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Northern Metropolis Development – Proposed Dedicated Legislation

RICS Hong Kong – Consultation Response

Purpose of this Document

This document has been prepared as RICS Hong Kong’s response to the public consultation on the proposed dedicated legislation for the Northern Metropolis.

RICS Board members and selected representatives from the Member Engagement Group (MEG) are invited to review and provide comments on the proposed recommendations and observations set out in this document.

Introduction

The Northern Metropolis represents one of Hong Kong’s most significant long-term development initiatives, with the potential to strengthen the city’s economic competitiveness, innovation capacity and integration within the Greater Bay Area. As the Government advances proposals for dedicated legislation to accelerate the development of the Northern Metropolis, it is important to establish a regulatory framework that enhances efficiency and flexibility while maintaining transparency, professional standards and sustainable development principles.

As a leading professional body for the built environment, RICS Hong Kong welcomes the Government’s initiative and offers professional observations and recommendations on key aspects of the proposed legislative framework. This submission focuses on seven key areas, namely:

- 1) Streamlining Town Planning Procedures (簡化城市規劃程序);
- 2) Expediting Compensation Payment for Land Resumed (加快支付被收回土地的補償);
- 3) Facilitating Adoption of Innovative Construction Technology (便利採用創新建築技術安排);
- 4) Streamlining Construction Noise Permit Applications (簡化申請建築噪音許可證程序及要求);
- 5) Facilitating and Regulating Cross-Boundary Flow of Elements (便利及管理跨境要素流動);
and
- 6) Establishing Statutory Corporations for Designated Areas (就指定地區成立法定公司);
- 7) Strengthening Delivery Capability and Market Readiness.

1. Streamlining Town Planning Procedures (簡化城市規劃程序)

Overview

RICS supports measures to streamline statutory planning procedures and improve development efficiency within the Northern Metropolis while maintaining due process, transparency and appropriate public participation.

Recommendation 1 – Introduce Structured Review Cycles for Subsidiary Legislation

RICS recommends introducing structured review windows for subsidiary legislation and planning-related regulations, taking reference from the Singapore Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) model.

Reviews could be conducted every three to five years, with amendments outside those review periods limited to clearly defined exceptional circumstances. This approach would improve regulatory certainty, reduce policy fragmentation and provide greater confidence for long-term investment and development planning.

Recommendation 2 – Facilitate Transition from Temporary to Permanent Uses

RICS supports extending the maximum period for temporary uses to seven years to enhance flexibility and improve the financial viability of interim developments and capital-intensive projects.

To provide greater certainty for project proponents, the Government may consider establishing a clear and streamlined pathway for successful temporary operations to transition into permanent status from both planning and land administration perspectives. Such arrangements would encourage longer-term business establishment and sustained investment within the Northern Metropolis.

Recommendation 3 – Adopt International Planning Benchmarks

RICS encourages the Government to benchmark the Northern Metropolis against leading international development models rather than relying solely on incremental amendments to existing Hong Kong standards.

Relevant international examples may include:

- The Öresund Region (Copenhagen–Malmö), connected by the Öresund Bridge, demonstrates how two different legal and economic systems can be integrated to create a unified, high-tech employment region, offering a relevant reference for collaboration between Hong Kong and Shenzhen;
- London’s carbon neutrality and ecological planning initiatives, which provide useful reference for balancing high-density development with environmental protection and wetland conservation, similar to the Northern Metropolis, aiming to balance development with the Mai Po wetlands; and
- Singapore’s “Garden City” model integrates sustainability, liveability and economic competitiveness through coordinated urban planning.

2. Expediting Compensation Payment for Land Resumed (加快支付被收回土地的補償)

Overview

RICS supports measures to expedite compensation payments for resumed land while maintaining fairness, transparency and professional consistency in valuation and dispute resolution processes.

Recommendation 1 – Introduce Early Professional Exchange Mechanisms

RICS supports the proposal to impose a six-month statutory limit for referring compensation disputes to the Lands Tribunal as a pragmatic measure to avoid prolonged uncertainty.

To support efficient dispute resolution and reduce tribunal workload, the Government may consider mandating “without prejudice” meetings, and/or exchanges of valuation parameters and reports within six months.

Such professional exchanges would enable both parties to identify valuation gaps at an early stage, facilitate negotiation and settlement where appropriate, and reduce the time and costs associated with formal litigation proceedings.

3. Facilitating Adoption of Innovative Construction Technology (便利採用創新建築技術安排)

Overview

RICS strongly supports the wider adoption of innovative construction technologies in the Northern Metropolis, including Modular Integrated Construction (MiC), prefabrication, advanced steel structures, smart construction technologies and low-carbon materials.

Recommendation 1 – Establish a Dedicated Interdepartmental Task Force

RICS recommends establishing a dedicated task force comprising representatives from the Development Bureau, Architectural Services Department, Buildings Department, Innovation and Technology Commission and relevant industry stakeholders.

The task force should coordinate policy implementation, regulatory approvals, industry collaboration and technology adoption strategies for the Northern Metropolis.

Recommendation 2 – Strengthen Collaboration with Mainland Industry Partners

The task force should actively collaborate with leading Mainland factories and research institutions to co-develop MiC modules and construction solutions tailored to the Northern Metropolis.

Hong Kong should lead on design standards, quality assurance and regulatory oversight, while Mainland partners may contribute production efficiency and supply chain capabilities.

Long-term framework agreements with key suppliers should also be considered to improve procurement efficiency, reduce tendering time and enhance supply chain stability. Approaches similar to direct supply contract models may also be explored.

Apart from MiC, collaboration should extend to:

- prefabrication and advanced steel structures;
- smart construction technologies, including AI monitoring, 5G and IoT applications; and
- low-carbon and recycled construction materials.

Recommendation 3 – Develop Centralised Industry Databases

RICS recommends establishing centralised databases maintained by the relevant authority to facilitate the effective implementation of innovative construction technologies.

Suggested databases may include:

a. Cost Database

To support cost benchmarking and effective cost control for innovative technologies in public capital works projects.

b. Technology Database

To verify approved innovative technologies, avoid duplication in technology assessment, record implementation experience and maintain reference lists of qualified suppliers and service providers. Such a database may also facilitate faster screening and approval processes by the Buildings Department and relevant authorities.

c. Implementation Database

To monitor implementation performance, operational effectiveness and long-term sustainability outcomes.

These databases would facilitate more efficient regulatory review and approval processes while promoting knowledge sharing between the public and private construction sectors.

Recommendation 4 – Implement Pilot Projects Prior to Full Rollout

RICS recommends establishing the proposed task force within Q3 2026, with pilot implementation commencing in selected Northern Metropolis developments, such as Hung Shui Kiu projects, in late 2026.

Subject to the outcome of pilot implementation, broader rollout across the Northern Metropolis could be targeted from mid-2027 onwards.

Recommendation 5 - Providing Incentives to Promote BIM-Based Building Plan Approval

RICS recommends that the Government provide incentives to encourage large-scale private development projects within the Northern Metropolis to adopt Building Information Modelling (BIM) in the preparation of building plans and applications for plan approval submitted to the Buildings Department.

This initiative may be treated as a pilot programme, with the objective of guiding the industry towards fully achieving the target of preparing and approving building plans using BIM technology by 2029.

The initiative would also promote the adoption of a “whole life cycle” approach across the design, approval, construction and maintenance stages. Experience gained through implementation may further support the development of technical guidelines and industry standards to facilitate wider BIM adoption.

Recommendation 6 - Strengthening Spatial Data Support for Implementation

RICS recommends introducing measures to promote the extensive use of the Common Spatial Data Infrastructure (CSDI) and 3D digital mapping technologies in supporting the planning, development and operation of the Northern Metropolis.

By integrating Geographic Information System (GIS), real-time Internet of Things (IoT) technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI), these tools may strengthen smart city development initiatives, including emerging sectors such as the low-altitude economy.

The Common Spatial Data Infrastructure would also facilitate greater integration of information across government departments, providing more efficient infrastructure data support and improving coordination for planning, development and long-term operational management within the Northern Metropolis.

Recommendation 7 - Encouraging the Adoption of More Innovative and Environmentally Friendly Materials

RICS recommends encouraging the wider adoption of innovative and environmentally friendly construction materials, including Ground Granulated Blast Furnace Slag (GGBS) concrete, engineering bamboo and S960 high-strength steel.

The Government may also consider promoting broader adoption of off-site prefabrication technologies beyond buildings, extending applications to public infrastructure works such as roads and drainage systems.

At the same time, consideration should be given to strengthening industry adoption of construction technologies relating to Common Data Environment (CDE) platforms to improve project coordination, information management and long-term asset performance.

4. Streamlining Construction Noise Permit Applications (簡化申請建築噪音許可證程序及要求)

Overview

RICS supports measures to streamline construction noise permit procedures while maintaining appropriate environmental safeguards and protecting nearby communities.

Recommendation 1 – Adopt Real-Time Noise Monitoring and Site-Specific Mitigation Measures

RICS supports the implementation of real-time on-site noise monitoring systems and context-sensitive mitigation measures based on actual environmental conditions, including proximity to noise-sensitive receivers.

Such measures would improve transparency and enhance communication with nearby residents regarding construction impacts.

Recommendation 2 – Consider Extended Daytime Construction Hours with Appropriate Safeguards

RICS notes that under the “Law of the People’s Republic of China on Prevention and Control of Noise Pollution”, daytime hours are defined as 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Consideration may therefore be given to extending permissible daytime construction working hours within the Northern Metropolis beyond the current Hong Kong standard of 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., subject to appropriate environmental safeguards.

Extended working hours could reduce overall construction periods and improve project delivery efficiency.

Recommendation 3 – Require Enhanced Noise Mitigation Measures

Any extension of construction working hours should be accompanied by appropriate mitigation measures, including temporary noise barriers, low-noise equipment, acoustic enclosures and continuous monitoring systems.

Relevant requirements may also be incorporated into land lease conditions and construction contract provisions to minimise impacts on nearby residents and surrounding environments.

5. Facilitating and Regulating Cross-Boundary Flow of Elements (便利及管理跨境要素流動)

Overview

RICS supports measures to facilitate the efficient and regulated cross-boundary movement of labour, materials, equipment and prefabricated components necessary for the timely delivery of the Northern Metropolis.

Recommendation 1 – Streamline Skilled Labour Importation Procedures

RICS recommends simplifying and expediting approval procedures for imported skilled labour, particularly for MiC, steel structures, MEP installation and specialist trades where labour shortages may affect project delivery.

Consideration may be given to expanding imported skilled labour quotas where justified by project demand and local workforce constraints.

Recommendation 2 – Establish Dedicated “Green Lane” Arrangements

RICS recommends establishing dedicated “Green Lane” customs arrangements for construction materials, prefabricated modules and critical equipment to minimise customs clearance delays.

Flexible arrangements such as “先送後驗” (“delivery before inspection”) may further improve logistics efficiency.

Recommendation 3 – Strengthen Cross-Boundary Coordination Mechanisms

RICS recommends establishing dedicated joint working groups or task forces between Hong Kong and Shenzhen authorities to regularly review and resolve cross-boundary operational issues.

Enhanced coordination would support smoother customs procedures, standards harmonisation, workforce mobility and supply chain management.

6. Establishing Statutory Corporations for Designated Areas (就指定地區成立法定公司)

Overview

RICS acknowledges the potential benefits of establishing statutory corporations to coordinate and accelerate development within designated areas of the Northern Metropolis.

Recommendation 1 – Establish Clear Governance Boundaries

Clear boundaries should be established between statutory corporations and existing government departments, including the Lands Department and Planning Department, to avoid duplication, conflicting requirements and unnecessary administrative complexity during project implementation.

Recommendation 2 – Maintain Transparency and Accountability

RICS recommends establishing transparent governance structures, reporting obligations, and stakeholder engagement mechanisms to ensure accountability, professional oversight, and public confidence in the operations of statutory corporations.

Recommendation 3 – Strengthen Strategic Coordination and Positioning of Innovation and Technology Developments

There appears to be an increasing number of planned or proposed innovation and technology parks within the Northern Metropolis, including HSIPT, potential Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks (HKSTP) expansion, Hung Shui Kiu Industry Park, San Tin Technopole and a potential Cyberport presence, without clear differentiation in terms of positioning, target sectors or strategic roles. This overlap risks creating confusion among investors and diluting the overall value proposition of each development.

Rather than introducing additional statutory “parks”, the Government should consider leveraging and strengthening the role of existing park operators. A clear and coordinated roadmap should be developed to guide investors on which platform or park best aligns with their business needs, while articulating the distinct positioning, strengths and competitive advantages of each location.

In the current market environment, where demand from end users remains limited, it is not optimal for the Government to rely on competition among multiple park operators to drive outcomes. A more coordinated and demand-led approach would help minimise fragmentation, enhance market clarity and improve the overall effectiveness of the Northern Metropolis as a strategic innovation hub.

Recommendation 4 – Review Public-Private Partnership Delivery Models

Many of these initiatives appear to be pursuing Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) structures as a standard public-private partnership (PPP) model. However, such an approach may not be commercially viable in the Northern Metropolis at this stage.

Relatively immature land values, coupled with high construction costs and uncertain end-user demand, present significant challenges to private sector participation under traditional BOT frameworks.

Consideration should therefore be given to whether alternative implementation approaches or greater flexibility in delivery models may better support the long-term development objectives of the Northern Metropolis.

7. Strengthening Delivery Capability and Market Readiness

Overview

RICS recognises that the successful delivery of the Northern Metropolis will depend not only on planning and legislative reforms, but also on institutional capability, financing mechanisms and effective market participation. Given the scale, complexity and long-term nature of the Northern Metropolis programme, implementation arrangements should support commercial viability, market confidence and delivery certainty.

Recommendation 1 – Establish a PPP / Private Finance Advisory Unit

To support the successful delivery of the Northern Metropolis as Hong Kong's flagship long-term development programme, the Government should consider establishing a dedicated PPP and private finance advisory function focused specifically on this initiative. Given the scale, complexity and multi-decade horizon of the Northern Metropolis, encompassing new towns, transport infrastructure, innovation hubs and cross-boundary integration with the Greater Bay Area. There is a strong case for a centralised function to design and implement structured private sector participation models.

This function could act as a centre of excellence to develop standardised PPP frameworks, define risk allocation principles, and assess project bankability and value for money at an early stage. It could also engage proactively with investors, developers and financiers to ensure Northern Metropolis projects are aligned with market expectations and capable of attracting long-term capital. Recent policy signals highlighting acceleration of Northern Metropolis delivery and exploration of market-led approaches further reinforce the need for institutional capability to support alternative financing models.

A dedicated advisory unit could also improve consistency across multiple workstreams and avoid fragmented procurement and financing approaches. By drawing on lessons from comparable large-scale urban development programmes globally, the Government can embed commercial discipline, improve delivery certainty and optimise the use of public funds.

Ultimately, such a function could play an important role in unlocking private capital, accelerating delivery timelines and supporting financially sustainable and market-responsive delivery of the Northern Metropolis.

Recommendation 2 – Broaden Delivery Capabilities and Skillsets

The successful delivery of the Northern Metropolis will depend not only on vision and planning, but also on the capability of public sector teams to manage an unprecedented scale of integrated development.

While Hong Kong has long benefited from strong technical and engineering expertise, the Northern Metropolis requires broader multidisciplinary capability reflecting the complexity of delivering large-scale,

phased infrastructure and urban development programmes in parallel. This includes strengthening expertise in project financing, commercial structuring, strategic procurement, project controls and supply chain management, capabilities that are essential for managing risk, controlling costs and ensuring timely delivery across interconnected projects.

The Northern Metropolis will require significant coordination across land formation, transport infrastructure, housing delivery, utilities and innovation clusters, often under evolving market conditions and cost pressures. Recent global and regional experience has demonstrated that gaps in commercial and financial capability, rather than technical design, are often primary drivers of programme delays and cost overruns.

By investing in targeted capability development, specialist expertise and closer collaboration with industry, Government delivery teams can be better equipped to manage complexity and engage effectively with private sector partners. Enhanced project controls and data-driven decision-making will also be important to maintain oversight across multiple concurrent projects.

Developing these broader capabilities will not only improve Northern Metropolis delivery outcomes, but also strengthen Hong Kong's long-term institutional capability to deliver future large-scale infrastructure programmes with greater efficiency, resilience and value for money.

Recommendation 3 – Develop and Publish a Clear Northern Metropolis Pipeline

A non-committal yet clear, transparent and regularly updated infrastructure and development pipeline for the Northern Metropolis, as part of a wider Hong Kong Government project pipeline, would be well received by the market and support effective long-term delivery.

Given the scale and duration of the Northern Metropolis programme, visibility of upcoming projects, including indicative scope, phasing, procurement strategies and potential financing approaches, would enable the private sector to plan, invest and allocate resources effectively. A well-defined pipeline would support contractors, consultants, developers and investors in building capacity, forming strategic partnerships and committing capital with greater confidence. This will be particularly important as the Northern Metropolis seeks to attract a diverse range of market participants, including international investors and Greater Bay Area stakeholders.

Clear communication and coordination with the market will also create opportunities for innovative delivery and financing approaches, including PPP models, by signalling opportunities early in the project lifecycle. Regular updates would allow the pipeline to remain aligned with policy priorities, market conditions and project readiness.

Ultimately, a clearly articulated Northern Metropolis pipeline could improve market confidence, enhance competition, strengthen pricing outcomes, reduce delivery risk and support sustained private sector participation in achieving Hong Kong’s long-term development ambitions.

Conclusion

RICS Hong Kong supports the Government’s initiative to introduce dedicated legislation for the Northern Metropolis and recognises the need for more agile, coordinated and forward-looking implementation mechanisms.

The Northern Metropolis presents a unique opportunity for Hong Kong to adopt internationally benchmarked planning, governance and construction practices capable of supporting long-term economic transformation, innovation and sustainable urban development. RICS further encourages the Government to ensure that sustainability, climate resilience, low-carbon development and ESG considerations remain embedded within both the legislative framework and implementation process of the Northern Metropolis.

RICS Hong Kong appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed dedicated legislation and looks forward to continued engagement with the Government and relevant stakeholders.

Submitted by

RICS Hong Kong
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Acknowledgments:

- RICS HK Regional Advisory Board:
 - Chair:
 - Ada Fung FRICS
 - Members:
 - Hannah Jeong FRICS
 - Lesly Lam MRICS
 - Steve Lewis MRICS
- RICS HK Member Engagement Group:
 - Chair:
 - Alan Choi MRICS
 - Vice Chairs:
 - Leo Yuen MRICS
 - Jonas Wong MRICS
 - Member:
 - Perry Ng FRICS