# Yu-Ih Hou – Mayor, New Taipei City, Taiwan



***Over one-fourth of Taiwan's biomedical industry is based in the greater Taipei community – most of which are small companies carrying out R&D***

09.07.2019

Tags: Taiwan, Regulation, Investment, Taipei

*Yu-Ih Hou, mayor of New Taipei City, introduces the city and highlights its key competitive advantages and strategic direction of growth as Taiwan's top economic and cultural destination.*

**After a 30-plus year career in law enforcement and over seven years as deputy mayor, you were elected Mayor of New Taipei City in 2018. As a newcomer to this position, how did you approach the role, what challenges in the transition did you face, and what priorities did you set for yourself and the city?**

Actually, becoming the mayor was never my intention at the beginning of my career. I did not have much experience in municipal affairs beforehand, but as mayor, I do believe it is important to be myself and leverage the unique experiences and point of view that I can bring to the position as a non-career politician.

Within the civil administration, I have been familiar with this work for the past seven or so years and therefore had a better idea of the position than during my career in law enforcement. As my priority, I believe we have to take care of people and do more for our citizens. As a law enforcement officer, I was only able to help people through one aspect, but as a mayor, I can now do much more. Being the mayor of New Taipei City has allowed me to have a bigger, more positive impact not only on the city but also on Taiwan as a whole as well.

New Taipei City is the largest city in Taiwan with a population of over four million residents – it is not only the biggest city in the country but also the most influential. However, this position is not only about the four million people in New Taipei City, but also the greater Taipei circle. New Taipei City is at the centre of this community and we can have an impact on the over 10 million people in the area but also the 23 million citizens of Taiwan.

**How would you describe the business environment of the city? What advantages does New Taipei City have to offer private business compared to other cities in Taiwan such as Taipei, Hsinchu, and Taichung?**

In New Taipei City, we have the largest labour force in the nation, especially ranging from young professionals to middle-aged authorities. We have slightly over two million working-age citizens in addition to the many people who move to New Taipei City from central and southern Taiwan, making the economic supply chain quite strong. Our city has the largest industrial infrastructure in the nation with approximately 300,000 private companies and factories based here. Furthermore, the public administration of the city is rather influential compared to other cities. As such a key city in Taiwan, through our success, we are able to benefit other cities within the country.

**The government has made innovation a key issue in policy agendas recognizing its importance in promoting economic growth and addressing social challenges. Can you walk us through New Taipei City's innovative policies addressing citizen-driven initiatives, green lifestyle, smart city, and carbon reduction?**

New Taipei City is closely linked to Taipei not just in terms of transportation, but also industrial and economic supply chains. Our mutual goal is to not only develop as cities but be able to align ourselves with the innovation trends of the international community. Therefore, the core of our current administrative policies is formed around five new emerging industries and three key traditional industries. The first five consist of smart manufacturing, new business, new media, innovation entrepreneurship, and artificial intelligence and applied technologies. The remaining three industries which are very distinct from Taipei are biotechnology, green energy, and tourism and culture. Blockchain, AI, e-commerce, and smart manufacturing will all be fulfilled through this 5+3 policy. This is the development direction of New Taipei City as we strive to incorporate innovation into our city's infrastructure.

**How significant are the biotech and pharma industries to the city's industrial infrastructure?**

Between New Taipei City and Taipei, this is a very important community for Taiwan's biomedical industry. This area acts as a medical hub and we have several enterprises in Hsinchuang, Wugu, Taishan along with several university hospitals which are linked to the 3,000 biomedical production facilities in the city. In fact, over one-fourth of Taiwan's biomedical industry is based in the greater Taipei community – most of which are small companies carrying out R&D.

There are many technology factories in Xichi which are digitally connected, making use of AI and IoT – something we are currently focused on promoting. Shuang Ho Hospital, our teaching hospital, has just built its third medical building which is dedicated to biomedicine.

Although many of the companies in the city are small, they are doing well in merging biotechnology and ICT. There is another biomedical industry park close to the Nangang Bio Park which is the hub of biomedicine in Taiwan. All in all. the industrial chain of New Taipei City is very mature.

**What challenges are you facing in implementing these policies considering that New Taipei City historically has attracted more traditional industrial companies?**

We are still trying to attract more R&D teams to New Taipei City step by step. We have improved our innovation and production capabilities and traditionally speaking, manufacturing is not as effective in long-term development as R&D. As a strategy to be able to offer more space to companies, we are participating in verticalization activities to build taller buildings.

Additionally, in the context of the US-China trade war, we believe there is an opportunity for Taiwan and New Taipei City to play a strategic role. Important players like Google and Amazon are establishing regional centres in Taiwan rather than China. These digital players can also connect to the biomedical industry through cross-disciplinary collaboration. Furthermore, we are having more tender bidding for the land in the centre of the city in order to attract not only international companies but bring back Taiwanese companies that may have relocated to China in the past. Our goal is to attract NTD 117 billion in investments to New Taipei City, but we believe this can even be surpassed. Although the land in New Taipei City is expensive, it is still more affordable than Taipei, which makes us more competitive in bringing new R&D based groups.

As we try to promote AI, blockchain, and biomedicine, New Taipei City is striving to further enhance its already mature infrastructures.

**In April you made an address about Taiwan's progress on blockchain and crypto adoption at the World Blockchain Summit here in the city. How is New Taipei City positioned to be a world-leading hub for the digital world?**

In the 2018 IDC Asia Pacific Smart City Awards, New Taipei City is one of the few cities to receive both "Public Safety" and "Public Health and Social Services" awards. In the era of rapid technological innovation, the use of big data is at the heart of the development of smart cities. In addition to the collection of massive data, it is more important to use technology to transform data into decision-making tools. This is the key to the city's ability to report a total of 148 projects from cities in the Asia-Pacific region. It is confirmed that New Taipei has become a world-class smart city with the advantages of developing smart technology and industry.

The development thinking of smart cities in New Taipei City has turned to "people-oriented" to solve local problems. At the same time, it emphasizes the "public-private partnership mechanism" to expand citizen participation. The most important thing is to be able to provide experimental fields, promote entrepreneurial ecosystems, and stimulate cross-border Innovative entrepreneurial momentum. In recent years, the city government has also actively promoted the international trend of emerging technology industries such as blockchain, artificial intelligence, e-commerce, e-sports and smart manufacturing, providing industrial innovation and dynamism, and developing a smart economy. In the future, through the tripartite cooperation between industry, government and government, New Taipei City will be motivated to cultivate more talents that meet the needs of the market, so that the public and private sectors can work together to grow together to create an international model of smart cities.

**What strategic goals have you set to accomplish by the end of your term as mayor?**

Our goals are to turn New Taipei City into a city where young people can find great jobs and elderly residents can enjoy their retirement life and to make the city a model of livability, resident happiness, and international competitiveness in northern Taiwan. On the day I assumed office as the city's mayor, I made an oath to implement policies that provide for convenient services, citizen-centred governance, and smart city development. By adopting the perspective of citizens to solve

problems, the government can provide services that precisely satisfy citizen needs. Through efficient governance, smart technology, and close collaboration with cities worldwide, New Taipei City can generate city-to-city communications and mutual benefits.

**What is your final message on behalf of New Taipei City as the leading destination for industrial investment and development in Taiwan?**

To improve the quality of life for citizens in the populous and geographically expansive New Taipei City, my first order of business will be to introduce policies intended to “replace roads with the Internet” that promote creative thinking, new technologies, and new communities to construct a smart city. The city government intends to combine EasyCard with commonly used electronic payment systems to enable citizens to conveniently pay government bills. Additionally, the government will continue to promote e-services to save travel time for citizens. Moreover, we aim to further promote information education. In the next 3 years, the New Taipei City government will invest NT$800 million to establish a comprehensive information environment that includes smart management and interactive classrooms. Therefore, digital interactive learning environments will be built to reach the goal of creating “boundless classrooms and borderless learning.” This investment policy will help develop the computational logic and information application skills of children, thereby expanding technology horizons. The city government also actively encourages the establishment and operation of smart industry enterprises that work with emerging technologies such as blockchain, artificial intelligence, e-commerce, e-sports, and smart manufacturing. Doing so keeps the city apace of current global trends, and such enterprises can become part of a smart economy that dynamically interacts with foreign counterparts. I plan to use an emphasis on technology to turn New Taipei City into a city of happiness in Taiwan and make the city a livable place with an internationally competitive smart economy as well as a humane spirit.

**See more interviews**