

Walk DVRC is an NGO who is a partner to the government, local retailers and the community in pedestrianization and placemaking initiatives. Walk DVRC engages the public to promote walkability and liveability with the goal of creating a healthier and more inclusive city in a holistic, yet step-by-step manner. The organisation advocates for a fairer sharing of road space between pedestrians and cars with an initial focus on Hong Kong's Central Business District. The entity consults, educates and undertakes research on the creation and management of vibrant streets in the areas of Traffic Management, Street Management, Health Benefits, Economic Benefits, Social Benefits and Governance.

Walk DVRC is delighted that the Transport Department (TD) has chosen Des Voeux Road Central (DVRC), its surrounding side streets and Queen's Road Central as places for the improvement of the pedestrian experience in an effort to upgrade and integrate the Central Business District. Walk DVRC's goals are generally aligned with the TD's Walk in Hong Kong policy.



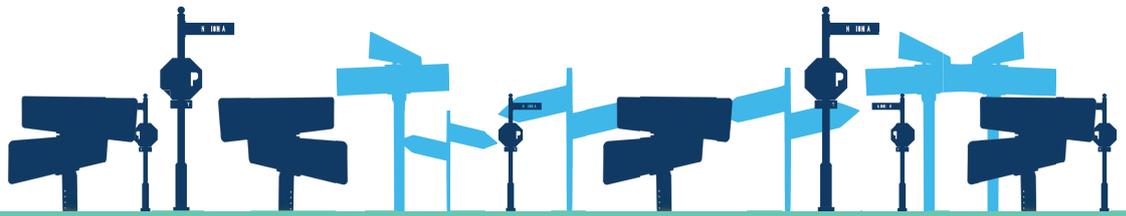
PEDESTRIANISATION HAS THREE KEY BENEFITS:

1. It fosters social inclusion and a sense of community, through the creation of neighbourhoods.
2. It brings health and wellbeing benefits through reduction of vehicular pollution and reduces the cost to the Public Health system.
3. It helps to preserve the culture and heritage that make Hong Kong unique.

As a way of progressing walkability in Central, Walk DVRC has the following recommendations in response to the TD's Public Consultation exercise:

I. Any proposal for walkability should cover all the following three areas: (1) Pedestrianisation; (2) Traffic Management; (3) Street Management

Any serious proposal for walkability must cover all these three areas, as they are intimately connected and cannot be dealt with in isolation. Public support can only be won if it is shown that attention is paid to each of these areas. In order for this to be achieved, a higher level of political and policy support is needed. Furthermore, since each of these areas cuts across several policy responsibilities and makes cooperation between government departments crucial to success, we propose that an "Energising Central Office" be created, as a formal body to coordinate policy and oversee implementation. Traffic management means not only reducing overall traffic but dealing with issues such as bus re-routing, loading/unloading, etc.



II. Vehicle reduction measures in Central

Vehicle reduction and walkability go hand in hand. Removing road space from cars actually reduces congestion. A study¹ of 60 cases worldwide showed that when a road is closed or its capacity reduced, an average of 20% of traffic disappears – it isn't displaced to other roads, it simply vanishes. DVRC alone has over 70 bus routes and more are added each year. Although Central is well served by the MTR and the Tram, private cars often enter the area and park illegally, contributing to congestion and roadside pollution. We propose the following measures to reduce vehicular traffic in Central:

(i) Implement Electronic Road Pricing – Electronic Road Pricing, by assigning costs to vehicles based on their individual impact on travel time and air pollution, has worked in a number of places worldwide and should be adopted in Hong Kong. Along with Civic Exchange, Walk DVRC supports the government's attempts to implement the Electronic Road Pricing Pilot Scheme in Central.

(ii) Rationalise bus stops and bus routes – The opening of the Central-Wanchai Bypass should allow some traffic to be diverted from DVRC to Connaught Road. Furthermore, bus routes – especially those originating in the New Territories – are frequently well below capacity by the time they arrive in Central. Routes should be diverted or combined to avoid overcrowded roads. Bus interchanges (for example in the vicinity of Rumsey Street, which has been on TD plans for some time) should be created to rationalize bus routes and to avoid circular journeys.

(iii) Optimise pedestrian access to public parking (Park 'n Ride) – Easily accessible public car parks should be created outside Central to discourage private cars from entering.

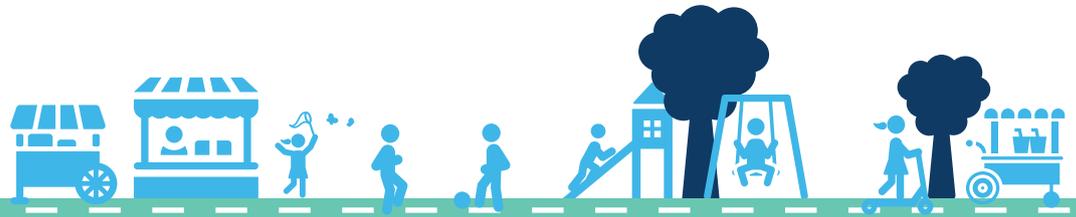
III. Streetscape Improvements

Walk DVRC encourages a holistic approach to changes in the streetscape. Public space works when it is *designed correctly*. Small streetscape changes and short-term street closures do not allay fears or stave off objections simply because they don't allow ideas to be tested and revised to meet community needs. Streetscape improvements, many of which have already been identified, include:

(i) Implement traffic calming and speed reduction measures through street design – here has been a great deal of knowhow generated in many cities worldwide on how streetscapes can be designed to reduce traffic speeds. One such measure is the removal of barriers and railings separating pedestrians from traffic – designs which heighten the awareness of shared space have reduced traffic accidents in Europe by up to 60%. Segregation lowers a driver's perception of accident risk while barrier removal leads to a reduction in car speed. All road users are forced to communicate when railings are not in place.

(ii) Remove street clutter – Get rid of redundant street furniture such as unused telephone booths, excessive poles for road signs, advertising boards etc.

1. Hamer, Mick, "Roadblocks Ahead," Technology Magazine, 24 January 2012.



(iii) Widen the pedestrian space – Extend the sidewalk to accommodate those on foot.

(iv) Add better and more streamlined wayfinding – as a means to connect DVRC and Queen’s Road to the harbour and neighbouring cultural sites (Tai Kwun, PMQ, Man Mo Temple).

(v) Improve the pavement to make it more inclusive – Make pedestrian surfaces more even, fix holes and make it more “walkable” for the elderly, disabled and those who must walk with wheels (trolley delivery, suitcases, etc.)

(vi) Provide public amenities – public seating with shading options, access to free drinking water, greening, street art, etc.

IV. Two-phase Traffic Impact Assessment

Walk DVRC supports a two-phase Traffic Impact Assessment. In the *first phase*, a formal traffic rerouting is tested for a period of time with no programming or physical changes on the road. This provides an opportunity to refine the scheme, if necessary, and rectify potential problems. In the *second phase*, following this adjustment period, the road should be closed for a significantly longer period of time so that curated programmes along with streetscape enhancements can be enacted. There will naturally be some inconvenience and re-education required in any exercise that involves the redesigning of public space to make it more walkable. In order to change behavior and adapt to the community’s needs, a period of time of at least three months is needed.

V. Programming – creating a model and Proof of Concept

Walk DVRC has identified a way to prove that pedestrianisation and walkability exercises are feasible in Central. The “Sheung Wan Fiesta” project has been in development for some time and is now ready to be launched. The Sheung Wan Fiesta is a replicable “proof of concept” for the creation of a vibrant public space for the entire community. The Sheung Wan Fiesta project is a 90-day closure to vehicular traffic of a two-block stretch of DVRC, from Western Market to Hillier Street. Trams continue to run and cross streets remain open. The Fiesta will be held from 10 am to 10 pm, to enable deliveries outside these hours. The site will be curated and provide seating and shading, entertainment and local, artisanal food. It will also include cultural and heritage walk tours to surrounding areas. A tested traffic arrangement that identifies viable traffic diversions, loading/unloading solutions and bus stop relocation will be put in place. Extensive street management policies will be implemented. Considerable time, money, manpower and stakeholder engagement has already taken place to ensure that this project succeeds.

VI. Public Engagement and Market Research

Public support for walkability and pedestrianisation initiatives is high. Evidence comes from a number of sources including the media, global interest in designing a New Central in Hong Kong and numerous stakeholder engagement exercises. In addition, two pieces of recent market research support the creation of a more walkable and liveable Central that is connected to surrounding cultural and historical sites as well as to the harbour.

The Nielsen Company, a leading international market research firm, was commissioned to conduct a study on the 76 ground-floor businesses that will be affected by the Sheung Wan Fiesta. The research has quantitative and qualitative components with two objectives: to educate/persuade and to solicit opinions/feedback for the purpose of capturing data that can be used to demonstrate positive support of the project to stakeholders. Over 60% of respondents are in favor of and want to participate in the Fiesta as they believe:



It represents a unique initiative in Hong Kong



It will give Hong Kong a powerful example of the power of pedestrianisation-based issues



It will help to promote local culture and the importance of preserving and cherishing the past



It will increase business and sales

Additionally, an independent piece of market research carried out by Colliers International, “Challenging Hong Kong’s Retail Competitiveness: Exploring Hong Kong’s Digital Retail Trends and Drive to Pedestrianisation,” cites that:



Pedestrian precincts play a significant role in future retail development



Specific opportunities are available for DVRC to serve as a connector and integrator



Offering a vibrant pedestrianized space can greatly increase footfall



The Sheung Wan Fiesta is “a great way of warming residents and businesses to the new concept”

VII. Conclusion – Pedestrianisation is always possible and increasingly desirable

Walkability is becoming increasingly important in cities around the world. To better serve the needs of its citizens, Hong Kong should now look to take forward a number of proposed pedestrianization projects that will benefit the community as a whole. To achieve this, high-level policy support is needed. Traffic Management and Street Management are key issues; they are not insurmountable obstacles.

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