

LCQ 20: Alleviating congestion problem at road harbour crossings

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (October 18):

Question:

In order to alleviate the congestion problem at and in the vicinity of the various road harbour crossings (RHCs) in Hong Kong, the authorities have been implementing in phases large-scale improvement measures including HKeToll (i.e. a free-flow tolling service), the "633" fixed toll plan and the time-varying toll plan. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as there are views that the time-varying toll plan planned to be implemented within this year is relatively complicated, and the implementation time of the plan is only several months away from now, whether the authorities have put in place specific publicity measures to enable members of the public to gain a clear understanding of the details of the plan; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as there are views pointing out that after the implementation of the "633" fixed toll plan, congestion often occurs at the Hong Kong Island exit of the Western Harbour Crossing in the direction of Central and Sheung Wan, and it is expected that the vehicular flow will further increase after the implementation of the time-varying toll plan, whether the authorities will consider constructing an additional lane leading to Central and Sheung Wan, so as to divert traffic in the vicinity; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) of the respective areas of land to be released as well as the plot ratios and gross floor areas for development after the demolition of toll booths at the portals of the various RHCs as estimated by the authorities; whether there are development plans for such lots, including whether "park-and-ride" (PnR) facilities that help alleviate congestion at tunnels or on urban roads will be built; if so, of the details and the timetable; if not, the details and progress of the development of PnR schemes across the territory at present?

Reply:

President,

Cross-harbour traffic congestion during peak hours is a problem that needs to be tackled effectively. The Government has been adopting a multi-pronged strategy to alleviate traffic congestion, including through upgrading

the transport infrastructure, expanding and improving public transport services, and managing the use of roads.

In consultation with the Transport Department (TD), my reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Han-pan is as follows:

(1) The coming implementation of time-varying tolls at the three road harbour crossings (RHCs), namely the Cross-Harbour Tunnel (CHT), the Eastern Harbour Crossing (EHC) and the Western Harbour Crossing (WHC), is a new measure to suppress and divert cross-harbour traffic during peak hours. The Government attaches great importance to publicity and education so that motorists can grasp the details of the toll plans and make early preparations, thereby maximising the effect of time-varying tolls on traffic management.

To this end, since the announcement of the toll plans of the three RHCs in March this year, the Government has been actively launching a series of publicity and education efforts, including press conferences, press releases, TV/radio interviews, social media/online promotions, information packs, mobile application messages, tunnel broadcasts and variable message displays, etc., with a view to enabling motorists to have a deeper understanding of the policy intent, as well as the arrangements for the "633" toll plan during the first stage.

To tie in with the coming implementation of time-varying tolls, we are making a series of preparations to ensure that members of the public and motorists are able to obtain information on the tolls of the RHCs through different channels. Upon completion of the legislative procedures when the commencement date of time-varying tolls is fixed, the Government will further step up publicity so that the public would be fully aware of the specific charging arrangements, which include the following:

(i) to conduct press conference timely, together with Announcements in the Public Interest on TV and radio, the above-mentioned multi-media publicity, etc.;

(ii) to launch a new toll enquiry function on HKeMobility mobile application and website to enable motorists to obtain real-time and forecasted cross-harbour toll information before going on their journey;

(iii) to set up new "toll information displays" at the RHCs, which will come into operation upon the implementation of time-varying tolls and will show the prevailing tolls and locations of the toll points to motorists on a journey; and

(iv) to allow motorists to check the toll payable/paid via the HKeToll mobile application or website after passing through the tunnel.

(2) The construction of an additional lane at the Hong Kong Island exit of the WHC in the direction of Central and Sheung Wan will increase the capacity of the road section and facilitate smoother traffic flow at the tunnel exit. The TD is liaising with the relevant government departments to examine the matter. If it is proven to be technically feasible, the Government will

proceed with the detailed design and draw up a timetable for taking it forward.

(3) As a result of the removal of all manual toll booths upon the implementation of HKeToll, we estimate that about 12 700, 4 500 and 5 800 square meters plot of land will be released at the WHC, CHT and EHC respectively. In the short run, those spaces will be used for improving the traffic at the tunnel entrances and exits, including widening the existing space for loading/unloading of buses and access to bus stops, increasing the number of lane-side buffer zones to ensure the safe operation of the tunnels, as well as rationalising traffic lane arrangements, etc. In the long run, the development of such released spaces can tie in with that of the neighbouring areas, and the Government will take this into account when carrying out the relevant planning work.

The Government has been adopting a public transport-oriented policy, encouraging the public to make good use of public transport services for their journeys as far as possible and minimise their reliance on private car use. The Government is committed to providing park-and-ride (PnR) facilities at or near suitable railway stations to encourage motorists to take the train after parking their vehicles, hence reducing the road traffic entering relatively busy areas. At present, there are 24 car parks providing PnR concessions in Hong Kong, offering a total of about 9 700 parking spaces. To further increase the provision of PnR facilities, the TD is exploring the inclusion of terms offering PnR concessions for suitable short-term tenancy car parks, the targeted locations of which are Tsuen Wan, Tsing Yi and Ma On Shan, etc., as well as public vehicle parks newly developed under the principle of "single site, multiple use". Looking ahead, the Government is considering the development of a new generation of transport interchange hubs under the Traffic and Transport Strategy Study based on the principle of "single site, multiple use", and will explore the provision of PnR facilities at suitable transport interchange hubs.