

From Good to Great

Simon Ng from think tank Civic Exchange wants to upgrade Hong Kong's transport sector by putting people at the center of it

Picture the city of Hong Kong: a dense urban jungle of more than 7 million people going about their daily lives. Each one of those days, on average, those people take more than 13 million trips by bus, metro, ferry and taxi. Accounting for more than 90 percent of all journeys, public transport isn't just a means to get around, it's a way of life.

"In other parts of the world, it's a choice," Simon Ng, Independent Consultant Fellow at Hong Kong think tank Civic Exchange, told a recent AmCham lunch-time briefing on sustainable transport.

Hong Kong's public transport system topped last year's

Sustainable Cities Mobilities Index by design and engineering consultancy Arcadis, largely because its share of ridership is the world's highest. Safe, efficient and affordable, it also won plaudits for the long-term viability of infrastructure investment. Metro operator MTR plows profits from real estate construction on top of its stations back into the system – a model that's being adopted across the world.

"Sustainable development should be assessed from three angles: environmental, social and economic."

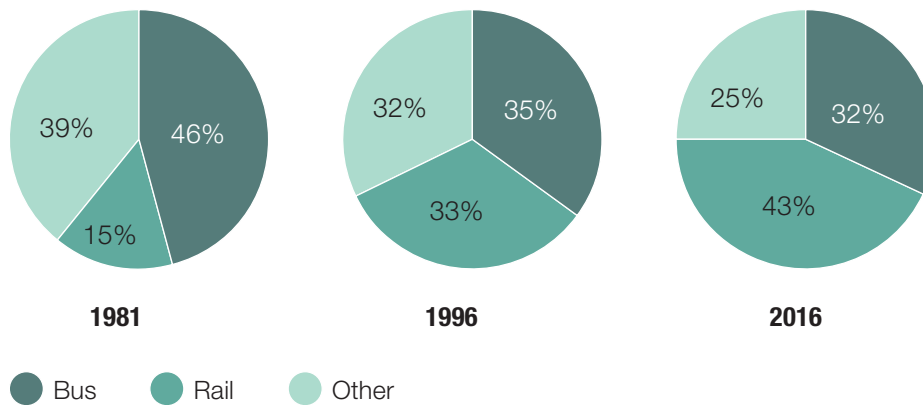
***– Simon Ng,
consultant for Civic Exchange***

But a stroll along the city's harbor front reveals a dark smudge in the well-oiled system: the black clouds belching from ferries and antiquated barges. Hong Kong still depends on fossil fuels for its power supply and has failed to tackle the pollution caused by ships and the



A snapshot:

Hong Kong's ridership pie



(Other includes minibuses and ferries, as well as private cars.)



Photo: Wikimedia Commons



swelling fleet of cars that snarl up its streets. That pushed the city down to 53rd spot in Arcadis' gauge of the system's environmental impact and government plans to cut emissions.

Sustainability, says Ng, should be a priority in transport planning to develop a system that isn't only good for now, but for decades to come. If Hong Kong wants to maintain its global competitiveness, then sustainable transport must become a focus, not an afterthought.

People first

"Sustainable development should be assessed from

Electric vehicles

Slashed tax waiver designed to spur EV sales

Stance on vehicle emissions

Progressively phasing out pre-Euro IV diesel commercial vehicles by end of 2019

Bike sharing fleets



~21,000

PM2.5 levels

(Beijing is at 60+ and the World Health Organization target is set at 10).

30+

three angles: environmental, social and economic," says Ng. In typical fashion, Hong Kong has nailed the economic aspect. Now it is time to work on the other factors.

To do this will require putting people – not cars – at the center of transport planning. This means developing



Entire public bus
fleet electric
by end of 2017

China considering
total ban of diesel and
petrol vehicles



100,000+

20+

more options for cyclists and pedestrians, switching to clean fuels and more effective traffic management.

Ng says that in other cities for example, parking is used by the government as a tool to control traffic. By comparison, Hong Kong's low parking prices actually encourage the use of private cars.

"Sustainability should not just be a goal for the Transport Department alone to achieve."

– Simon Ng

So what's driving the switch to sustainability elsewhere? A combined effort.

In other countries, emission reductions are built into national targets. "Sustainability should not just be a goal for the Transport Department alone to achieve. Hong Kong needs to embed these goals into official policy to give stakeholders the authority to act," Ng says.

It will be a slow process, but "it is the small things that start change."

