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Does Hong Kong really need large infrastructure projects on Lantau?

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COMMENTS: !



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The Lantau Development Advisory Committee has called for comments from the public on plans to develop eastern Lantau and nearby islands into a transport, tourism and economic metropolis housing one million people serving the Pearl River Delta. As an adviser on infrastructure finance in Asia, I suggest the following.

The government should explain why this development is needed. It will come too late to address the current housing crisis. The tourism and leisure employment market is already tight, Disney's recent lay-offs notwithstanding.

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If it is to accommodate the projected increase of our population to nine million, this will not happen by natural birth rate alone so will be driven by our immigration policy – about which there is no debate in Hong Kong.

The SAR is already overcrowded so what is the purpose in making it even more so? And when China’s population growth is easing off, why build logistics facilities in the most expensive corner of the country?

The government should explain how much this will cost and why the money is better spent on this development rather than on alternative uses such as hospitals or old age pensions at a dignified level. This was the sort of debate that conspicuously did not take place on white elephants such as the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau bridge.

Should the development be built largely on reclaimed land or in country parks? Encroaching on any country park will cause an outcry so the intention is to fill in more harbour – but, again, at what cost? At some point, it is not worth spending the money so as to save some country park land.

The rail link will presumably be for passengers only. The opportunity for any rail was missed on the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau bridge, which could have fed the Shenzhen ports via the Tuen Mun-Chek Lap Kok link. But Kwai Tsing will not need freight rail. It has never had it and it will all be waterfront residential real estate, like Manhattan and London, in 20 years’ time anyway.

What are the geotechnical implications for the movement of, for example, silt, of filling in so much of the western harbour? Urmston Road already needs dredging; the third runway will have a major impact too.

Relentless development is in Hong Kong’s DNA but this should not be blind. The government should share with us the full picture.

Andrew Kinloch, Logie Group Limited



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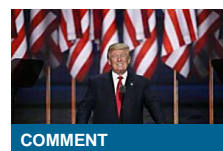
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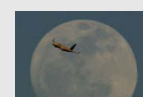
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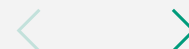
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