Information Folder (1) — The development of rail transport in Hong Kong [1888-2018]
Grandpa, we studied transport geography in our geography lessons today. Our geography teacher told us that railway was now the **backbone of Hong Kong’s transport system**. As railway patronage is increasing, all other transport modes are now playing a supplementary role in the public transport system of Hong Kong.

“Railway” refers to those transport means comprising a traced path on which wheeled vehicles are bound. Can you tell us more about the development of Mass Transit Railway (MTR) in Hong Kong?

Of course! ... but MTR is only a part of the rail transport in Hong Kong. What is the first rail transport mode in Hong Kong?

I think it should be the double-deck **tram** on the Hong Kong Island. These trams seem old and slow, so they should have a long history of development in Hong Kong.
Although Hong Kong Tramways has developed a system of trams running on the northern shore of Hong Kong Island since 1904, it is not the 1st system of rail transport in Hong Kong.

Yes, I remember that the Peak Tram celebrated its 130 years of development in Hong Kong in 2018. The Peak Tram has served as a major transport mode between the Mid-levels and the Central since 1888. The Peak Tram should be the 1st rail transport mode in Hong Kong.
You’re right! The Peak Tram is a **funicular railway**. It has only one single route, linking Central and the Victoria Peak, with several stations in between. The Peak Tram is one of the first funiculars in Asia. See its modern look since 1989 here:

The **Hong Kong Tramways** has started to provide tram services on the northern shore of Hong Kong Island since **1904**. The tram network links up the urban areas between Kennedy Town and Shau Kei Wan (refer to Figure 1), and should be the 2nd mode of rail transport in Hong Kong. They are modernized nowadays and some trams have air-conditioning too. For details of the network of the Hong Kong Tramways, please refer to the interactive map on its website:

Figure 1  A map showing the major routes (including terminus and depots) of Hong Kong Tramways
In 1910, the **British section of the Kowloon-Canton Railway (KCR)** (i.e. the East Rail Line nowadays) was inaugurated to provide a new means of rail transport between Hong Kong and the Mainland (Canton). From 1912-1928, there was also a branch line linking Fanling to Sha Tau Kok. The branch line was only 7.25 miles long and had 3 stops (Figure 6).

See the following photos about the old KCR trains and stations in the past. You may also conduct a field visit to the Hong Kong Railway Museum to see the historical coaches and diesel engines.

**Hong Kong Railway Museum**
**Address:** 13 Shung Tak Street, Tai Po Market, Tai Po, Hong Kong
**Opening Hours:** Monday, Wednesday to Sunday and public holiday (10am – 6 pm); Christmas Eve and Chinese New Year Eve (10am – 5 pm)

*Figure 2* Tai Po Market Station of the Kowloon-Canton Railway in 1913 (now in the Hong Kong Railway Museum)
Figure 3  Diesel electric engine No.51 used by the KCR to provide train services for the public before the electrification of the railway in 1983. (now in the Hong Kong Railway Museum)

Figure 4  Historical coaches of the KCR in the Hong Kong Railway Museum
Figure 5  This narrow gauge steam locomotive was used in the Fanling-Sha Tau Kok Branch Line in the past (now in the Hong Kong Railway Museum)

Figure 6  A map showing the KCR routes and stations in 1910 and the Fanling-Sha Tau Kok Branch Line (1912-1928)
Study the following KCR train service timetable (1925). It was published in the Hong Kong Daily Press on 11 September 1925. Andy, can you find out the **travelling time** for a **trip** from Kowloon to Shumchun (i.e. Shenzhen) and from Fanling to Sha Tau Kok in 1925 respectively?

(Source: “Hong Kong Daily Press / 孖刺日報” in the Hong Kong Railway Museum)
It’s easy!

The average journey time for a trip from Kowloon to Shenzhen in 1925 was _______________ minutes.

The average journey time for a trip from Fanling to Sha Tau Kok in 1925 was _______________ minutes.

After its electrification in the 1980s, the East Rail Line now provides rapid transit-like service to all commuters between Hung Hom and Lo Wu / Lok Ma Chau (Shenzhen). We may also compare the frequency of the train services between Kowloon and Shenzhen in 1925 and 2018:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency or Number of Train Services per day / per hour</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KCR train service between Kowloon &amp; Shenzhen in 1925 (Hint: check from the timetable on P.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Rail Line train service between Hung Hom and Lo Wu / Lok Ma Chau (Shenzhen) in 2018 / at present (Hint: check from the Internet or your past travelling experience)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Besides the cross-border train services between Hong Kong and Shenzhen mentioned above, don’t forget the long-distance, intercity through train services. There are 3 long-distance through train routes between Hong Kong (Hung Hom) and the Mainland in 2018, including (a) the Guangdong Line (to/from Guangzhou East), (b) the Shanghai Line (to/from Shanghai), and (c) the Beijing Line (to/from Beijing).

Figure 7 A double-deck through train from Hung Hom, Hong Kong to Guangzhou Dong Station

Finally, we can discuss the development of Mass Transit Railway (MTR) now. I just check from the Internet that it was first developed in 1979 and the 1st MTR line is the Kwun Tong Line. Look at the MTR system map of Hong Kong in 2018 below. There were 13 major railway lines at that time, including the Light Rail system in western New Territories and the Ngong Ping Cable Car. The East Rail Line, the West Rail Line and the Light Rail were originally KCR lines. The two rail companies (i.e. KCR and MTR) merged in 2007 to form a single rapid transit network in Hong Kong.
Figure 8  A map showing the MTR system in Hong Kong in 2018 (before the High Speed Rail inaugurated to provide cross-border train services in Hong Kong on 23 September 2018)
The MTR network is still expanding. The “Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link / High Speed Rail (Hong Kong Section)” is a newly completed rail development project in Hong Kong in 2018.

There are other new rail development projects under construction or planning in Hong Kong. Check on the following website of the MTR or other websites on the Internet to know more about these new projects. Find out the routes / alignments of the new projects, then add them onto Figure 8 or modify the routes in Figure 8. Remember to mention in the legend that these new lines are now under construction / planning.


With these new rail projects, we can go to different parts of Hong Kong and the Mainland much faster than before. The railway network of Hong Kong is really extensive in terms of coverage. The MTR stations in Hong Kong are usually key nodes in the Hong Kong transport system and are areas of high accessibility. Many of them are multi-modal transportation hubs, which have significant impact on the development of their surrounding land uses (transit-oriented development). Rail transport is now the most common type of transport mode in our daily commuting to schools and work.
Yes, rail transport covers many different parts of our daily lives. Besides those major rail transport modes mentioned above, don’t miss those smaller-scale and short-distance rail systems in Hong Kong. Examples of this include the **automated people mover** (a driverless train service) at the basement level of Terminal 1 of the **Hong Kong International Airport**, the **tiny rail systems in the Hong Kong Disneyland** and **Ocean Park, Hong Kong**, as well as the **Po Fook Hill Inclined Elevator**. The Po Fook Hill Inclined Elevator is a tiny rail system with two stations connecting the car park of the Po Fook Hill Cemetery to its upper section (Figure 9).
Yes, I tried that inclined elevator when I visited Po Fook Hill Cemetery last Ching Ming Festival. Maggie, I remember that a similar **vertical transportation mean** can also be found in the Discovery Bay. See these photos in my mobile phone (Figures 10-12).

The **“Discovery Bay Inclined Elevators”** is also a tiny rail system. The two elevators here have two stations, linking up the Discovery Bay North Plaza, a hotel and community facilities in the northeastern part of Discovery Bay with the residential areas on the uphill. The system provides uphill and downhill transportation services to both residents and tourists in the area.

Actually, this kind of transportation mean will be more common in Hong Kong in the future. I read from newspaper that another public inclined elevator system will be constructed between Tai Wo Hau Road and Wo Tong Tsui Street, Kwai Chung.
Figure 10  The Discovery Bay Inclined Elevator

Figure 11  The Discovery Bay North Plaza and a hotel at the downhill side of the inclined elevator system
Figure 12  The high class residential areas at the uphill side of the inclined elevator system
References:

✦ 李俊龍 (2014) 《香港電車—叮囑110年》，香港：中華書局(香港)有限公司。

✦ 陳志華、李健信(2012、2015) 《香港鐵路100年》，香港：中華書局(香港)有限公司。

✦ 蘇昭旭 (2017) 《世界捷運與輕軌百科》，台北市：人人出版股份有限公司。

✦ Hong Kong Tramways
  https://hktramways.com/en/

✦ Hong Kong Railway Museum

✦ “Legislative Council Panel on Transport: 185TB – Lift and Pedestrian Walkway System between Tai Wo Hau Road and Wo Tong Tsui Street, Kwai Chung”
  https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr16-17/english/panels/tp/papers/tp20170421cb4-839-3-e.pdf

✦ MTR