

The Government Local Civil Engineers Association

P.O. Box 28515, Gloucester Road Post Office, Wan Chai, Hong Kong.

Annual Report for 2002/03

1. General

1.1 *The Council was elected on 13 June 2002 at the 23rd AGM. During this term, 6 Council meetings were held to discuss and administer the affairs of our Association. There were also meetings and close liaisons with other staff associations concerning affairs affecting the common interests of professionals in the civil service.*

1.2 *We have witnessed many changes in the civil service in the last 12 months. Hong Kong is facing challenges from globalization and the economic downturn. We understand the Government must introduce reforms to cope with the severe situation. We are however of the view that these reforms should be carefully thought out and implemented at a slower and progressive pace so as to minimize the impact on civil servants.*

1.3 *The Council is delighted to see the appointment of our respectable former members Ir Tsao Tak-kiang and Ir Mak Chai-kwong as the Director of Civil Engineering and Director of Highways respectively.*

2. Civil Service Issues

Pay Adjustment

2.1 *In February 2003, the Government announced that civil service pay would be brought back to the levels as at 30.6.1997 in cash terms by 2 adjustments of 3% to be implemented on 1.1.2004 and 1.1.2005 respectively. We are prepared to share the burdens with the Government under the present economic situation but object against the enactment of legislation to implement such adjustments. We are of the view that any disputes between the Government and civil servants should be settled through an independent Committee of Inquiry according to the long-established mechanism.*

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2.2 *The Government, as a separate exercise, aims to carry out and complete work within 2004 on an improved civil service pay adjustment mechanism to reflect the policy that civil service pay should be broadly comparable to private sector pay. We will work in collaboration with the SENOA and express our views.*

Private Sector Involvement in the Provision of Public Services

2.3 *In October 2002, we wrote to Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works to raise our concern on the subject matter. There are cases of failed privatizations and public private partnerships overseas, which resulted in higher prices, reduced access for the poor, increased unemployment and unmet infrastructure extension targets. Without any evidence to prove success, we stress that under present economic climate services to the community are still best delivered using publicly owned and accountable systems. Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and Public Private Partnership (PPP) should only be longer term targets when the situation is ripe.*

Capital Works Expenditure

2.4 *Since the start of the 2002/03 LegCo session in October 2002, we noticed that a large number of projects have been postponed. The main reason is that despite these projects have attained the Category B status in earlier Resource Allocation Exercises (RAE), the policy bureaux are requested to re-prioritize projects and to put in funding bids only for absolutely essential items in this year's RAE.*

2.5 *We also noted that a new administrative requirement has been introduced in the 2002 funding bid, whereby the Government has asked all policy bureaux to absorb or arrange to absorb all Recurrent Consequences (RC) during the commissioning or operating stage of a project using their own expenditure envelope. This has resulted in the delay of many projects due to the disagreement of absorbing the RC between Departments.*

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2.6 *We have drawn the attention of both our Hon. Adviser and the Government to this unhealthy development. We are of the view that infrastructure investment in a period of economic downturn can boost recovery. There is no reason to justify the need to achieve a budget balance in 2006/07. The RC requirement is illogical. The Government should take a more critical and conscientious review of the infrastructure plan, and a more practical solution has to be identified to ensure the smooth and timely delivery of all those much needed capital works projects. However, it seems the situation has not been improved so far.*

Voluntary Retirement Schemes

2.7 *We are disturbed that the first round voluntary retirement (VR) scheme has created the impression of only trimming the fat at lower level. Our citizens must be made to understand that experienced professionals and managers at the top and mid-levels are still required to lead Hong Kong to recover from the present economic turmoil.*

2.8 *We also fear that the second round VR scheme might cause a “leadership vacuum” if senior posts are deleted as a result. We are of the view that Department heads must keep enough senior subordinates and retain the flexibility to decide on their own management hierarchy. Otherwise, the vacuum will create a threat to the quality of our public service.*

Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance

2.9 *Many Legislators criticized the Government for the noise barriers along the Tolo Highway. Although the Government had finally decided to alter the installation of these noise barriers, it seemed our fellow engineers in the Highways Department had to bear the brunt, facing the criticism of wasting taxpayers’ money.*

2.10 *We responded by pointing out that the culprit is the Environment Impact Assessment Ordinance (EIAO) which places rigid and demanding requirements on the project proponents. We*

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fully agree with our Hon. Adviser, the Hon. Ir Dr Raymond Ho's view that there is a need to amend the EIAO such that it facilitates rather than hindering our infrastructure developments.

3. **Meetings with Works Directors and Hon. Adviser**

3.1 *We always seek to maintain regular dialogue with DCE and DWS on professional issues and grade management matters. The Council has also met other Works Directors to exchange views on re-organization/re-structuring proposals, employment of contract assistant engineers and engineers, privatization/corporatization,, promotion opportunities and staff morale.*

3.2 *We have also been working closely with our Hon. Adviser, the Hon. Ir Dr. Raymond Ho, on many issues for the last 12 months.*

4. **Liaison Office of Central People's Government in HKSAR**

4.1 *We have, in the last 12 months, had a couple of meetings with representatives from the Social Work Department of the Liaison Office of Central People's Government in Hong Kong SAR on issues of common interests. We aim to promote networking and foster a closer link between us.*

4.2 *We hope to organize an official visit to our counterparts in the mainland in the near future. We will announce the details once they are confirmed.*

5. **Civil Engineering Graduates (CEGs) and Contract Assistant Engineers/Engineers (CAEs/Es)**

5.1 *Under the present economic downturn, the outlook for graduate is not quite as rosy as in the past. We are of the view that the graduates are valuable asset of the Government; and a clear career path should be set to attract candidates of the right caliber to join the Government and to nurture them to become competent engineers in the public sector.*

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5.2 *The Government has successfully operated the CEG training scheme, which forms an integral part of the human resources management system of the engineer grade in the past 30 years. We will be disappointed if the Government now deviates from the right track.*

5.3 *The job security of CAEs, CEs and “3+3”Es is also at stake. We are sympathetic with their situation and have been assisting them in keeping dialogue with the Government and our Hon. Adviser. Most recently, Government trained young engineers have formed a Sub-Committee under the umbrella of our Association to handle issues of their common interests. We will act as a counsellor for these young engineers and to assist in securing their jobs in the Government.*

6. **Quality Service**

We have expressed at a number of occasions that staff quality and morale must be maintained in the public sector to upkeep standards. The drastic cutback and downsizing of public organizations will have a detrimental effect on staff motivation and alertness in maintaining professional standards. We are proud of our achievements in the professional field so far, but we must pay to keep these hard-earned track records.

7. **Partnering**

Through some of our Council Members, we maintain close working relationship with our counterparts in HKIE and SNEOA. We will increase cooperation with them. In addition, we aim to work in collaboration with all stakeholders to strive for improving the image of engineers as a common goal.

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8. HKIE Activities

8.1 *The Annual General Meeting of the HKIE has been scheduled on 26 June 2003 (Thursday). The election for the post of Elected Ordinary Members (EOM) for the 2003/04 session will also be held on the same day. The Council appeals to all members to show your support by attending the AGM and casting your votes.*

8.2 *Our Hon. President, Ir Peter Chan Pak-fong, will run for the election for the post of EOM in partnership with Ir Lau Chi-kin of Buildings Department and Ir Koo Yuk-chan of Fugro (HK) Limited. Ir Chan participates actively in both the activities of the Association, SNEOA and HKIE. **Your council appeals to all members for your strong support to Peter and his partners.***

9. Membership Drive

Given the present economic climate and uncertainties, we need a strong and united Association to cope with the instability surrounding our profession today. Once again, we appeal to members to encourage more fellow engineers to join our Association to boost our representative power. Please contact the Hon. Secretary at st.ip@housingauthority.gov.hk or your department's representative in Council for membership application.

10. End-Piece

I wish to thank you for your support and advice during the past year. It is gratifying to have a group of dedicated and devoted Council Members working for the well-being of our Association. Finally, I wish the incoming Council every success in the year ahead.

By Order of the Council

*(Ir Stephen CHU Kin-hong)
Chairman
8 June 2003*