

Introduction of free-flow tolling system proposed

The Free-Flow Tolling (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill 2021 (the Bill), which seeks to provide legal backing for the implementation of a free-flow tolling system (FFTS) at government tolled tunnels and the Tsing Sha Control Area, will be gazetted on Friday (March 19).

The FFTS is a technology-based solution to enable payment of tunnel tolls without requiring a vehicle to stop at a toll booth, mainly by making use of the Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology, with the support of the Automatic Number Plate Recognition technology. Upon implementation of the FFTS, the use of a government tolled tunnel or the Tsing Sha Control Area by a vehicle will be detected by the boothless tolling facilities through reading of a toll tag, which is a self-adhesive RFID sticker, affixed on the windscreen of the vehicle.

A spokesman for the Transport and Housing Bureau said today (March 18), "Implementing the FFTS is a major Smart Mobility initiative. It will bring convenience to motorists by enabling their payment of tolls remotely with toll tags and facilitating a smoother traffic flow, thereby improving the traffic in the vicinity of tunnels. Moreover, the commuting public may also benefit as the existing toll booths at toll plazas will be demolished, freeing up space for other transport-related purposes such as enhancement of existing bus stops."

The Bill will amend the Road Tunnels (Government) Ordinance (Cap. 368) and Tsing Sha Control Area Ordinance (Cap. 594) as well as their subsidiary legislation to provide for the toll collection and recovery mechanism under the FFTS. It will also amend the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374) to empower the Secretary for Transport and Housing to make regulations for the issue and use of toll tags, as well as the Road Traffic (Registration and Licensing of Vehicles) Regulations (Cap. 374E) for requiring vehicle owners to provide their email addresses or mobile phone numbers in vehicle-related applications so as to facilitate the issue of administrative toll payment notifications by a toll service provider to vehicle owners through electronic means.

The Government had consulted the Transport Advisory Committee (TAC) and the Legislative Council Panel on Transport on the proposal in December 2020 and January 2021 respectively. Members of the TAC and the Panel generally supported the proposal. The Government has also liaised with the transport trades and other stakeholders through various channels to canvass their views. The community at large also supports the Government to introduce the FFTS.

The Bill will be introduced into the Legislative Council for the first reading and second reading on March 24.

"After passage of the Bill, the Transport Department will work in collaboration with relevant departments to complete the other necessary preparatory tasks, including engagement of a toll service provider, continued development of the FFTS backend system, procurement of the boothless tolling facilities, collection of email addresses or mobile phone numbers of vehicle owners, with a view to implementing the FFTS at various tunnels starting from end-2022. Meanwhile, the Government will step up publicity efforts through various channels to enhance community awareness of the FFTS, with a view to securing the support of vehicle owners to use toll tags," the spokesman added.