The “Public Transport-oriented Development” Approach in Hong Kong

Approximately 90% of all passenger trips in Hong Kong are by public transport and about 37% of those trips are by railway. For the land-based cross-boundary passenger trips between Hong Kong and the Mainland, about 68% are by railway (source: Transport Department). Railway is indeed the backbone of Hong Kong’s public transport system, complemented by other modes of public transport means.

In Hong Kong, railway all along forms the main development corridors for population and employment growth, and the Government fully realizes the importance of the integration between transport and land use planning. Back in 1984, the Territorial Development Strategy, recognizing the close relation between land use and transport infrastructure, had adopted the computer-based “Land Use-Transport Optimization model” to facilitate formulation of development options. Furthermore, the Third Comprehensive Transport Study completed in 1999 recommended that future population and employment centres should be located in the proximity of railway stations, adequate pedestrian facilities, connections with other transport means should be provided, and development of railway stations and surrounding land uses should be synchronized. In the “Hong Kong 2030 Planning Vision and Strategy”, an integrated approach of strategic planning taking into account considerations in land use, transport and environmental protection was adopted, leading to a “Preferred Development Option” which highlighted the planning concepts of setting development axes along railways and allowing more intensive development around railway stations.

![Development Clusters around the Railways Stations in Hong Kong](image-url)
All the above principles are incorporated into the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines” (HKPSG) as guidance for town planning. According to the relevant guidelines, in planning for new development areas and major population and employment centres, due consideration should be given to optimizing the use of existing and proposed railway routes and stations. Planning for new railways should be integrated with landuse planning to optimize the development opportunities around railway stations, depots and public transport interchanges such that the walking distance between railway stations/public transport interchanges and major housing, employment, shopping, commercial, cultural facilities and other activity nodes of high pedestrian flow could be less than 500 meters, and all facilities/nodes are inter-connected with well-planned pedestrian walkway network. For a long walking distance, for example up to 1,000 metres, consideration should be given in the early stage of planning process to provide facilities such as travellators. In addition, in planning for the rail facilities, consideration should be given to the need for environment mitigation measures such as allowing buffer distance with noise sensitive receivers, provision of noise barriers and absorbers and decking of depots. These will help reduce the environmental constraints of the rail facilities for optimization of the development opportunities around such facilities.

These principles are also incorporated in the planning guidelines for residential development intensity. In accordance with the HKPSG, higher density residential development should, as far as practicable, be built in the proximity of railway stations and major public transport interchanges to make better use of the development opportunities and to reduce dependency on road traffic. The residential development intensity should progressively be lowered with increasing distance away from the railway stations and public transport interchanges. In areas away from the major traffic corridors and railway catchment areas, higher density residential development should only be considered if adequate transport means linking to the railway stations and public transport interchanges are available.

According to the above principles, the HKPSG proposes to divide the Metro Area (including Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, Tsuen Wan and Kwai Tsing) into 3 Residential Density Zones:

- “Residential Zone 1” covers the areas with the highest development density and applies to districts well served by high capacity public transport systems such as rail stations or other major transport interchanges. Commercial uses are usually allowed on the lower floors of residential buildings.
• “Residential Zone 2” covers the areas with medium density and applies to districts less well served by high capacity public transport systems. Commercial uses are usually not allowed in residential buildings.

• “Residential Zone 3” covers the areas with the lowest development density and applies to districts with very limited public transport capacity.

As for the new towns, the development density is generally lower than the urban areas in order to encourage the movement of population out of the congested Metro Area by offering better living environment. However, higher density development would be allowed in areas close to high capacity transport systems and where there are no infrastructural constraints. In the rural areas, the densities should be kept much lower than that in the Metro Area and new towns because of the limited transport capacity.

Urban development in Hong Kong generally follows the above planning principles and the “Public Transport-oriented Development” approach. Based on the estimation by the Planning Department, about 42% of the territory’s households, 43% of the employment population and 75% of the commercial and office floor areas are located within a radius of 500 metres of railway stations. This greatly demonstrates the integration of land use and transport planning and a compact and highly efficient urban development approach.
Insights for Pearl River Bay Area:

Hong Kong adopts a highly integrated planning strategy incorporating landuse, transport, and environmental considerations. Through the use of a “Public Transport-oriented Development” approach, Hong Kong has successfully developed into a compact and highly efficient city making best use of the public transport system while preserving much green land in the countryside. In recent years, the Pearl River Delta region has put much effort in railway development. New growth areas are mainly located around railway stations and adjacent areas, for example, Shibi of Guangzhou and Qianhai of Shenzhen. There is great potential in these areas to achieve compact and high density developments by integrating railway and other developments. We can foresee that within the Bay Area, the service industries would gradually take up a more important role in the economy. As the efficiency of service industries would much hinge on the mobility of people, locating them along a compact transport system would help pull in the necessary human resources. Hong Kong’s “Public Transport-oriented Development” approach provides a good reference for the Bay Area on how to link up the new development areas and major urban centres, particularly in the planning for the integration among railway, public transport and pedestrian walkway facilities.