

'Measuring' the Tamar-Central Controversy

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Introduction: Envisioning the Tamar-Central Site



Figure 1. *A government rendering of the planned Tamar site released to the public. (Image courtesy of Atkins China Limited Online).*

Chief Executive Donald Tsang’s plans for relocating government offices to the Tamar site together with implementing the Central Outline Zoning Plan have generated much controversy. Environmentalists expressed worry at the toll increased traffic congestion, and its attendant pollution, would take on the already strained roads of Central. Business interests pointed out the undesirability of creating large land parcels along the waterfront and advocated smaller lots for the better creation of low-rise, vibrant commercial enterprises. Civil society groups lamented the loss of yet more harbor-front sites to skyscrapers, shopping malls, and ‘groundscraper,’ as well as the likely demise of Government Hill, which presently houses the Central Government Offices, when the land is eventually sold after the move to Tamar.

To address this growing tide of disapproval, the government mounted its own campaign on 28 May 2006 to inform the public of its intentions. Their vision included several different – but also similar – renderings of the site, replete with grand promenade and abundant greenery among large developments. For the statistics offered by opponents to criticize the plan, the government brought forth their own numbers to substantiate their case.

What was surprising during this entire process was the wealth of information being disseminated by the proponents, opponents, and media to the public while at the very same time, the striking inability for an individual to move beyond the role of the passive observer to that of a concerned participant. Luckily, I was given a chance by Civic Exchange to examine the area in question under the supervision of Dr Bill Barron.

With ruler, calculator, and map in hand, I focused on the road to total area ratio, with its critical linkage to questions of environmental pollution, traffic congestion, and sound urban planning. In this way, my investigation hoped to let the numbers speak for themselves – among the already myriad voices surrounding the Tamar-Central controversy.

Methodology: Examining the Facts & Figures



Figure 2. *Computer rendering of Central Reclamation Phase III. (Image courtesy of Asia Airfreight Terminal Online).*

Initially, I divided the area of the entire Tamar-Central Region into polygons, whose areas could be easily calculable – in this case relying on rectangles, triangles, trapezoids, and parallelograms. Afterwards, I summed up the area of all these polygons to determine the entire area of the Region. To calculate the areas of the roads within Tamar-Central and of the actual Central Reclamation Phase III (CRIII) area, I repeated the process for each.

Using the above figures, I could then calculate the ratio of roads to the Tamar-Central Region and to the CRIII area by simply dividing the total area of roads by the total area of the Tamar-Central Region and of the CRIII area, respectively. This information would be vital to evaluating questions of traffic congestion, environmental pollution, and good urban planning. After all, could devoting x percentage of the Tamar-Central Region to roads represent a viable solution to traffic congestion on Central’s already packed

roads? Could such a concentration of streets assuage already rampant pollution in this densely developed – not to mention, populated – area? Ultimately, could this scenario embody responsible urban planning on such valuable real estate?

Secondly, one could also take these measurements and convert them to their real life equivalents. By multiplying the numbers obtained above by a reliable conversion of map distance to actual distance, one could more fully assess the Tamar site itself, in the process understanding the site’s actual scale, dimensions, and potential scope of development. Indeed, to be able to envision what else could be fitted within that expanse– such as 2 blocks of vibrant Causeway Bay – might make one realize the greater cost of erecting such sprawling complexes that might otherwise be put to more thriving purposes.

(A more detailed, step by step documentation of my calculations can be viewed at the end of this paper).

Conclusion: Placing the Tamar Site in Focus

In a debate already awash with many concerned voices, this study hopes to let the numbers speak for themselves. My study found that 30% of the entire Tamar-Central Region would be taken up by roads while 20% of the CRIII devoted to such thoroughfares. Needless to say, this raises germane concerns of environmental tolls, pedestrian accessibility, and not least of all, responsible urban planning given the critical significance – and cost – of the piece of land question.

Furthermore, this study determined that the actual reclaimed land to be dedicated to the government offices would be equivalent to 2 blocks of Causeway Bay; 4 HSBC Headquarters buildings, 4 Statue Squares, 4 Legislative Council Buildings, and 2 Chater Squares combined; or the total area of Soho plus Lan Kwai Fong.¹ These figures are critical in assessing the full cost of the Tamar project, aside from its HK\$5 billion price tag, by taking into consideration the alternative uses of such a prime expanse of land.

Hopefully, the numbers, findings, and conclusions above can place this controversy in greater focus – providing a useful evaluative tool to assess the government’s vision within the contentious landscape of government, business, and civil society concerns surrounding the Tamar-Central site.



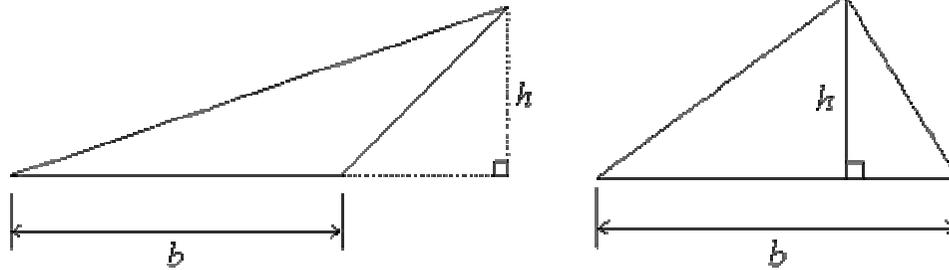
Figure 3. *An alternative vision for the Tamar Site as Hong Kong’s Central Park. (Image courtesy of Atkins China Limited Online).*

¹ Spatial Analysis of Tamar-Central Site. Paul Zimmerman. Harbor Front for 1000 Years Conference. Pacific Place Conference Center. Hong Kong. 18 March 2006.

Tamar-Central Region Measuring Roads

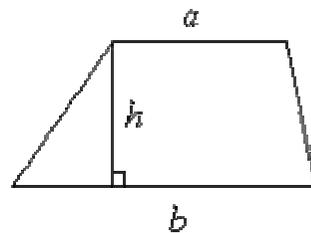
- (1) Split up the map of Tamar-Central Region into rectangles, trapezoids, triangles, and parallelograms. Approximated shape where necessary. Went out to hundredth decimal place – but even then, only rarely so.
- (2) Calculated the individual areas of each geometric shape according to its proper formula:

a. Triangle



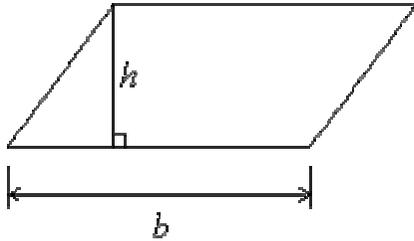
$$\text{Area} = \frac{1}{2} bh$$

b. Trapezoid



$$\text{Area} = \frac{1}{2} (a+b)(h)$$

c. Parallelogram



$$\text{Area} = bh$$

d. Rectangle



$$\text{Area} = lw$$

- (3) Summed the areas of all polygons to obtain the total area of the Tamar-Central Region.
- (4) Converted the total area of Tamar region from cm^2 map to m^2 real life, using the approximate conversion of (3.9cm map/200m real life).
- (5) Repeated for Tamar-Central Region Roads.
- (6) Repeat for Central Reclamation Phase III.

Conclusions

Tamar-Central Region Map

After summing areas A thru Q (18 in all, taking note that I split J into J1 and J2), found total area to approximately be:

197.89 cm² map

Converted into m² real life:

$$197.89 \text{ cm}^2 (200\text{m real life}/3.9\text{cm map})^2 = 520,420.7758044 \text{ m}^2 \text{ real life} \\ \approx 520,421 \text{ m}^2 \text{ real life}$$

Tamar-Central Region Roads

After summing areas 1-55, found total area to approximately be:

64.285 cm² map

Converted into m² real life:

$$64.285 \text{ cm}^2 (200\text{m real life}/3.9\text{cm map})^2 = 169,059.829 \text{ m}^2 \text{ real life} \\ \approx 169,060 \text{ m}^2 \text{ real life}$$

Ratio of Tamar-Central Region Roads: Tamar-Central Region Map

Tamar-Central Region Roads/Tamar-Central Region Map:

$$169,060/520,421 \approx 30\%$$

Central Reclamation Phase III

After summing the areas A thru O on a separate map of Tamar Region, found total area to approximately be:

102.615 cm² map

Converted into m² real life:

$$\begin{aligned} 102.615 \text{ cm}^2 (200\text{m real life}/3.9\text{cm map})^2 &= 269,861.9328 \text{ m}^2 \text{ real life} \\ &\approx 269,862 \text{ m}^2 \text{ real life} \end{aligned}$$

Tamar-Central Region Roads (New Roads)

After summing up the areas of 46 thru 55, found the total area to approximately be:

21.895 cm² map

Converted into m² real life:

$$\begin{aligned} 21.895 \text{ cm}^2 (200\text{m real life}/3.9\text{cm map})^2 &= 57,580.539 \text{ m}^2 \text{ real life} \\ &\approx 57,581 \text{ m}^2 \text{ real life} \end{aligned}$$

Ratio of Tamar-Central Region Roads (New Roads): Central Reclamation Phase III

Tamar-Central Region Roads (New Roads)/Central Reclamation Phase III:

$$57,581/269,862 \approx 20\%$$