

LCQ1: New railway projects

Following is a question by Hon Leung Che-cheung and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (October 23):

Question:

The Railway Development Strategy 2014 recommends the taking forward of seven new railway projects, including the Tuen Mun South Extension. The MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) submitted a proposal on the Tuen Mun South Extension to the Government in as early as December 2016. On the other hand, it was reported in May this year that the Government was considering an idea of constructing an additional railway station near Tuen Mun Swimming Pool along the Tuen Mun South Extension, so that MTRCL could finance the railway construction costs through the revenues from the topside developments at that station. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that it has been two and a half years since the Government received the Tuen Mun South Extension proposal, when the Government will respectively announce the alignment of the railway and seek funding approval from this Council, if necessary;

(2) of the details of the idea of constructing a new railway station near the Tuen Mun Swimming Pool; the details of the topside developments or the changes to be made to the community facilities involved; when it will consult the Tuen Mun District Council and this Council on that idea; and

(3) given that in order to take forward the "Lantau Tomorrow Vision", the Government will conduct an area-wide transport study and an engineering feasibility study on the road and rail links connecting the Hong Kong Island, the artificial islands in the Central Waters, Lantau Island and the coastal areas of Tuen Mun, and such studies will not be completed until 2023, whether the implementation timetable of the Tuen Mun South Extension will be affected as a result; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to Hon Leung Che-cheung's question is as follows:

The Transport and Housing Bureau (THB) announced the Railway Development Strategy 2014 (RDS-2014) in September 2014. Having regard to transport demand, cost-effectiveness and the development needs of New Development Areas, the RDS-2014 recommends that seven new railway projects be completed in the planning horizon up to 2031, including the Tuen Mun South Extension.

According to the RDS-2014, the Tuen Mun South Extension will extend the West Rail Line by about 2.4 kilometers from the existing Tuen Mun Station to

Tuen Mun South. The Tuen Mun South Extension mainly serves to improve railway access to the community south of the current Tuen Mun town centre near Wu King Estate, Siu Hei Court and Yuet Wu Villa, and connectivity to Tuen Mun Ferry Pier, in order to facilitate the residents to use railway for their journeys.

Having regard to the indicative implementation window recommended in the RDS-2014, the THB had invited the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) to submit a proposal for the implementation of the Tuen Mun South Extension. The MTRCL submitted a proposal for this railway project to the Government in end December 2016. The THB, the Highways Department and relevant bureaux and departments have evaluated the proposal and requested the MTRCL to provide additional information and supplement details. In carrying out the evaluation, our emphasis is to ensure that the proposal is practically feasible and can bring maximum benefits to the community.

Railway projects involve huge capital investment, and the Government has to plan in a prudent manner. The new railway projects proposed in the RDS-2014 have different degrees of complexities. As clearly stated in the RDS-2014, the taking forward of individual proposed railway projects set out in the Strategy will be subject to the outcome of detailed engineering, environmental and financial studies relating to each project, as well as updated demand assessment and availability of resources. Moreover, for railway projects which are mainly intended to complement new development areas and new housing developments, the implementation timetable for the development areas and new housing developments in question will be an important planning parameter for the railway projects. Therefore, the indicative implementation windows recommended in the RDS-2014 may be adjusted having regard to any change in circumstances.

In planning the Tuen Mun South Extension, we need to consider the various impacts on nearby residents arising from the proposed alignment and the possible mitigation measures. Due to the tight housing supply and the potential housing supply that may be brought about by railway development, the Government is also reviewing the proposal submitted by the MTRCL in this light. Having examined the proposal submitted by the MTRCL and considered the urgency of the project and the land development potential that may be brought about, we plan to request the MTRCL to commence the detailed planning and design for the Tuen Mun South Extension in the coming year, so that works of this project can commence as early as possible.

As regards the earlier media reports about the information of the Tuen Mun South Extension such as station location(s) and funding arrangement, I would like to take this opportunity to clarify that the Government did not release the information about the Tuen Mun South Extension through any channel or person. As I just mentioned, the Government is reviewing the proposal submitted by the MTRCL in the light of the potential housing supply that may be brought about by railway development. Since the relevant work is still in progress, we are not in a position to disclose further information about the Tuen Mun South Extension at this stage, to avoid causing unnecessary speculation or misunderstanding.

I would like to reiterate that, in line with established procedures, prior to the finalisation of any new railway scheme, we shall consult the public, including the Legislative Council and the relevant District Councils, on the details of the scheme.

Besides, the support from the Public Works Subcommittee of the Legislative Council had been obtained in May this year on the funding application for the "Studies related to artificial islands in the Central Waters" (the Study), which includes conducting transport infrastructure study on the road and railway links related to the project. These roads and railway will connect to the transport network along the coastal area of Tuen Mun, but their exact alignment, mode of construction and implementation programme are subject to the findings of the Study.

Generally speaking, the Tuen Mun South Extension project may have connection with a section of the railway related to the artificial islands in the Central Waters. We will request the MTRCL to make provision for connection points in the Tuen Mun South Extension project for interchange and the related connection purposes in the future. Besides, the commissioning of the railway links related to the artificial islands in the Central Waters may alter the patronage behaviour of the Tuen Mun South Extension, such as diverting passengers who would otherwise be using the Tuen Mun South Extension / West Rail Line to the railway related to the artificial islands in the Central Waters. Nevertheless, the planning of the road and railway links related to the artificial islands in the Central Waters will generally not affect the implementation programme of the Tuen Mun South Extension. We will continue to closely liaise with the relevant bureaux and departments for the further planning of the Tuen Mun South Extension, so as to implement the Tuen Mun South Extension as soon as possible. Thank you, President.