

# Hong Kong Data Centre Sector

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19 Apr 2022

## Supply further slowdown amid resilient demand

HSI: 21,518

- **Supply growth to further slow down to 9.1% p.a. in 2021-2024E**
- **Demand will remain resilient after the pandemic; cloud services to predominate**
- **Expect supply shortage in the next few years**
- **Reiterate BUY on [SUNeVision \(1686 HK\)](#) as a key beneficiary of supply shortage**

### Supply growth to further slow down to 9.1% in 2021-2024E.

The COVID-19 resurgence in Hong Kong has led to longer data centre approval processes from the government, and delays in data centre construction and logistics issues. Based on our research, along with conversations with the Data Centre Facility Unit, we now expect supply growth to further slow down to a CAGR of 9.1% in 2021-2024E (vs. our previous forecast of 12.3%).

**Resilient demand post-pandemic.** The market is concerned about slower data centre demand due to rationalisation post pandemic and geo-political tension, as well as shrinking spending from internet companies. However, we expect the demand to be resilient for digitalisation after the pandemic. Besides, Hong Kong is still an attractive data centre hub in APAC region despite the geo-political tension. We also expect Hong Kong to catch the demand for overseas expansion from Chinese internet companies and cloud providers amid slower domestic growth due to macro uncertainties. According to Gartner, total end-user spending on public cloud services in Hong Kong is expected to grow at a CAGR of 26% in 2021-2024E. We forecast overall data centre demand to grow by 15%-20% p.a. in 2022-2024.

### Expect supply shortage; reiterate BUY on SUNeVision.

Looking forward, we expect a supply shortage for data centres in Hong Kong in 2022-2024, given the limited supply and resilient demand growth. SUNeVision will be a key beneficiary as the largest data centre operator in Hong Kong with a market share of 16% in terms of GFA and 100%+ IT capacity expansion with three new projects to be delivered in the near term. Reiterate BUY on SUNeVision with a TP of HK\$13.3.

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### Recommendation & valuation

Company	Price (HK\$)	Target Price (HK\$)	Rating	Mkt Cap (HK\$m)	FY22 PE (x)
<a href="#">SUNeVision (1686 HK)</a>	6.42	13.3	BUY	15,010	30

Source: Thomson Reuters, DBS Bank (Hong Kong) Limited ("DBS HK")



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## Hong Kong Data Centre Sector

### Introduction

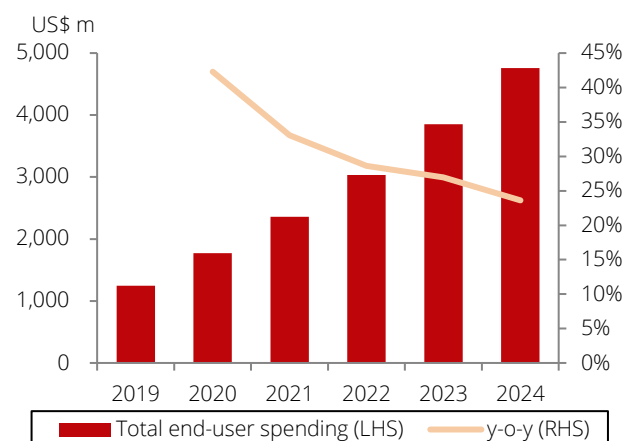
Hong Kong is a key regional connection hub and a gateway for mainland China, with a tight data centre supply in the past few years. The overall utilisation rate of the data centres in Hong Kong was 80% in 2021, according to the Data Centre Facilitation Unit. We have re-evaluated the data centre supply-demand dynamics in Hong Kong given the potential easing of the COVID-19 pandemic and geo-political risk concern, along with slower growth from Chinese internet companies.

Looking forward, the demand is expected to remain strong in Hong Kong, and cloud service providers are to predominate the market to be the key growth driver of data centre demand. According to Gartner, the public cloud market is projected to grow at a CAGR of 26% in 2021-2024E. However, the supply of data centres in Hong Kong is very limited, for both greenfield projects and industrial building conversion. The prolonged impact of the global pandemic along with several rounds resurgence in Hong Kong will further slowdown the supply growth from a CAGR of 10.8% in 2015-2021 to a CAGR of 9.1% in 2021-2024E (vs. our previously estimated 12.3%), which will bring forth a rising supply shortage and benefit leading players in Hong Kong, like SUNeVision.

### Growth drivers after the pandemic

**Resilient demand in post-pandemic era.** The market might be concerned whether the demand will be sustainable after the pandemic. According to JLL Research, hybrid work will remain durable in a post-COVID-19 environment and flexibility will be essential to workplace programmes. According to Equinix's annual global study, 66% of businesses have rearchitected their IT infrastructure to meet new remote and hybrid working demands, with tech budgets increasing to accelerate digital transformation. Apart from benefiting from the higher flexibility to IT resource usage, enterprises may choose cloud services for capex savings. IDC expected that the split between the global volume of data stored in the cloud and data stored in traditional data servers will be roughly 50/50 by 2025, up from 2018, where only 35% of data was stored in the public cloud. Gartner estimated that total end-user spending on public cloud services in Hong Kong would attain a CAGR of 26% in 2021-2024E. As a result, we expect cloud service providers to predominate the market and account for a major part of the incremental demand. We expect the overall data centre demand in Hong Kong to grow by 15-20% p.a. in 2022-2024.

### Hong Kong public cloud market



Source: Gartner, DBS HK

**Catching the demand for overseas expansion.** Hong Kong, an important gateway to mainland China, will be increasingly used as a jumping-off point out of mainland China. We have already started to see this with the top tier of China-based internet companies and cloud players like Alibaba and Tencent, followed by the leading Chinese telcos. Tencent Cloud launched its third availability zone in Hong Kong in 2021 in SUNeVision's Mega Campus. A leading internet company also fully committed to SUNeVision's data centre site in Fanling in 2021. We expect more demand for overseas expansion from the Chinese internet companies and cloud providers due to the macro uncertainties in China. In addition, further integration of the Hong Kong economy with mainland China, especially the Greater Bay Area (GBA), offers considerable potential with an increasing data flow between Hong Kong and the GBA. There are calls for pilot projects to facilitate open data flow within the Greater Bay area, with Hong Kong as the hub. We can see Hong Kong taking a leading role facilitating data flow within the GBA, and in the long-term, establishing itself as a data hub for data flow from mainland China.

**Geo-political risk is overly concerned.** The market may worry that large US internet companies (e.g., Amazon, Google, and Microsoft) would diversify their data centre locations out of Hong Kong to other APAC regions due to US-China tension and the introduction of the National Security Law. However, Hong Kong's data centre market has remained strong and has even climbed one place to become the third most attractive data center region in the entire Asia Pacific region in 2021, only after Sydney and Singapore, according to

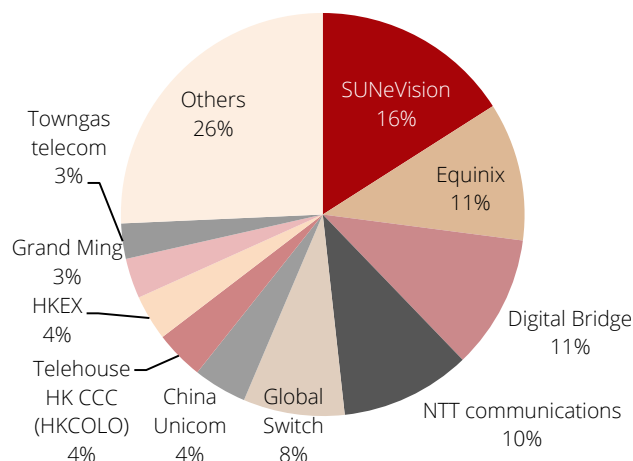
Cushman & Wakefield. Taking away all the political factors, Hong Kong is undeniably a leading connectivity hub with a prime geographical location within 100ms round trip latency across APAC. 11 out of 14 existing intra-Asia subsea cables are connected to Hong Kong. An entire ecosystem of connectivity, traversing key landing points and exchanges, is not going to be easily lifted and shifted and therefore Hong Kong will retain its long-term strategic importance. Microsoft even launched new availability zones in its East Asia Azure cloud region in Hong Kong in 2021.

### Limited new data centre supply

We have analysed data centre supply through market sources and conversations with the government's Data Centre Facility Unit. We estimate that data floor space in Hong Kong in terms of gross floor area (GFA) was 9,274k sq.ft. as at the end of 2021. SUNEvision is the largest data centre operator in Hong Kong, with a market share of 16% in terms of GFA. Data centres are clustered mainly in Tseung Kwan O, Kwai Chung, and Tsuen Wan. On Hong Kong Island, power supply is in great demand by grade A office buildings and thus, it is very difficult to be made available towards data centre projects.

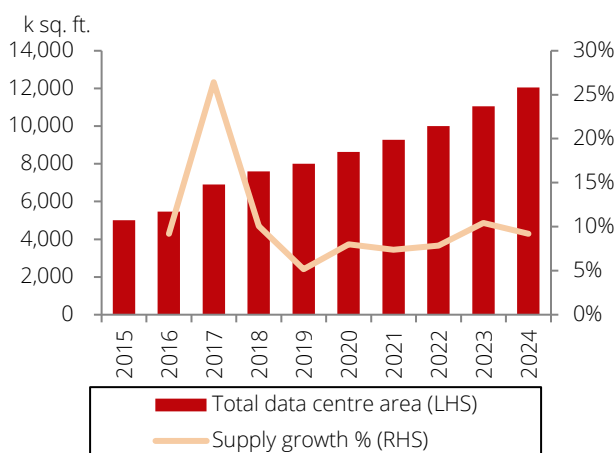
Limited land supply in Hong Kong led to a slow growth in new data centre supply. We expect further slowdown of new data centre supply due to longer government approval processes for new data centre applications and delay in site construction and logistics issues due to the pandemic. Supply CAGR of data centre capacity in terms of GFA is expected to drop from 10.8% in 2015-2021 to 9.1% (vs. our previously estimated 12.3%) in 2021-2024E. In general, the supply of data centres in Hong Kong mainly comes from (1) conversion of industrial buildings (IB), (2) redevelopment of industrial lots through lease modification, and (3) greenfield projects.

### Data centre supply in Hong Kong



Source: Companies, DBS HK

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Source: Companies, DBS HK

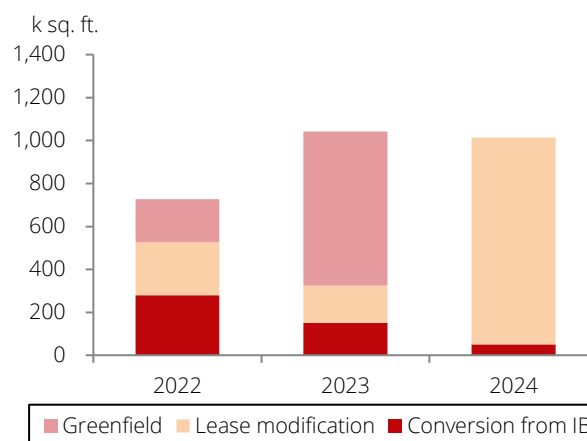
**Conversion from IB to data centre is difficult.** Since 2012 to June 2020, the government has received a total of 41 applications for converting parts of existing industrial buildings for data centre use. Out of these 41 applications, 31 have been approved (29 executed and two pending execution), six processed, and four withdrawn. The approved and executed applications involve a total internal floor area of 1,517k sq.ft., implying an average of c.190k sq.ft. p.a. It has become more difficult to find suitable IBs to convert them into data centres due to not only the stringent requirements for power supply and building structure, but also the decreasing space from this source. The number of

IBs has reduced from 1,448 in 2014 to 1,342 in 2020. Only 1-2% of the IBs in Hong Kong are suitable for conversion to data centres, according to Cushman & Wakefield. Conversion work usually takes around one to two years. We estimate the total new data centre supply from conversion to be c.480k sq.ft. in 2022-2024.

**Few lease modification applications due to higher investment.** Despite measures on relaxing the maximum non-domestic permissible plot ratio by up to 20% as incentive, IB redevelopment is a longer-term strategic decision that requires planning, considerable upfront capital investment, and unified ownership of the building. There has been around 10 successful applications by March 2022, with an expected new contribution of about 1,385k sq.ft. for data centre use in 2022-2024.

**Scarce supply of greenfield land.** Major sources of greenfield land supply for data centre construction are (1) industrial estates managed by The Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation (HKSTPC), (2) dedicated data centre sites, and (3) sites/building premises available in the open market. The first two options are not in the pipeline in the near term. The last dedicated data centre site was awarded to SUNeVision in 2018. There were only a few transactions in the open market in the past two years. In July 2020, China Mobile won the tender for an industrial land in Fo Tan at c.HK\$5.6bn (c.HK\$6,000/sq.sf.). In Sep 2020, Grand Ming bought two lands in Fanling for HK\$168m (c.HK\$1,900/sq.sf.) and HK\$188m (c.HK\$2,000/sq.sf.) respectively. Mapletree also won a tender in Fanling at HK\$813m (c.HK\$3,750/sq.sf.) in Jan 2021. We estimate the total new data centre supply from greenfield projects to be c.920k sq.ft. in 2022-2024.

### Source of new data centres



Source: Companies, DBS HK

New data centre supply will mainly be in Tseung Kwan O, Tsuen Wan, Kwai Chung, and Fanling. SUNeVision has three new projects to be delivered in 2022 and 1H23. GDS also has two data centres to become serviceable in Tsuen Wan in 2022 and 2024 respectively.

### Major data centre projects in HK (2022-2024)

Data centre operator	Data centre area (GFA, sq.sf.)	Location	Estimated year of completion	Source
GDS	246,800	Kwai Chung	2022	Lease modification
SUNeVision	129,000	Fanling	2022	IB conversion
SUNeVision	201,000	Tsuen Wan	2022	Greenfield
SUNeVision*	1,212,000	Tseung Kwan O	2023	Greenfield
Digital Bridge*	700,000	Tsuen Wan	2023	Lease modification
Mapletree	216,785	Fanling	2023	Greenfield
GDS	234,789	Kwai Chung	2024	Lease modification

Source: Companies, DBS HK

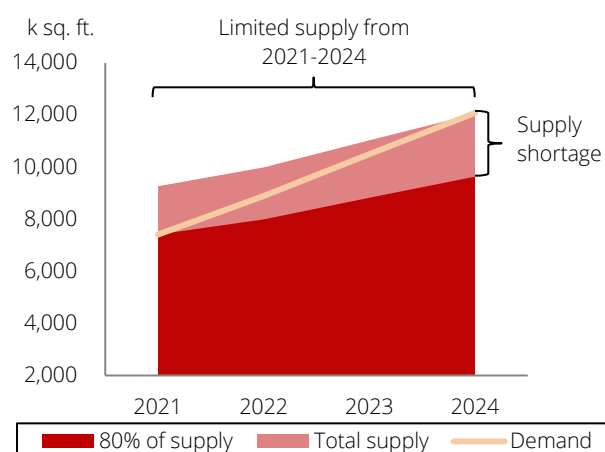
\* Deliver in phases

## Hong Kong Data Centre Sector

### Conclusion and recommendation

**Expect supply shortage during 2022-2024.** The overall utilisation rate of data centres in Hong Kong is c.80%, which is optimal to fully support the average infrastructure demand and give the right buffer to support workload peaks without degrading performance. Looking forward, we expect a supply shortage in 2022-2024, given the limited new data centre supply and resilient demand growth in Hong Kong. Data centre operators with strong existing capacity in service and new projects delivery in the near term will benefit from the supply shortage.

### Supply and demand of data centres in Hong Kong



Source: Companies, DBS HK

**Reiterate BUY on SUNeVision.** SUNeVision is the largest data centre operator in Hong Kong, with a market share of 16% in 2021 in terms of GFA. The IT capacity in service was 70MW as at the end of 2021. SUNeVision has three new projects (MEGA Fanling, MEGA Gateway, and phase 1 of MEGA IDC) to be delivered in 2022 and 1H23, which will expand its IT capacity in service to 150MW. In the long run, the IT capacity in service could potentially reach 280MW when phase 2 of MEGA IDC is delivered. The data centre supply shortage will help maintain the pricing and a high utilisation rate for SUNeVision.

We forecast revenue to grow by 12%, 24% and 18% for FY6/22, FY6/23 and FY6/24 respectively. We forecast net profit to grow by 10%, 19% and 18% for FY6/22, FY6/23 and FY6/24 respectively. Maintain BUY on SUNeVision, as it is a key beneficiary of the rising demand for data centres amid a supply shortage in HK, with a TP of HK\$13.3. Our TP is based on the DCF model, assuming a 6.7% WACC and 3% terminal growth rate.

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**FULLY VALUED** (negative total return, i.e., > -10% over the next 12 months)

**SELL** (negative total return of > -20% over the next 3 months, with identifiable share price catalysts within this time frame)

\*Share price appreciation + dividends

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