

## Policy Address Response

### **Is Convenient the same as Smart?**

Making Hong Kong a “Smart City” was a subject highlighted in the CE’s Policy Address. Lots of ideas, such as expanding broadband coverage and real-time traffic systems, demonstrate that Hong Kong is looking to make the city more convenient. However, is convenient equivalent to smart? Technology can certainly make life easier, but it might not make a city more liveable. Smart Hong Kong, the Government’s consultancy study report, set out the vision and mission for the Smart City Blueprint. The mission includes the following:

 <p>People will be happier, healthier, smarter and more prosperous. The city will be more liveable, green, clean, sustainable, resilient and competitive.</p>	 <p>Businesses will continue to capitalise on Hong Kong’s renowned business-friendly environment, foster innovation, transform the city into a living lab and test bed for development and accelerate into local and global markets.</p>	 <p>The elderly and youth will be better cared for, and there will be a stronger sense of community. Businesses, people and the Government will be more technologically savvy as the city continues to be more digitally enabled.</p>	 <p>As a member of the global community, Hong Kong will be more environmentally friendly and consume fewer resources whilst maintaining its efficiency, liveability and vibrancy.</p>
--	---	---	--

Source: Smart Hong Kong

As we can see, there is more to achieve from a smart city plan than simply becoming convenient. Other focuses include: Improving the physical and mental health of people, encouraging innovations to expand Hong Kong’s competitiveness in the global market, creating a sense of community, and building a green, sustainable city. Being “tech savvy” is only a small part of the Smart City vision. What are the plans for building a stronger sense of community, and creating a happier, healthier place for people?

### **Liveable City**

Aside from building a Smart City, improving the liveability of Hong Kong was another topic addressed. Transportation and congestion have once again taken lead roles, with projects such as the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail, and the newly adopted 19-seat light buses being highlighted. A lot of this work focuses on making a better vehicular environment – not a better pedestrian one.

The Government has often used efficiency as a measurement of success. Many plans strive to improve the connectivity of the city. While it is positive to see the Government bringing in new

infrastructure and transport vehicles these are by no means an improvement to Hong Kong's liveability. As more space is taken up by vehicles, residents are left with less outdoor space. Sidewalks and footbridges exist only for pedestrians to move from one point to another. They omit the joy and comfort of walking. The lack of public open space and a poor walking environment cannot be healthy for Hong Kong residents, either physically or psychologically. Building covers on walkways or installing hillside escalators and elevators does not encourage walking. Nor does it create a pedestrian-friendly environment.

Currently Hong Kong's CBD, from Pedder Street to Western market, along Des Voeux Road Central, is a space ignored by those who do not work in the area. However, those who are commuting daily to the Central district will tell you what a horrendous place it is for pedestrians. There is little regard for people at the street level. Surrounded by railings and miscellaneous objects on the street, pedestrians are squeezed onto a narrow 2-meter sidewalk. The tight spaces create an unhealthy environment, with pollution and germs spreading quickly. Congestion on streets like Des Voeux Road Central have rendered public transport slow. Both pedestrians and vehicle drivers are unhappy, and the Government is doing little to change it.

The Government must make an effort to create a walk-friendly community. According to the policy address, the Government will be picking two pilot areas in which to study the walking environment. Surely the Central Business District and DVRC must be one of them. The Government should put more concrete efforts on giving back spaces for walking, and utilize streets in the way they were originally designed: for the people.