

LCQ1: Improvement to pedestrian facilities

Following is a question by the Hon Wu Chi-wai and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (May 13):

Question:

The Government commenced in December 2017 the 30-month Review of Assessment Mechanism for Hillside Escalator Links and Elevator Systems and Preliminary Feasibility Studies as well as Consultancy Study on Enhancing Walkability in Hong Kong respectively, so as to tie in with the promotion of the "Walk in HK" initiative. In addition, the Government announced in 2019 the launch of the Special Scheme under the "Universal Accessibility" Programme for retrofitting lifts at the walkways in or connecting to the common areas of three types of public housing estates part of the ownership of which has been disposed of. Regarding improvement to pedestrian facilities, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the details of those proposed projects for hillside escalator links and elevator systems (HEL) for which investigation and design work is underway, including (i) the names of the projects, (ii) the commencement dates and anticipated completion dates of the investigation and design work, (iii) whether the process of consulting the relevant District Councils (DCs) has been completed, and (iv) the planned timing for submitting the funding applications to the Finance Committee of this Council;

(2) of the latest progress of the first consultancy study mentioned above and how, as it is envisaged, the implementation of HEL projects can be expedited upon implementation of the recommendations made by the consultancy study;

(3) when it will consult the relevant DCs on the projects under the Special Scheme, and of the works schedules of the various projects; whether it has plans to expand the scope of the Special Scheme to retrofit lifts at the walkways in or connecting to the common areas of various types of subsidised sale housing courts (including Home Ownership Scheme courts); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) of the anticipated completion dates of the two aforesaid consultancy studies and the related follow-up work, e.g. whether it is necessary to conduct follow-up studies and whether the recommendations of the consultancy studies can be implemented within this year; and

(5) of the relevant expenditure incurred (e.g. the fees for engaging consultants to conduct studies) and the actual results achieved since the Government took forward the "Walk in HK" initiative in 2017?

Reply:

President,

The Government is committed to promoting the "Walk in HK" initiative to create a pedestrian-friendly environment, thereby enhancing the overall walkability of Hong Kong and encouraging citizens to walk more. Both the Review of Assessment Mechanism for Hillside Escalator Links and Elevator Systems and Preliminary Feasibility Studies and the Consultancy Study on Enhancing Walkability in Hong Kong (Walkability Study) are measures under the "Walk in HK" initiative. Meanwhile, the Government continues to take forward current hillside escalator links and elevator systems (HEL) proposals with a view to enhancing the accessibility of hillside areas and facilitating people to commute.

Besides, the Government has been striving to create a barrier-free and accessible environment and has launched the "Universal Accessibility" (UA) Programme to proactively retrofit barrier-free access facilities (e.g. lifts) at walkways. Since 2012, the Government has progressively launched various phases of the UA Programme with a view to covering more walkways.

My reply to the various parts of the Hon Wu Chi-wai's question is as follows:

(1) As at end-April 2020, the Highways Department (HyD) is conducting investigation and design work at various stages for eight HEL projects. Details are at Annex.

(2) The Transport Department (TD) commenced the Review of Assessment Mechanism for Hillside Escalator Links and Elevator Systems and Preliminary Feasibility Studies in December 2017 with the aim to review and improve the assessment mechanism established in 2009 for HEL proposals and, based on the revised mechanism, carry out initial screening, shortlisting and prioritisation of a total of 114 HEL proposals received over the past few years. The latest progress of the proposed revision of the assessment mechanism was reported to the Subcommittee on HEL under the Legislative Council Panel on Transport in November 2019. Members expressed support for the revised mechanism.

Under the revised mechanism, more comprehensive technical assessments on the HEL proposals will be conducted at the initial screening stage and new criteria will be included to better ascertain the necessity and feasibility of the proposals. Besides, taking into account the past experience in taking forward HEL projects, the TD has refined the scoring weightings and improved the assessment standards. For instance, "Implementation Readiness" is one of the key assessment criteria under the revised mechanism. We believe the revised mechanism will enable a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of HEL proposals for determining the priority for implementation, and hope that the implementation of projects can be expedited.

The consultant is conducting preliminary assessments on the 114 HEL proposals received over the last few years in accordance with the revised assessment mechanism. The TD plans to consult District Councils within this year so as to finalise the first batch of projects for implementation.

(3) The Government announced in the 2019 Policy Address that the ambit of the UA Programme would be further expanded by launching a "Special Scheme" to retrofit lifts to walkways in estates under the Tenants Purchase Scheme, the Buy or Rent Option Scheme, as well as public rental housing estates with properties divested under the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HKHA).

The HyD has begun consultations with the relevant District Councils on the Special Scheme since May this year and is inviting District Councils to suggest items for implementation under the scheme. Following the completion of District Council consultation, the HyD plans to carry out investigation and related design work in 2021 for the items proposed by the District Councils with a view to commencing the retrofitting works as soon as possible.

In expanding the ambit of the UA Programme to cover the three types of housing estates mentioned above, the Government mainly takes into account the fact that although part of the ownership of these estates have been disposed, many of their residents are still tenants of the HKHA. As these tenants are no different from those in regular public housing estates, the Government considers that it should facilitate the residents in these housing estates in using barrier-free access facilities.

As for the various types of subsidised sale housing (including those under the Home Ownership Scheme), as they are entirely private properties, it should be left to the owners of these properties to consider the retrofitting of the related facilities so as to ensure the proper use of public funds.

(4) Regarding the Review of Assessment Mechanism for Hillside Escalator Links and Elevator Systems and Preliminary Feasibility Studies, the TD plans to consult the respective District Councils on a batch of HEL proposals with higher effectiveness based on the preliminary scoring results, and complete the entire scoring process by 2020 so as to finalise the first batch of projects for priority implementation.

As regards the Walkability Study, it is expected to be completed in 2020. The TD has been making reference to the recommendations of the Walkability Study and has implemented various measures progressively to improve the pedestrian environment. The measures include:

(i) relaxed in 2019 the criteria for provision of covers for walkways stipulated in the Transport Planning and Design Manual. In this connection, the Chief Executive announced in the 2019 Policy Address that the Government would provide covers for the walkways connecting to public hospitals as well as those eligible new and existing walkways progressively based on the relaxed criteria, and would invite District Councils to each nominate a suitable walkway on which a cover is to be provided. The TD has carried out various follow-up work with relevant departments;

(ii) rolled out since the end of 2019 short-term enhancement measures for the walking environment in two pilot areas, namely Central and Sham Shui Po, including decluttering of traffic signs and removing of unnecessary railings. Meanwhile, the TD is refining the long-term measures recommended in the

Walkability Study and implementation plan will be formulated;

(iii) developing the design standards for a new pedestrian wayfinding signage system through a follow-up study in the second half of 2020 in the light of the Walkability Study's recommendation and the public's positive feedback on the pedestrian wayfinding system in Tsim Sha Tsui, with a view to commencing the manufacturing and installation of the new wayfinding signage throughout the territory by phases starting from 2021; and

(iv) updating the existing planning guideline and design standards regarding pedestrian environment and facilities progressively in 2021, in accordance with the Walkability Study's recommendations.

(5) Under the "Walk in HK" initiative, the TD has substantially completed the "Pedestrian Connectivity in Hong Kong Island North from Wan Chai to Sheung Wan – Feasibility Study" in 2019 and implemented in phases the footpath widening work near Jaffe Road starting from the fourth quarter in 2019. The consultancy fee was about \$3.6 million. The TD will continue to take forward the remaining proposed enhancement works at Sheung Wan, Central, Admiralty and Wan Chai, with a view to further improving the pedestrian connectivity in Hong Kong Island North from Wan Chai to Sheung Wan.

With regard to the Walkability Study, the consultancy fee was about \$13.9 million. The TD has progressively implemented various short-term measures on a pilot basis in late 2019, including decluttering or removal of unnecessary traffic signs on the footpaths in order to make room for pedestrians. The TD will review the effectiveness of the enhancement measures in the two pilot areas in due course and consider whether to extend the measures to other districts.

The consultancy fee of Review of Assessment Mechanism for Hillside Escalator Links and Elevator Systems and Preliminary Feasibility Studies was approximately \$22 million.

The walking route search function of "HKeMobility", including barrier-free walking route search function, currently covers Yau Tsim Mong, Sham Shui Po, Wan Chai and Central and Western District. The TD plans to extend its coverage to all districts by the end of 2020. The estimated cost of expanding the pedestrian network database is about \$1 million.