

Hiram's Highway Stage II Improvements

As part of the public consultation for the proposed improvement works to Hiram's Highway, the 1st Public Forum was held in the Jockey Club Hall on Saturday 23 February.

This related to the Stage II works, between Marina Cove and Sai Kung Town – the Stage I works, between Nam Pin Wai Roundabout and Marina Cove are on the planning stage (*it is still possible to comment on Stage I*), although the precise details of the works have yet to be decided.

A total of 170 people attended, with 100 people registered to take place in “small group” discussions. The main language was Cantonese with simultaneous interpretation into English.

Although the forum was open to all, participation in the “small group” discussions was by prior registration and FSK members were at two of the eight small group tables.

The forum began with presentations by Highways Department and Meinhardt (the engineering consultancy involved in the project) which outlined:

- The background to the project (*Originally named “dualing” of the Highway now only “improvement”*)
- The results of a traffic survey conducted in December (*Xmas time*) last year – peak hourly throughput of vehicles, and calculations that these will rise by ca. 20% (*Apparently based on the number of extra tourists that might visit Sai Kung on weekends*)
- Population and projected population figures for the District (including East Hang Hau) – given as 60,000 in the future (*Again based on tourists expected on weekends – so who is this road for?*)
- Perceived deficiencies in the present configuration of Hiram's Highway between Marina Cove and Sai Kung Town Centre – including vertical and horizontal sight lines and lack of pedestrian crossing facilities
- Accident statistics (1.36 per million vehicle / kms., as against 1.29 for the whole of Hong Kong) (*All statistics given should appear on Highways website – we will be checking.*)

Following these presentations there was a Q&A session, and the small group discussions then began. Some of the questions/comments included:

- Where do the populations figures come from? (*question not answered satisfactorily*)
- Improvements to the road will not get rid of bottlenecks.
- Locals have been waiting for the improvement of the road for over 10 years.
- The road was built in the 50s and needs improving.

- The road is being upgraded for tourists, not for locals.
- What Sai Kung needs is more car parking spaces.
- This project should be carried out by Transport Department, to improve public transport, not by Highways.
- A cycling path is needed.
- Development alongside the road should be curtailed.
- Traffic reduction measures are needed.

“Small Group” discussions

Participants were invited to focus first on the overall concept or vision they had for the area, and for access, and then to review each section of the route in detail, pointing out problem areas they were aware of, and suggesting any improvements they would wish to make. Following these discussions a member of each group presented the vision and views which had emerged. *(Videos of all presentations should be available on the Highways website).*

The variety of suggested improvements and alternatives to Hiram’s Highway as an access route to Sai Kung was considerable, but all groups were apparently unanimous in the view that the unique nature of the area should be preserved. There was a general feeling that an extra road lane, or a four lane highway would bring more problems than it would solve, and that other measures were required. Among the suggestions made:

- Additional pedestrian crossing points, including underpasses, to facilitate public transport access
- Additional bus lay-bys, to prevent traffic build-up at bus stops and allowing minibuses to stop only at designated stops
- Alternative transport modes, including single-deck franchised buses, electric buses and high-speed ferries to Tseung Kwan O, Kowloon and Hong Kong Island
- Additional feeder minibus services from villages to the main road – encouraged by a simpler and cheaper licensing procedure
- A by-pass to Sai Kung , via tunnel from Pik Uk, or elevated highway from Clearwater Bay Road
- Extending the MTR Ma On Shan line into Sai Kung
- Enhanced pedestrian sidewalks along the existing Hiram’s Highway
- A cycle path along the existing Hiram’s Highway, or closely paralleling it
- Road pricing, or restricted road status, to be applied at weekends
- Park-and-ride facilities and a weekend shuttle bus system – cheap or possibly even free
- Additional car parks
- A pedestrianised town centre

Following these presentations there was a brief closing statement from Highways Department, and it was confirmed that the improvement works would not take the form of a four lane highway, and that a series of concrete options would be available for discussion at a future forum.

Participants were clearly in favour of some improvements to the road, although one point made was that this should not involve protracted works which would impact everyone living in, or visiting Sai Kung. There was some question as to the accuracy of the figures provided, particularly for population, and it was pointed out that the Sha Ha development application was rejected by the Town Planning Board on the grounds that the road infrastructure would not support the additional population – now the Highways Department is looking at “improving” the road. It was also pointed out that, even on the Highways Department’s own figures, the worst of the traffic problems occur at weekends, when tourists visit Sai Kung – so who would these improvement works actually benefit?

Friends of Sai Kung
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