

## 1995 Use of English – Suggested Solution

### Section A

#### Part I

##### A.

1. (a) personal inconvenience  
(b) losses to business  
(c) [security forces / police and firemen] lose [minutes / time]  
(d) deterioration in air quality // air pollution

##### B.

2. (a) discussions with senior officials of Transport Department  
(b) meeting with taxi and minibus owners  
(c) visiting other cities in South East Asia // Singapore and Bangkok  
(d) took a survey // distributed a questionnaire  
(e) consulted town planners
3. (a) January 1996  
(b) December 1998

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#### Phase I

4. [tax / license fee] raised by 50%  
(a) disabled people [will not pay tax / will be exempt]  
(b) people in rural areas will pay lower tax  
(a) heavy fines for [tax evaders / people who drive without paying tax]  
(b) repeat offenders will lose licences
5. freeze on new taxi licences // no licences issued for six months  
taxi licence is transferable within family  
illegal operators may face imprisonment

#### Phase II

6. taxi fares will be doubled  
disabled subsidized by government
7. completely barred from certain congested / busy areas during rush hours  
can operate on Sundays and public holidays
8. banned from operating in congested areas during rush hours  
vehicles held by police for up to one year

#### Phase III

9. (a) now guaranteed to be accurate  
(b) now impossible to cheat the system  
(c) now flexible // system can be changed easily  
(d) now fair

#### 10.

Class of district	Example area	Level of charges during peak hours	Amount (\$)
Busy	Sha Tin // Shatin	Standard	\$10
Sometimes busy	Tai Po // Taipo	Reduced	\$5

11. \$0 // zero // nil // none

12. (a) discourage unnecessary use of cars  
(b) encourage companies to use [flexitime / flexible working hours]  
(c) provide revenue for government

#### Part II

##### A

13. Why do car owners in Hong Kong pay so much more tax than in the US?

14. (a) road network limited so more crowded here // roads are limited  
(b) excellent public transport here  
(c) people travel shorter distances to work  
(d) many people here drive cars for status

##### B

15. Is it fair that tax paid by drivers should support [public transport / others]?

16. (a) reduce [road congestion / traffic congestion]  
(b) air will be cleaner / fresher  
(c) people will get to work on time

##### C

17. How can we cope with the new restrictions?

18. (a) make sure your suppliers know rules about delivery times  
(b) plan deliveries in advance  
(c) educate your staff about the system  
(d) report suppliers who violate the new rules

D.

19. Will our local bus companies really improve their service?
20. (a) there will be financial incentives // bus companies will be rewarded if they offer a better service  
(b) less traffic will mean shorter travel times  
(c) bus companies will be required to provide driver courtesy training  
(d) buses will be regularly inspected

E.

21.

Criticisms of ERP	Details of the criticisms	Suggested alternatives	Objections to alternatives
1. too expensive	a. expensive to install	b. increase fuel tax	c. bus passengers would be affected
	d. new staff needed to run system	e. privatize the system	f. the government has to be accountable
2. unfair	g. all cars would be taxed at same rate	h. raise licence fees for luxury cars	i. all cars take up same space
	j. people won't be able to check on what they've spent	k. pre-paid cards // stored value tickets	l. people could still be overcharged
3. invasion of privacy	m. government would have a record of your movements	n. pre-paid ticket	o. long queues at the entrance to the zone

F.

22. Are you confident that the Hong Kong public will accept ERP this time?
23. (a) people are more familiar with high technology  
(b) traffic congestion much worse than 10 years ago  
(c) more aware of high cost of pollution

G.

24. What do you see as the future of trams? // Will trams still have a role to play?
25. (a) ideal for short journeys  
(b) easy for elderly to use  
(c) offer a frequent service

H.

26. Will government employees take the lead in helping to reduce road traffic?
27. (a) introduce [flexi-times / flexible working hours]  
(b) reduce cars in government fleet  
(c) government parking lots will charge fees  
(d) civil servants will have to pay for drivers
28. By what means of transport did Mr. Spencer come to this conference?

## Use of English Listening Test 1995

### Part I

Spencer : Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I'm John Spencer, Commissioner for Transport. We're called this press conference today to present a comprehensive road traffic scheme to solve Hong Kong's congestion problem. I don't think I really need to tell you how serious traffic congestion has become here in Hong Kong. Traffic congestion causes a lot of problems. First of all, I'm sure we're all aware what a personal inconvenience traffic delays are. There really is nothing worse than being stuck in traffic. Such delays can also result in losses to business. Time is money, after all. What's more, when there's traffic congestion, our security forces, police and firemen lose precious minutes when responding to emergencies. Finally, from an environmental point of view, all the traffic leads to a deterioration in air quality, and that affects our health.

The new traffic scheme has been prepared by Mainline Associates, a US-based consultancy firm which specialises in traffic management. I'd now like to introduce Ms Sarah McCarthy, Vice-president of Mainline Associates. Ms McCarthy?

McCarthy : Thank you, Mr Spencer. I'm delighted to be here in Hong Kong and after only a few months I've already fallen in love with your wonderful city. Well, let me start by telling you a bit about how we obtained information on the situation here. First of all, we had extensive discussions with senior officials in the Transport Department. These took place at intervals over a period of about three months. Then we met with taxi and minibus owners to hear their side of the story. We wanted to get a balanced view of the problem. We also visited other cities in South East Asia - most notably Singapore and Bangkok - to see how they were handling their problems. We also got information from the Hong Kong public itself. We took a survey - actually we distributed a questionnaire. As you might expect, there was a very wide range of opinion. Finally, we consulted town planners both here in Hong Kong and overseas. Only after we'd done all this did we begin work on the scheme itself.

Now, let me give you a time-frame for the scheme. Phase I'll begin in January of next year, 1996. The scheme'll be phased in over three years and it'll be fully operational in December, 1998.

Let me talk about the three phases one by one.

In Phase I, we recommend that the tax on private cars be raised by 50

percent.

Obviously, we realise this'll be very harsh on some people, and so we've proposed some important concessions. The first concession is that disabled people won't pay any road tax at all. They'll be exempt. Secondary, people living in rural areas, where public transport is limited, will pay lower taxes. We haven't decided how much yet. Now I come to the penalties. There'll be heavy fines for evaders - people who drive without paying the tax. Repeat offenders - those who are caught more than once - will lose their licences.

The other important proposal in Phase I relates to taxis - there'll be a freeze on new taxi licences. No licences 'll be issued for six months. We've got to cut down on the number of taxis on the roads. However, to avoid undue hardship we're making one important concession. A taxi licence is transferable within the family. In this way the family'll still control the business. As for penalties, anyone caught operating a taxi business illegally may face imprisonment.

There'll be no measures affecting minibuses or goods vehicles in the first phase of our scheme. But there will be measures affecting them in Phase II.

Now let's move on to Phase II, beginning with taxis. In Phase II, taxi fares'll be doubled. Now this may seem severe, but it'll make Hong Kong taxi fares comparable with other cities. say London or New York. The recommendation for taxis includes a concession for the disabled. They'll be subsidised by the Government if they use a taxi.

Minibuses are also affected in Phase II. They'll be completely barred from certain congested areas. such as Hennessy Road in Wan Chai, or Nathan Road in Tsim Sha Tsui. However, an exception will be made to allow minibuses to operate in these areas on Sundays and Public Holidays.

Now we come to goods vehicles - we propose that goods vehicles be banned from operating in congested areas, but that's only during rush hours. we'll give you the details of the districts involved, and the actual hours, at a later date. If the drivers break the new regulation, their vehicles will be held by the police for up to one year.

Now for Phase III, where the most important thing is the introduction of Electronic Road Pricing or ERP. I realise there was quite a controversy over ERP in Hong Kong about ten years ago. However, ten years is ancient history as far as high technology's concerned, and there've been

many improvements.

First of all, ERP is now guaranteed to be accurate - the technology's fool-proof. Also, it's impossible to cheat the system - we've built a number of safeguards into it. Obviously, I'm not going to tell you what they are. Also, the system has been made flexible. It can be changed easily since it's now fully computerised. Finally, the most important improvement is that the present system is a fair one - those who use busy roads a lot will pay the most. Occasional users of busy roads will get off more lightly. Those of you who confine your driving to the rural areas, where congestion isn't a problem, won't have to pay at all.

We've prepared a small table for you to complete which'll show you how ERP will operate during the peak hours. The plan features three classes of districts based on different levels of congestion. The first of these will simply be known as a 'congested' area. The second is classed as busy' and the third as, sometimes-busy' Obviously, there're also areas with no congestion but we haven't included a space for this in the table. The scale of charges drivers'll pay will depend on how congested the areas are as well as what time periods they're used in, but, as I say, I only want to talk about the peak hours for the moment.

As you'd expect, there'll be a high charge of twenty dollars for driving in a congested area, say, for example, Central, in either of the rush hour periods.

A standard charge will apply in the busy areas during the same periods. So you'll have to pay ten dollars if you drive your car in Sha-Men in the middle of the rush hour.

For the peak time periods in the sometimes-busy areas, a reduced charge will apply. This means, for example, that drivers in Tai Po will have to pay five dollars.

To cheer you up, as I said before, ERP doesn't apply at all in areas where there's no congestion, and overnight, there's no charge at all anywhere. If you don't want to pay ERP charges, you'd better live and work in the rural areas!

The benefits of this system are clear. It'll discourage unnecessary use of cars, thereby reducing road traffic. It will encourage companies to use flexi-time - or flexible working hours - which will also help ease traffic congestion. Finally, ERP will provide revenue for the government. The income generated can be used to subsidise efficient public transport.

Well,. I think that's all I've got to say for the moment. Thanks for your attention.

Spencer : Thank you, Ms McCarthy. Perhaps we should take a short break before we start our question-and-answer session.

## Part II

Spencer : Welcome back, everyone. Now it's time for our question and answer session. If you have a question, please raise your hand. When I call on you, if you wouldn't mind standing up and giving your name and the name of the organisation you work for or represent.

Poon : I'm Susan Poon of the Hong Kong Times. I lived in the US for three years and what I want to know is this - why do car owners in Hong Kong pay so much more in tax, as opposed to other countries like the US?

McCarthy : I know tax here is high for car owners, but the situation in Hong Kong is completely different from the US. The road network's very limited here, so roads are much more crowded. Secondly, you have an excellent public transport system here which we don't have in the US in most places. And don't forget that people travel shorter distances to work than they do in my country - that is, America. Finally, many people here drive cars for status. They don't really need to drive a car at all.

Spencer : Okay, next question please.

Yau I'm Alison Yau of the Kowloon Car Owners Club. It seems to me that you're saying not only will car owners be paying more tax, but that some of this money'll subsidise public transport, which we don't use. So my question now is - is it fair that tax paid by drivers should support public transport?

McCarthy : Yes, I do think it's fair that drivers' tax should support public transport. People with no children pay tax to support schools; healthy people pay tax to support hospitals. The point is, public transport, like schools and hospitals, benefits the whole community. A good system'll reduce road congestion and drivers'll benefit from this. The air'll be cleaner and fresher and every one of us will enjoy that too. Finally, people'll get to work on time and That'll please our bosses.

Spencer : Gentleman at the front?

- Tsang : I'm Kenneth Tsang of the Hong Kong Retailers Association. Our members are used to the old delivery hours. How can we cope with the new restrictions?
- McCarthy : Everyone is going to have to make adjustments under the new system. First, you could make sure your suppliers know the rules about delivery times. Then be sure to plan deliveries in advance so that they don't all come at once during the non-restricted hours. Educate you staff about the new system, make sure they don't bring a loss to you out of ignorance. Finally, you could report any suppliers who try to violate the new rules to the police. Remember, violators face the loss of their licences.
- Spencer : Thanks. Now, the lady at the back?
- Lau: Hello, I'm Priscilla Lau of the Hong Kong Economic Journal. You mentioned imported bus services. Will our local bus companies really improve their service? A lot of people'll be very doubtful.
- McCarthy : Yes. I think the bus companies will improve. I'm aware of the current dissatisfaction with bus services here, but the new system will lead to a better service in several ways. First, there'll be financial incentives - bus companies'll be rewarded if they offer a better service. Also, less traffic'll mean shorter travel times - the buses won't take so long to get from one end of the route to the other. And there're some details I didn't mention earlier. All bus companies'll be required by law to provide courtesy training for their drivers. There've been too many complaints about rude drivers and they need to learn to be more polite. Also, the buses'll be regularly inspected for road worthiness and cleanliness. The local companies are generally guilty of neglecting the importance of clean buses.
- Spencer : Okay, thanks. It's Mr Lewis, isn't it?
- Lewis : Yes, I'm John Lewis of the Hong Kong Taxpayers Association. We believe there are three main disadvantages of ERP. Let me spell them out one by one, and maybe we can have a little discussion. One, the system's too expensive; it'll cost far too much money.
- McCarthy : Just how will the system be expensive?
- Lewis : In two ways. First the system will be very expensive to install. That'll take a lot of money.
- Tsang : I agree, installation will be expensive, but why don't we first increase the

fuel tax as an alternative? That'd be easy to implement.

- McCarthy : No, I disagree, because if we raise the fuel tax, that'd affect bus passengers as well and we want to encourage people to use public transport.
- Lewis : Well, it'd be expensive in another way. An entirely new staff'd be needed to run the system.
- Lau : Then, instead of letting the government run it, why don't we "privatise" the system - let a private company operate it.
- Spencer : Oh, no. The government has to be accountable to the people. We can't evade our responsibility like that. It wouldn't be the right thing to do.
- McCarthy : And what's your second objection, Mr. Lewis?
- Lewis : The system's unfair, Again in two ways.
- McCarthy : I think it's very fair.
- Lewis : I disagree. First, all cars'd be taxed at the same rate. This isn't fair to those people who've saved two years to buy a small car. They'd be subsidizing people with luxury cars.
- Tsang : I agree. I think you should just raise the licence fees so that owners of luxury cars will have to pay higher licensing fees.
- McCarthy : That doesn't make sense. All cars take up roughly the same road space no matter how expensive they are. What we really want is fewer cars on the roads.
- Lewis : Well, now to my second point about unfairness. People won't be able to check on what they've spent.
- Lau : To avoid that, you could have pre-paid cards like those we already have for telephones here. A stored-value ticket system like we have on the MTR.
- Lewis : People could still be overcharged and there'd be nothing they could do about it.
- McCarthy : All right, let's move on. What's your third disadvantage?

- Lewis            The system represents an invasion of privacy. We all have a right to privacy.
- McCarthy :     I don't understand your point. Can you explain what you mean?
- Lewis :         It's obvious. The government'd have a record of your movements. It'd know where you went and when you went there.
- Lau             I think the answer to that is again the pre-paid ticket. The driver can insert the ticket into a machine when he enters a new zone.
- Lewis           Yes, but then you'd have long queues at the entrance to the zone.
- Spencer :      Well, there's still time for some more questions. Yes?
- Li               I'm Ryan Li of the Hong Kong Car Dealers Association. Are you confident the Hong Kong public will accept ERP this time round? I think they may still object to it.
- McCarthy :     Oh, I don't think they will. For one thing, people are more familiar with high technology. These days most of us work with computers in some form. You've also got to realise that traffic congestion is much worse than it was ten years ago. There's double the amount of traffic there was then. Finally, people today are more aware of the high cost of pollution, so they are now prepared to pay a higher price for a cleaner environment.
- Anderson :     I'm David Anderson, General Manager of Hong Kong Tramways. Your plan doesn't mention anything about trams. What do you see as the future of trams? Will they still have a part to play?
- McCarthy :     Absolutely. I suppose I should say we didn't mention trams because they already play their part perfectly. Why do I say this? One, they're ideal for short journeys, say from Central to Wanchai. Two, they're easy for the elderly to use - they may have difficulty climbing onto buses or negotiating the stairs in the MTR. Trams also offer a frequent service - you don't have to wait long for the next one
- Spencer :      Yes?
- Tyler          :     I'm Tyler Could, a reporter for the Orient Express. This question is for

Mr. Spencer. Will government employees take the lead in helping to reduce road traffic?

Spencer : I'm very glad you asked that question. There are a number of measures under consideration. First, we're thinking about introducing flexi-time – that is, flexible working hours, in a number of government departments. This'd certainly help in easing congestion on the roads. There are also proposals to reduce the number of cars in the government fleet. Old cars which go out of service won't be replaced. This means that in a fairly short time there'll be a lot fewer cars in the fleet. Government car parks will start charging fees next year to discourage civil servants from driving to work. And finally, senior civil servants won't be given their own driver unless they pay for them. Of course, before any of these measures are put in to force we'll have to consider their impact on morale.

Tyler : One final question, Mr. Spencer.

Spencer : Yes?

Tyler : By what means of transport did you come to this press conference today? MTR? Public light bus?

Spencer : Oh dear. There must be something wrong with your microphone. I didn't catch that question at all. In any case, we're out of time. Thank you, Ms. McCarthy. Thank you all for coming.