

Public Transport in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, transport and transport policy must continually adapt to the changing circumstances. Rapid increase in population after the Second World War led to the creation of new centres of population density, new housing estates and industrial areas. These in turn resulted in tremendous demand for public transport and evolution of new transport systems.

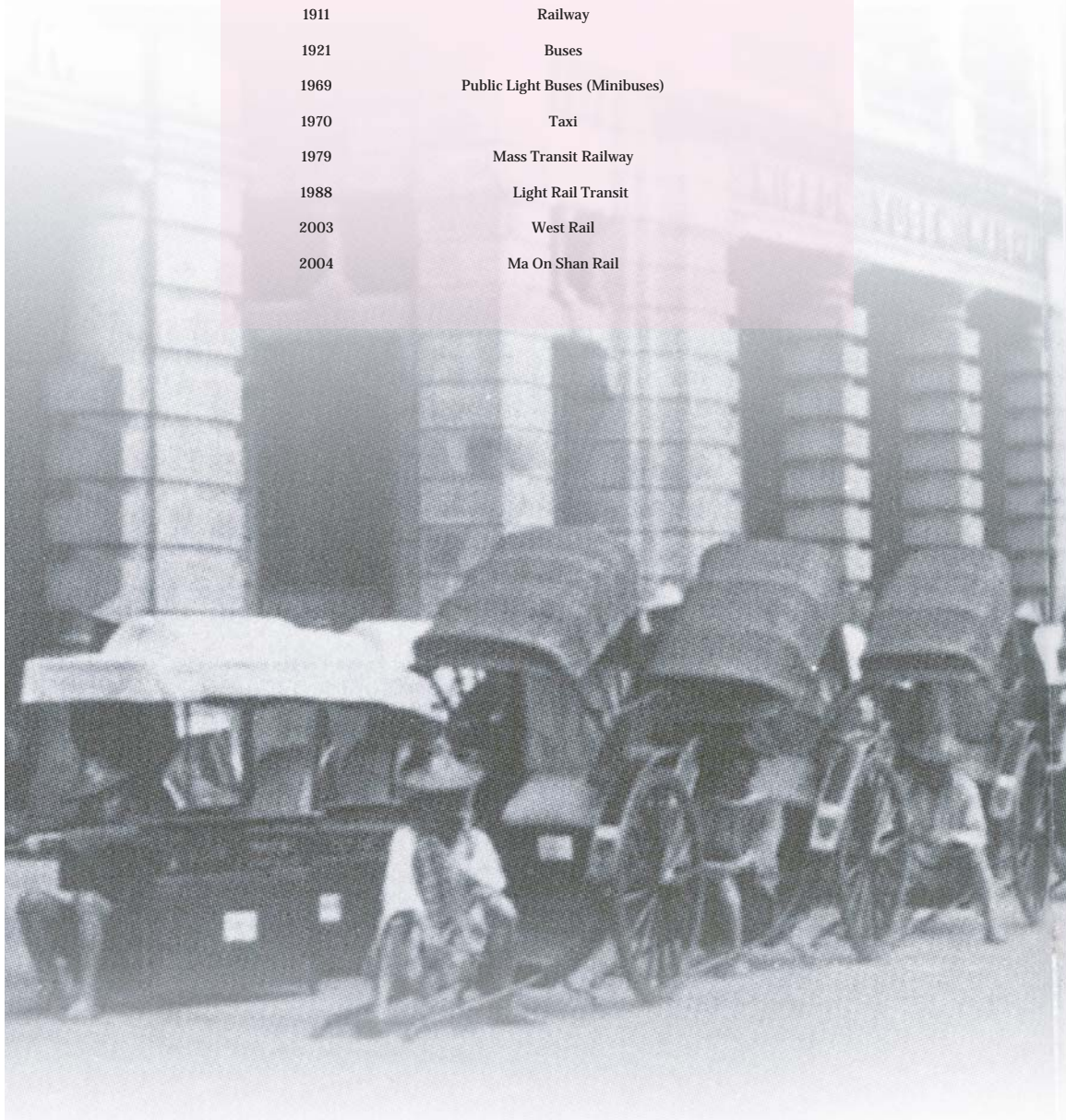
The Transport Department (formerly known as Transport Office) was set up in 1965. Its main functions are to give advice on future transport requirements, to liaise with the public transport companies so as to coordinate their activities in the best interests of the public and to carry out those statutory duties vested in the department under the various road traffic ordinances.

In this exhibition, we endeavor to outline the development of local transport in Hong Kong beginning with a brief introduction to early traditional transport. There follow descriptive accounts of the development of various modes of transport in chronological order. The subject of transport is a broad one and it is clearly not possible to deal with it exhaustively in an exhibition of this size. However, every possible effort has been made to make it as comprehensive and interesting as available resources would allow.

Event Chronology

Year Local transport appeared in Hong Kong

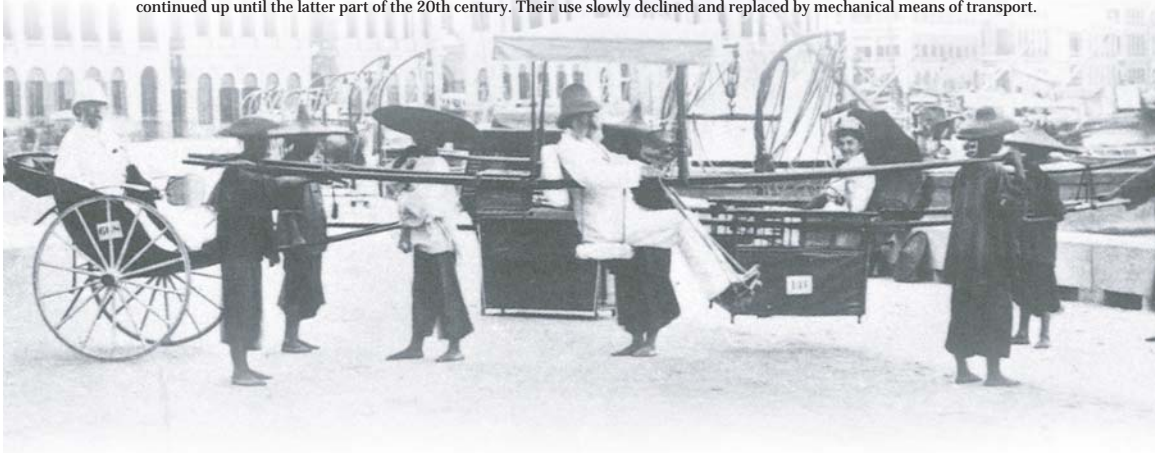
1841	Sedan Chairs and carriages were first in use locally
1873	Ferry
1888	Peak Tram
1904	Tram
1911	Railway
1921	Buses
1969	Public Light Buses (Minibuses)
1970	Taxi
1979	Mass Transit Railway
1988	Light Rail Transit
2003	West Rail
2004	Ma On Shan Rail



Sedan Chair (1841)

In the very earliest days, transport was very simple itself. The Chinese population and the foreigners walked to their destinations. For ventures farther abroad than the precincts of the city, ponies were the rule, and it was not long, of course, before the carriage-and-pair was a common sight on the roads. The first sedan chair arrived as early as 1841 after the completion of the first real road, from Wyndham Street to East Point, a carriage and pair, with coachman, arrived from Manila for the celebration of the new road. Sedan chairs quickly found their way into Hong Kong.

The rickshaw was invented by a European missionary in Japan and its use quickly spread to other parts of Asia, principally India in the 1880s and Hong Kong in 1874. They soon displaced sedan chairs as the popular means of transport and their regular use continued up until the latter part of the 20th century. Their use slowly declined and replaced by mechanical means of transport.



Ferries (1873)

Prior to 1918, there was no regular ferry service between Victoria and Yaumati, Mongkok, Shamshuipo, Hunghom and Kowloon City Districts. There were, however, some 16 small Chinese companies operation "taxi-ferry" boats which cruised along the waterfront in search of passengers, plying between Yaumati and a small pier at the end of Jubilee Street.

In 1918, Government granted a ferry monopoly to a Chinese concerned called the Kowloon District Company which opened services between Victoria and Mongkok and Shamshuipo. Ferry-boats left both sides at intervals of one hour. The service improved and bigger boats were put into operation and accommodation divided into first and second classes.

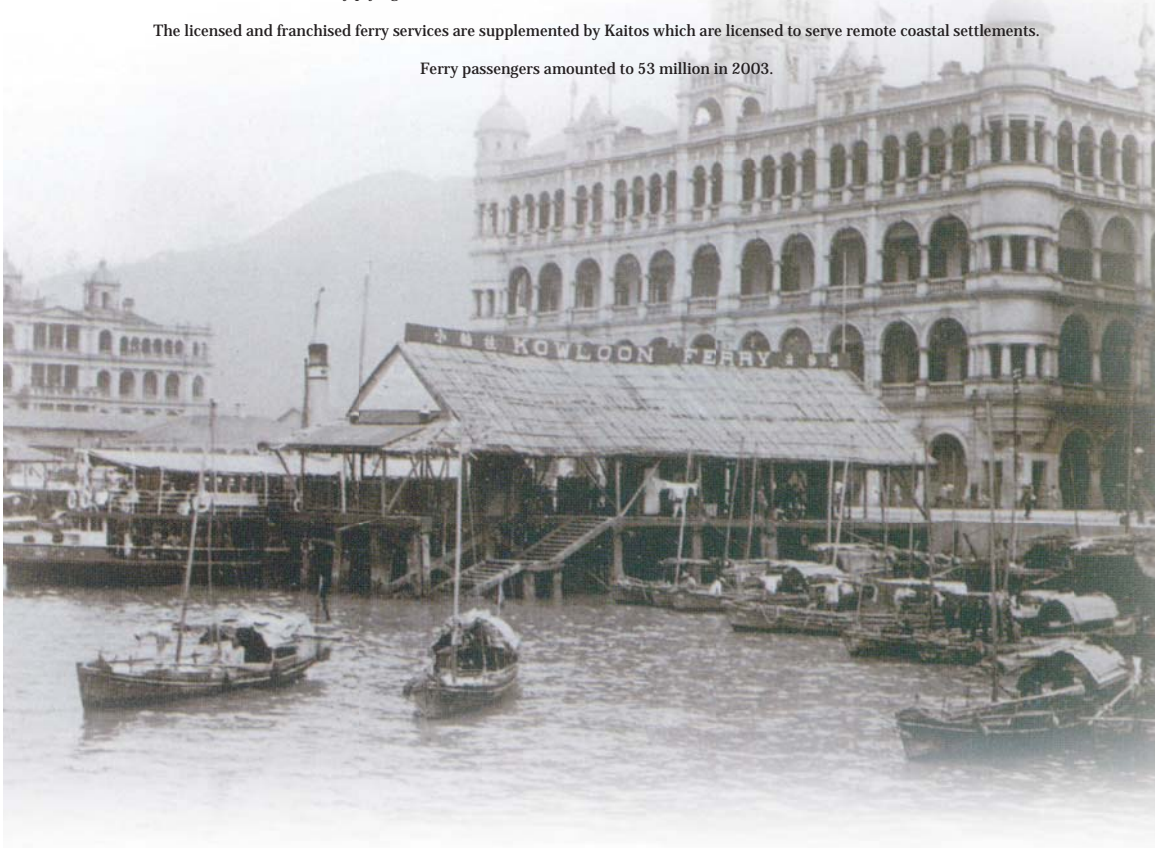
In 1924, the Hong Kong and Yaumati Ferry Company took over the franchise and by 1925 were operating new steel double-ended boats. The development of the vehicular ferry service was commenced in 1932.

The Star Ferry Company which operates a service between the Central District and Kowloon peninsula with efficiency which earned the respect of all visitors, commenced operations in 1898, taking over the ferry business commenced by Dorabjee Nowrojee many years earlier. Its growth has been commensurate with the rapidly expanding importance of Kowloon and it carries millions of passengers to and from in the course of a year.

In 1999, most of the ferry services are provided by licensed ferry operators. As at December, 2003, there are now 11 ferry operators providing 27 regular licensed passenger ferry services in Hong Kong. There are two franchised ferry services operated by Star Ferry plying between Central and Tsim Sha Tsui; and Wanchai and Tsim Sha Tsui.

The licensed and franchised ferry services are supplemented by Kaitos which are licensed to serve remote coastal settlements.

Ferry passengers amounted to 53 million in 2003.

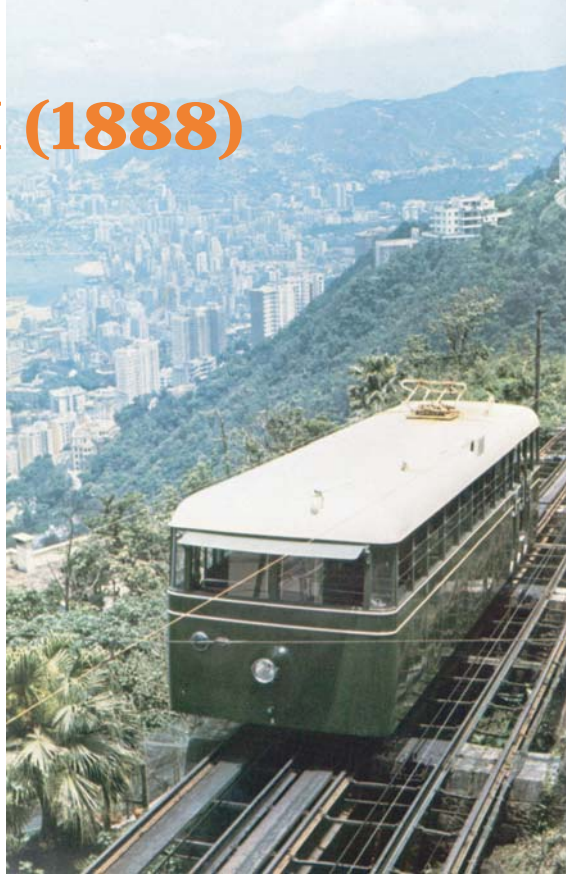


PEAK TRAM (1888)

In 1881, Mr. A. Findlay Smith finalized details for a Peak Railway and presented a petition for a concession to the Governor of Hong Kong. The legislation was passed in 1883. The actual construction began in September, 1885, and in May, 1888 the line was officially opened.

Steam power was used until 1926, when a modern Ward-Leonard system of electric control was installed. The old Lower Station was demolished in March, 1935, and the new modern Station with Studio Apartments above was completed in February, 1936. Today, the Peak Tower is a land mark in Hong Kong.

Now, the Hong Kong's tramway is a cable-hauled funicular railway. It runs 1.4 kilometres between Central and the Peak with four stops en route, climbing 373 metres on gradient as steep as one-in-two. The line carries about 8,500 passengers a day, mainly tourists and local sightseers.



TRAM (1904)

London financiers were responsible for the original development of tramways in Hong Kong. The Electric Traction Company was formed in 1902 and in July, 1904, the first tram ran on Hong Kong's roads. The company became the Hong Kong Tramways Company, Limited in 1910.

The system extends from Shaukiwan to Kennedy Town, a distance of 8.42 miles, and the total mileage of track is 19.462 miles. In 1905, the company had 35 tramcars in service - single-deckers with accommodation for 28 passengers. The Hong Kong Tramways provided the lowest fare charged by any transport undertaking in the world. The double-deckers tram made its first appearance in 1912.

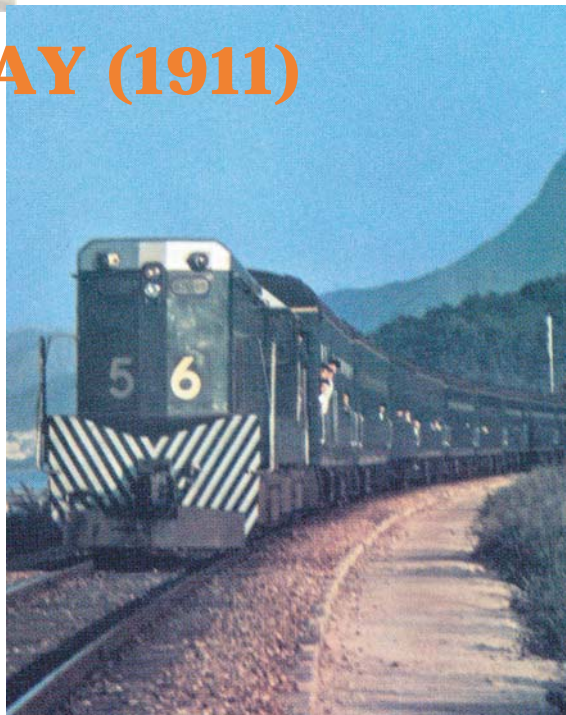
Today, the company have 164 trams including two open-balcony trams for tourists and private hire and one special maintenance tram. The daily average of passengers is 224,000.00.

THE RAILWAY (1911)

The railway from Kowloon to Canton is 111 miles long of which 22 miles are in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Section (formerly known as the British Section) of the line was opened to traffic on the 1st October 1910 and it was one of the most expensive pieces of railway construction in the world at that time. The costs of the line, exclusive of rolling stock, amounted to approximately 75,000 pounds per mile, tunnels being responsible for 17,500 pounds of this amount and earthwork 10,000 pounds. Beacon Hill Tunnel, which is approximately 1.5 miles in length, cost \$3,283,500.00.

The terminal station at Kowloon was completed and opened to the public on 28th March 1916.

Now, the East Rail (which connects East Tsim Sha Tsui in Kowloon with Lo Wu and total with 14 stations and carries about 800,000 passengers daily), Light Rail (opened in September, 1988 with 68 stops and a fleet of 119 single-deck light rail vehicles), Ma On Shan Rail (came into operation on 21st December, 2004 with 9 stations from Tai Wai to Wu Kai Sha) and West Rail (came into operation on 20th December, 2003 which linking up Nam Cheong in West Kowloon with Yuen Long and Tuen Mun in the North-West New Territories with nine stations) which are operated by the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation.





BUSES (1921)

Before the second world war, the bus company on the mainland operated 150 buses serving different routes, including the New Territories. The first buses were roughly covered trucks on which were three rows of wooden benches accommodating six first class and 10 second class passengers were provided with straw mattresses to cushion the bumps.

After second world war, the buses in Hong Kong mainly operated by The China Motor Bus Company Limited (CMB) in Hong Kong side and The Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited (KMB) in Kowloon side and the New Territories. After the franchise of CMB was expired on 1998, Citybus and The New World First Bus Services Limited (NWFB) took up the Hong Kong Island routes.

KMB now operates about 339 bus routes in Kowloon and the New Territories and 65 routes on cross-harbour services. She is one of the largest road passenger transport operators in southeast Asia and carried about 2.91 million passengers a day in 2003.



Citybus operates 113 bus routes, including 66 Hong Kong Island routes, 31 cross-harbour routes and 16 routes to Tung Chung/Airport and she carried about 568,000 passengers a day in 2003.

NWFB operates about 59 Hong Kong Island routes, 10 Tseung Kwan O routes and 33 cross-harbour routes and she carried 495,000 passengers a day in 2003.

There are two companies provide bus services to Lantau: Long Win Bus Company Limited and The New Lantao Bus Company (1973) Limited, the former provides bus services to north Lantau and the Airport and the latter provides bus services to Lantau Island.

Information from Transport Department and China Mail



MINIBUSES (1969)

Another popular form of transport in Hong Kong is Public Light Buses (Minibuses). As from 1st September 1969 new categories of licensed vehicles known as Public Light Buses were introduced. Public Light Buses plying for hire are free to set their own routes and fares. Private Light Buses are not allowed to carry fare-paying passengers unless the buses are owned and operated by schools or other educational establishments. There were almost 4,000 Public Light Buses plying for hire in most areas of Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and New Territories in 1970s.

Today, Public Light Buses with not more than 16 seats. It divides on scheduled services (green minibuses - which operate on fixed routes at fixed fares) and on non-scheduled services (red minibuses - which are free to operate anywhere and without control over routes or fares)



TAXIS (1970)

Taxis were a popular means of transport in Hong Kong even back in the 1970s.

Taxi provides a convenient personalized point-to-point transport service. At present there are 18138 taxis in Hong Kong, on which 15250 are urban taxis (operate throughout Hong Kong but except Tung Chung Road and roads in south Lantau), 2838 are New Territories taxis (fundamentally confined to rural areas in the New Territories, the airport and are permitted to serve certain locations in the urban area through specified routes) and 50 are Lantau taxis (operate only on Lantau Island)

Information from Transport Department, Hong Kong Report, China Mail, Hong Kong



Mass Transit Railway (1979)



Light Rail (1988)



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