

LCQ 16: Installation of countdown timers on pedestrian crossing lights

Following is a question by Professor the Hon Lau Chi-pang and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (May 18):

Question:

Some members of the public have pointed out that countdown timers (timers) have been installed on pedestrian crossing lights in quite a number of cities on the Mainland and in the Taiwan region as well as in the United States, Japan, etc. to help pedestrians decide if there is enough time for them to cross the road, and to help drivers who have stopped their vehicles and waited at a pedestrian crossing make early preparation for starting up their vehicles, thereby enhancing pedestrian safety and efficiency in road utilisation. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of traffic accidents involving pedestrian casualty that happened at signalised pedestrian crossings in each of the past three years;

(2) as the Government installed, in 2018, timers on pedestrian crossing lights at a number of locations in the territory for trial purpose, but it is learnt that it subsequently decided not to install such timers across the territory, of the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will consider relaunching the test scheme for timers, and put such timers on trial use at more locations, so as to collect more data to assess if such timers should be installed across the territory; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been striving to provide a safe, reliable and efficient transport system, and has implemented a number of measures at signal-controlled pedestrian crossings, such as the installation of electronic audio traffic signals at each pedestrian crossing and extending the pedestrian green time at crossings with special needs (e.g. in the vicinity of residential care homes for the elderly) to enhance the safety of pedestrians crossing the road. The traffic light control system currently adopted in Hong Kong complies with international standards with the aim of ensuring road safety. The Transport Department (TD) has also been closely monitoring the development of traffic light countdown device used around the world and studying the feasibility of their application in Hong Kong.

Having consulted the TD, my reply to the various parts of Professor the

Hon Lau Chi-pang's question is as follows:

(1) From 2019 to 2021, the annual numbers of accidents involving pedestrian casualties at signalised pedestrian crossings were 601, 386 and 427 respectively.

(2) The TD has studied the use of the "pedestrian traffic light countdown device" as an auxiliary traffic management facility. The original intention of the countdown device is to inform pedestrians in advance of the changes of traffic light and to make appropriate judgments, thereby enhancing pedestrian safety.

In 2006 and 2018, the TD commissioned the City University of Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong respectively to conduct on-site observation and research on the trial of "pedestrian traffic light countdown device" in Hong Kong to explore the effectiveness of the countdown device. The device installed next to a pedestrian traffic light displayed the remaining time by means of decrementing number or inverted triangles from the time when a pedestrian "Green man" light began to flash, until the signal turned into a "Red man". The results of the studies revealed that after the installation of the "pedestrian traffic light countdown device", more pedestrians are still crossing the road when the flashing "Green man" light ended. In general, the studies concluded that the devices brought no material improvement and benefit to pedestrian safety. In view of this, the TD did not further apply the "pedestrian traffic light countdown device" more extensively at that time.

(3) The TD has been paying attention to the use of the "pedestrian traffic light countdown device" and the development of related technologies. The department is currently optimising the operation of the device for trial (for example, the countdown will start to display when the "Green man" light is on, rather than upon flashing of the "Green man" light), and will integrate the operation with pedestrian sensors as well as application of artificial intelligence. The department will conduct trials at suitable pedestrian crossing(s). The design of the system and procurement of components are currently underway and detailed trial is expected to begin in 2023.