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## Public will wait 40 years for full access to Victoria Harbour, says study

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*Researchers urge government to speed up improvement work to public areas along the harbour*



[1]The public will

have to wait 40 years for access to the full length of the Victoria Harbour shoreline if the government fails to up the pace of its waterfront improvements, a new study has found.

While the government has long touted plans to open up the full length of the iconic harbour as a "world class" leisure facility, the research by students from the Worcester Polytechnic Institute in the United States found only slow progress towards the goal. The students were commissioned by urban planning group Designing Hong Kong and the Harbour Business Forum to examine the accessibility, connectivity, quality and popularity of the city's waterfront areas and compare their findings with a similar study in 2008.

They found that the area of waterfront accessible to the public had increased to 21.4 kilometres, from 13.4 kilometres in 2008. But at a rate of just 1.3 kilometres per year, it would take until 2055 for the full 74.3 kilometres of harbourfront to be opened up.

"The government has been making progress on the connectivity of the harbourfront," said Designing Hong Kong founder Paul Zimmerman.

"But the progress is very slow. It needs to work harder."

The team walked through every promenade in the city, rating the waterfronts at Tsing Yi, Admiralty and Tsim Sha Tsui as the harbour's best, with Cheung Sha Wan promenade considered the worst.

The Cheung Sha Wan waterfront, close to Nam Cheong MTR station, was condemned for being covered with rubbish and offering few facilities other than a wholesale fish market.

"Nothing has changed in Cheung Sha Wan," said team member Alfred Scott. "The government has no recommendation for people to go there, because they don't know what to do with it. I don't know what to do with it. There's nowhere to sit and nothing to do there."

There was also criticism of a route along the Wan Chai waterfront near the Convention and Exhibition Centre, which the group said had remained narrow and unsafe for pedestrians since the 2008 study.

The team spoke highly of the promenade at Tsing Yi, praising its easy access, outstanding quality and plentiful activities for visitors.

The Tsim Sha Tsui promenade was rated highly in activities, quality and popularity, but less so for accessibility as the routes from the nearby MTR stations were long, indirect and congested.

Another concern the team identified was the high number of people flouting localised bans on certain activities, including fishing, cycling and dog walking.

The team listed 14 activities banned on various parts of the waterfront, and suggested that the widespread flouting of the bans should lead the government to reconsider the rules.

"The traditional view of Hong Kong's promenades is that they are parks, which are under the pleasure ground regulations," Zimmerman said. "But promenades are not pleasure grounds. They are walking spaces, footpaths. They should be treated as pedestrian roads."

The team, selected because students from the university had previously taken part in similar studies, will shortly submit a detailed report to the Harbourfront Commission under the Development Bureau.

A spokeswoman for the Development Bureau said many harbourfront areas were already occupied by public facilities, homes or businesses, while other areas were needed for port operations.

She said the government had been looking into various solutions to construct an uninterrupted promenade along Victoria Harbour, and it would take time to address all the challenges.

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