover sections and stub ends are at **Annex**. This would give an impression

that the Government has not taken proactive steps in planning and developing those road sections, resulting in those flyover sections and stub ends being under-utilised.

5. In sum, we consider that there are three areas for improvement in the Government's planning and implementation of road works (including the construction of flyover sections and stub ends), as follows.

***(I) Establish a Mechanism to Regularly Review the Traffic Planning for All Idle Flyover Sections and Stub Ends***

6. Adjacent road sections or stub ends are built in advance during road construction for traffic networks development in future. The Government departments in charge of the future road expansion should regularly review the planning and development of idle road sections or stub ends to avoid them being idle for a long time. Nevertheless, the Government currently has no mechanism to regularly review the status and development of those idle flyover sections or stub ends.

7. In the course of this investigation, we discover that some stub ends (numbers 11 to 13 in **Annex**) have been idle for over 30 years while the traffic in their respective localities (such as Stubbs Road and Tai Tam Road) has become very busy. The local residents should welcome the construction of alternative roads in the long run to relieve the traffic congestion. Yet, the relevant departments have not conducted any regular reviews to assess the planning for and latest status of those stub ends. It was not until this Office has initiated this direct investigation that TD stated its intention to commence a study to examine the necessity and time schedule for implementing the relevant road development. Regrettably, the opportune time to construct new roads from the stub ends might have now been missed because of the changes and developments that the areas surrounding them have undergone over the past several decades.

8. Our view is that the Government should regularly convene joint-departmental meetings to review in a timely manner the traffic planning for idle flyover sections or stub ends. If a plan for a certain flyover section or stub end is changed, the Government should promptly explore other feasible options lest it would miss the best time to put the road section concerned to optimal use. Where warranted, the department in-charge should consult the local District Council ("DC").

***(II) Continue to Strengthen Communication with Local Stakeholders and Put Forward Improvement Proposals Early***

9. The Government often receives views or objections from different stakeholders when implementing various road work projects. Take **Case 1** (in **Chapter 3** of the investigation report) as an example. As early as 2006, CEDD and TD had already gazetted the construction of Trunk Road T4 (“T4”) in Sha Tin, and then repeatedly expounded the necessity of its construction to the Traffic and Transport Committee under the Sha Tin District Council. Nevertheless, the T4 project is yet to materialise in the face of strong objections from the residents. To date, the stub ends concerned are still idling.

10. Regarding the above case, we notice that residents’ concerns mainly focused on the impacts of T4 on the scenery of the surrounding areas and property prices. The importance of the trunk road to local traffic just went unheeded. In fact, the public may be slower than the Government in recognising the need for developing traffic infrastructure, and probably would not face squarely the necessity for constructing new roads until traffic congestion occurs. If construction of a new road is delayed or even shelved due to the concerns and objections raised by some people, pending reconsideration when traffic congestion occurs, then the best time for its construction may have been missed. Traffic congestion in the district concerned would only prolong for decades or longer.

11. This Office considers that when launching new road works, the department in-charge should step up its lobbying efforts and explain to the residents and the DC concerned, emphasising in particular the importance of the proposed road(s) to local traffic as well as the consequences and impacts of delaying construction of the new road network. Besides, the department in-charge should respond specifically to the objections raised by the stakeholders and make recommendations and proposals for improvement or revision promptly in order to gain the support of the residents and the DC for constructing the new road network as soon as possible.

***(III) Set up an Integrated Platform for Dissemination of Information on All Road Works***

12. The numerous road work projects being carried out by the Government often take more than ten years to complete and their planning may undergo modifications for different reasons. However, there lacks an integrated platform for the public to easily

check such information as the planning, progress and current status of all proposed road works. When a road works is a joint-department endeavour, it is even more difficult for the public to know which department they should turn to for the latest information.

13. Traffic infrastructure is closely related to our daily life. To enhance transparency of information, the Government should consider setting up an integrated information platform to facilitate public enquiry of the latest information and status of the various major road works proposed for different districts, so that the public can better understand the planning and progress of the proposed road works, and provide their views via the platform. The Government should also publicise the platform upon its setting up.

14. We hope that the information platform can enhance public understanding of the Government's planning direction and policies in respect of major road works. In particular, members of the public can understand the infrastructure to be built in the areas surrounding a property development when they make property purchase decisions. This can also reduce the risk of disputes when the Government implements the relevant road works in the future.

## **Final Remarks**

15. We are of the view that those idle flyover sections or stub ends do not pose any major problem *per se*. Yet, a stub end left idle for decades means that a road that has undergone years of planning is still awaiting construction, and the best time for its construction might simply have been missed, while residents in the vicinity will continue to endure traffic congestion every day. We hope this direct investigation can remind relevant government departments to look seriously again at those road planning that have been put aside for years, monitor their latest progress and expedite their implementation in order to ease the traffic congestion in the surrounding areas.

## **Recommendations**

16. In the light of the above, The Ombudsman makes the following recommendations to CEDD, HyD and TD:

- (1) convene joint-departmental meetings regularly to review the development status of all idle flyover sections or stub ends. Where warranted, the local DCs should be consulted;
- (2) step up its lobbying efforts with the local residents and the DCs concerned, respond specifically to the objections raised by stakeholders (in particular for those projects with stronger objections), and make recommendations and proposals for improvement or revision promptly in a bid to gain public support for constructing the new road network; and
- (3) set up an integrated information platform to facilitate public enquiry of information on the planning, progress and latest status of the proposed road works in various districts, and to publicise the platform.

**Office of The Ombudsman**

**March 2020**