

LCQ10: Lantau Closed Road Permits

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hok-fung and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (November 13):

Question:

I have received complaints from residents of Lantau Island alleging that the requirement to apply for a Lantau Closed Road Permit (LCRP) before driving in and out of South Lantau imposes financial pressure on them. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the criteria adopted for delineating the closed area of South Lantau; whether it has regularly reviewed the policy on LCRPs; if so, of the time and outcome of the last review;

(2) of the following information on LCRPs and temporary LCRPs respectively for each of the past three years: (i) the numbers of usual residents and tourists who applied for LCRPs, and (ii) the administrative fees charged by the authorities to each category of such persons (set out in a table);

(3) given that an LCRP is currently required for access to the closed roads in South Lantau and the validity period of a long-term LCRP is one year, whether the Government will consider extending the validity period of LCRPs (to three years, for example) and waiving the LCRP application fees for Lantau residents; if not, of the reasons for that;

(4) whether it will explore cancelling LCRPs in phases to tie in with the future development of Lantau Island; if so, of the timetable; and

(5) as it has been reported that some companies in the community claim to be able to apply for LCRPs on behalf of non-Lantau residents and workers, whether the Government has conducted investigations and taken enforcement actions; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Development Bureau and the Transport Department (TD), the consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Hok-fung is as follows:

To align with Hong Kong's long-term sustainable development, the Government established Sustainable Lantau Blueprint in 2017. Lantau will be developed based on the overarching principle of "Development in the North, Conservation for the South". North Lantau will become a platform for Hong Kong's economic development and will be developed as a new community. For South Lantau which has natural and cultural resources, the Government will focus on conservation to preserve and improve its unique environment of rural

villages. Besides, South Lantau will be used for recreational purpose, including the South Lantau Eco-recreation Corridor proposed earlier by the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) for enjoyment by the residents and the visitors.

(1) Given the designation of South Lantau as a nature conservation area by the relevant government departments, the roads on South Lantau have been designated as 24-hour closed roads since the 1970s to control the number of vehicles entering South Lantau.

All vehicles travelling on the closed roads on Lantau are required to possess valid Lantau Closed Road Permits (LCRPs) issued by the TD, while drivers of the vehicles concerned are required to comply with the conditions stated in the LCRPs and the relevant approval letters.

The TD will review the LCRP application mechanism from time to time to ensure that the LCRPs are issued to persons with genuine needs. For example, the Government last reviewed and improved the application mechanism in January 2022, including abolishing the renewal arrangement for temporary LCRPs, requiring applicants for general LCRPs to provide proof of relationship with the holder of the address proof and the registered vehicle owner, and requiring applicants applying through the Land Registry records to provide additional proof.

(2) The number of LCRPs issued in the past three years is at Annex. Each permit is valid for a period not exceeding 12 months and the fee is \$900 per year or \$75 per month for first issue while the renewal fee is \$660 per year or \$55 per month (any part of a month would be counted as one month). The same fee level applies to general LCRPs, temporary LCRPs and the LCRPs issued under the "Driving on Lantau Island" Scheme (DLS). The above permit fees are set in accordance with the Government's general policy of charging fees on a cost-recovery basis. In vetting applications for LCRPs, in order to avoid abuse, the TD has to prudently verify a range of information and supporting documents (e.g. bills issued by power company or the Rating and Valuation Department, land search document issued by the Land Registry, or rental receipt together with the stamped tenancy agreement, etc as address proof for a resident in South Lantau), and hence more administrative procedures are involved.

(3) and (4) The Government has to ensure that the prevailing planning of preserving South Lantau as a nature conservation area and the capacities of the ancillary transport facilities will not be affected before issuing the LCRPs. Except for temporary LCRPs and LCRPs issued under the DLS, the TD will require address proof from applicants for general LCRPs to ensure that LCRPs are issued only to eligible South Lantau residents and those who have business operation in South Lantau. If the validity period of the LCRPs is extended to more than one year, there is greater chance that people or business operators who have moved out of South Lantau may still be able to drive freely in and out of South Lantau during the validity period, which is in contravention of the principle under which the LCRP was issued. As for the fee waiver, this involves a number of considerations, such as whether it is in conflict with the "user pays" principle, whether the fee waiver may give

rise to abuse and the possible impact on traffic, etc.

The TD reviewed the arrangements for relaxing the closed roads on Lantau and the arrangement of issuing LCRPs in 2015. In the light of the review findings and the views gauged during consultation, the TD has implemented the relevant measures by phases, including raising the maximum number of coaches entering South Lantau from 30 to 40 per day, and launching the DLS which allows 25 private cars to enter the closed roads on Lantau from Mondays to Fridays (except public holidays). Private cars are allowed to travel via closed roads on Lantau to places such as Ngong Ping, Tai O, Cheung Sha and Mui Wo for leisure. Starting from July 2022, the daily quota for the DLS has increased from 25 to 50 (including 10 quotas for electric private cars).

At this stage, the Government has no plan to further adjust the arrangements for Lantau closed roads and the issuance of LCRPs. The Government will continue to review the arrangements in the light of the planning for South Lantau, the implementation of various enhancement measures, etc.

Considering the roads in South Lantau are currently closed roads which still have quite an extent of spare road capacities, there is insufficient justification from traffic flow perspective to support constructing large-scale transport infrastructure connecting North and South Lantau. However, Tung Chung Road is currently the only road connecting North and South Lantau, any serious traffic accidents will severely impact the external road traffic of the South Lantau. Therefore, the CEDD is conducting a study to explore options for improving the north-south connectivity of Lantau with a view to enhancing the resilience of the road network under emergency situations as well as benefiting the development of the South Lantau Eco-recreation Corridor under the overarching principle of "Conservation for the South". The study has commenced since March 2023 and is expected to complete in 2025.

(5) When examining each permit application, the TD has all along taken into account the genuine needs of the applicants to enter the closed roads in accordance with established criteria. The TD has also examined in detail whether the application submitted by the applicant complies with the requirements, the nature and justifications of the application, and the adequacy of supporting documents. If an applicant was found to have breached the permit conditions, including making a false declaration when applying for the LCRP, the TD would refer the case to the Police for follow-up action as appropriate.

LCQ21: Pilot scheme on electric

ferries

Following is a question by the Hon Lam San-keung and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Miss Diane Wong, in the Legislative Council today (November 13):

Question:

In 2021, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) signed an agreement with two ferry operators participating in the pilot scheme on electric ferries (the pilot scheme) to subsidise their construction of electric ferries and charging facilities in order to test the relevant technical and commercial viability in Hong Kong. The EPD pointed out at the time that the department would assist the ferry operators having signed the agreement in the preparation in respect of the tenders for the construction of electric ferries, and that the testing for electric ferries was tentatively anticipated to commence in 2023. In addition, the EPD was also finalising the details of agreement with two other ferry operators at that time with a view to signing a subsidy agreement as soon as possible. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether the four ferry operators participating in the pilot scheme have completed the tendering procedure;
- (2) as it is learnt that some ferry operators have repeatedly extended the expiry of the tender documents, whether the Government has gained an understanding of the reasons for that; if so, of the details; and
- (3) of the progress of the testing for electric ferries; if the testing has not yet commenced, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

To promote the trial of electric ferries in Hong Kong, the Government has earmarked \$350 million to implement the Pilot Scheme for Electric Ferries (Pilot Scheme) to fully subsidise ferry operators on the fees of the construction of four electric ferries and the associated charging facilities, as well as the operational, maintenance and repair expenditures incurred by the operation of the electric ferries during the 24-month trial period.

In the early implementation stage of the Pilot Scheme, our preliminary estimate was that the trials of electric ferries could commence in 2023. Nevertheless, given that there are limited applications of electric ferries globally and the Pilot Scheme involved the conduct of trials on new technology of electric ferries locally for the first time, the ferry operators have to exercise extra prudence in the design and tendering process so as to ensure that the electric ferries can meet their relevant operational needs and ensure the proper use of public money. Therefore, we subsequently

updated the target and plan to test out the electric ferries in co-operation with ferry operators in 2024.

My response to the question raised by the Hon Lam is as follows:

(1) and (3) Three ferry operators have completed the open tender process for the procurement of ferries. The ship launching ceremony of an electric ferry constructed by one of the ferry operators was held in Nansha, Guangzhou, in early September this year. This electric ferry is currently undergoing various performance tests and will formally be put into service after undergoing final testing in the Hong Kong waters by the end of this year and allowing captains to familiarise themselves with the operation of electric ferry. The shipbuilding works of the other two ferry operators are now in progress. Since the shipbuilding works of an electric ferry generally take about 18 months, it is anticipated that these two electric ferries will be delivered to Hong Kong for final testing in the first half of 2025 and the first half of 2026. The remaining ferry operator has also commenced the open tender exercise for the procurement of electric ferry. The Environmental Protection Department is closely monitoring the progress and the target is to commence the services as soon as practicable for the Pilot Scheme.

(2) Owing to the different design and technical requirements of electric ferries from those of traditional ferries in many aspects, the ferry operators took a longer time to evaluate the tender documents submitted by all tenderers and requested the tenderers to provide explanations and clarifications on specific tender submissions or technical issues. The design of an electric ferry was even changed in accordance with the latest operational needs of an individual operator. Therefore, to avoid the need of re-tendering due to expiry of the tender price proposal submitted by the tenderers, which would increase the time required for procurement, two ferry operators extended the binding period of the tenders in 2023 in accordance with the general tendering procedures without violating any terms of the tender documents. It is not uncommon to extend the binding period of tenders, in particular when new technologies are involved or there are some technical issues which take time to resolve. The two ferry operators concerned have completed the tender process and the shipbuilding works are now in progress.

[Unconscious remand person in custody dies in hospital](#)

â€‹An 89-year-old male remand person in custody, who had been found unconscious in Siu Lam Psychiatric Centre, died in a public hospital today (November 13).

The remand person in custody suffered from hypertension. He required

continuous medical care and follow-up at the institution hospital. At 4.06am today, the remand person in custody was found unconscious in his bed in the institution hospital by a correctional officer. The officer immediately called for reinforcement to provide first-aid treatment to him, and an ambulance was called at once to send him to a public hospital for further treatment. He remained unconscious after being sent to the public hospital. His condition deteriorated, and he was certified dead at 5.46am today.

The case has been reported to the Police. A death inquest will be held by the Coroner's Court.

The person in custody had been remanded for the offence of theft in November 2024.

LCQ1: Resolving congestion problem of road harbour crossings

Following is a question by the Hon Shang Hailong and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (November 13):

Question:

The Government has implemented time-varying tolls at the three road harbour crossings (RHCs) since December 17 last year. According to the paper provided by the Transport and Logistics Bureau for the Panel on Transport of this Council on May 17 this year, after the implementation of time-varying tolls, the overall traffic at the three RHCs during peak hours with higher tolls had decreased, but the traffic had obviously shifted to the Western Harbour Crossing (WHC) as the average longest traffic queue at WHC during peak hours had increased from 0.6 kilometres (km) in December last year to 1.6 km in April this year, which was close to the 1.8 km average traffic queue of the Cross-Harbour Tunnel. Moreover, many members of the public have relayed to the media that the morning congestion problem at WHC is even more serious than that before the implementation of time-varying tolls. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Government had anticipated that congestion at WHC would become more serious after the implementation of time-varying tolls; whether the Government can provide figures of the average traffic flow at the three RHCs in each time slot in each day after the implementation of time-varying tolls;

(2) as there are views pointing out that while there is no stopping for paying tolls when crossing RHCs after the implementation of HKeToll, the speed limit within the area of the former toll plazas of the RHCs and on some

road sections outside the tunnel tubes (the areas) remains at 50 km per hour (km/h), and the speed limit of the roads leading to the areas is usually 70 km/h to 80 km/h, whether the Government will consider enhancing or relaxing the speed limit arrangements of the roads, thereby improving the traffic situation at RHCs; and

(3) as it has been reported that the Secretary for Transport and Logistics indicated earlier on that in the long run, the congestion problem of existing RHCs needs to be resolved with the construction of a fourth cross-harbour tunnel at the Kau Yi Chau Artificial Islands, whether the Government will conduct a feasibility study in this regard, and of the relevant timetable?

Reply:

President,

(1) The Government has implemented time-varying tolls since December 17, 2023, at the three road harbour crossings (RHCs), namely the Western Harbour Crossing (WHC), the Cross-Harbour Tunnel (CHT) and the Eastern Harbour Crossing (EHC). The Transport Department (TD) has been closely monitoring the traffic condition after implementation of the new tolls. With the co-operation of motorists and adjustments to their commuting patterns, the distribution of total cross-harbour traffic flows among the three RHCs has become more even than before. While the traffic flows at CHT and EHC have decreased, the traffic flow of WHC has increased as a result of the reduction in tolls, which is within the Government's expectation; the WHC now has the highest traffic flow among the three RHCs.

The total traffic demand of the three RHCs, before the implementation of time-varying tolls, has far exceeded the total capacity of the three RHCs, particularly during peak hours. From January to September 2024 (excluding summer holidays, public holidays, days with inclement weather and the associated days affected), the overall weekday traffic flows of the three RHCs remained similar to the condition before the implementation of time-varying tolls. Despite the reduced total cross-harbour traffic flows during peak hours, occurrence of traffic queues were still inevitable. The total cross-harbour traffic flow about half an hour immediately before and after peak hours increased. As for other time periods that account for nearly 80 per cent of the time of a day, the traffic of the three RHCs (including the CHT which remained congested for a long time in the past) was smooth and congestion-free. The case of non-cross-harbour local traffic being affected by the queues tailing back from the tunnels was significantly reduced. Details of the average daily traffic flow of the three RHCs on weekdays with respect to time slots are at Annex.

The above figures show that time-varying tolls have effectively utilised the capacity of the three RHCs, and have encouraged some motorists to commute outside peak hours, thereby rationalising the uneven distribution of traffic in the past, which is in line with the Government's policy objectives and expectation. The implementation of time-varying tolls brings benefits to motorists, the public transport trades, the commercial vehicle trades, cross-harbour bus passengers, and the community as a whole. The figures show that

the cross-harbour traffic conditions are still changing, and the traffic flow varies in different quarters of the year. The Government will continue to collect data and keep the cross-harbour traffic condition under review so as to comprehensively analyse the impact of time-varying tolls on the cross-harbour traffic.

In view of the increased traffic flow at WHC, the TD is planning to construct an additional lane at the exit of WHC on Hong Kong Island towards Central and Sheung Wan to increase the carrying capacity of the road section and reduce weaving activities, so as to smoothen the traffic flow at the tunnel portal and its surrounding areas. The related road works are expected to commence in 2025 for completion in 2026.

(2) The HKeToll, a free-flow tolling service, brings convenience and smoother road experience to motorists. The Highways Department is now dismantling all the toll booths and toll islands, and is adjusting the arrangement of traffic lanes. It is expected that the relevant works involving the three RHCs will be completed in the second quarter of 2025. The TD will continue to monitor the traffic conditions around the original toll plaza and the existing bus stops, and review the speed limits of the relevant road sections in the light of the actual situation and needs. In considering whether to revise the speed limits, the TD needs to take into account the impact on the operation of bus stops to ensure that buses can safely re-enter traffic lanes from bus stops during peak and non-peak hours of the tunnel.

(3) The Government promulgated the Hong Kong Major Transport Infrastructure Development Blueprint in December last year, which formulates a planning framework for the city's future transport infrastructure development. The planned Tuen Mun Bypass, Route 11, Tsing Yi-Lantau Link and Hong Kong Island West-Northeast Lantau Link can provide more commuting options, reduce journey time, and effectively alleviate the pressure on existing major roads.

To facilitate the Kau Yi Chau Artificial Islands project, the Government is carrying out planning study for the transport infrastructures, including the Hong Kong Island West-Northeast Lantau Link under the project.

Suspension of "A Symphony of Lights"

Attention duty announcers, radio and TV stations,

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible and repeat it at suitable intervals:

The Tourism Commission announces that as the Hong Kong Observatory will issue the Strong Wind Signal No. 3 this afternoon (November 13), "A Symphony of Lights" will be cancelled tonight.