

LCQ1: New railway projects

Following is a question by Dr Hon Lo Wai-kwok and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (October 24):

Question:

The Railway Development Strategy 2014 (the Strategy) published by the Government in September 2014 has recommended that seven new railway projects be completed within the planning period of up to 2031, but such projects do not include a coastal railway between Tuen Mun and Tsuen Wan. So far, the Government has not yet announced the detailed proposals and the implementation timetables for the seven railway projects, resulting in the public waiting eagerly and railway construction personnel worrying about their subsistence as they will be jobless. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that at present residents of a number of districts (particularly Kowloon East and Tuen Mun) often face serious traffic congestion, whether the Government will expedite the implementation of the railway projects recommended by the Strategy and at the same time consider afresh, adopting the thinking of "letting railway provide impetus for development", the construction of the coastal railway between Tuen Mun and Tsuen Wan; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

(2) given that the Hong Kong Section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link has been commissioned and the Shatin to Central Link will be completed in the coming few years, and in order to avoid railway construction personnel suffering from the plight of "overworking to death at one time and starving to death at another time", whether the Government will consult the construction industry when it draws up the implementation timetable for each railway project so as to ensure that the various projects will commence in an orderly manner; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as the Third Comprehensive Transport Study, which was completed as early as in 1999, has become outdated and irrelevant to the needs of Hong Kong's latest development, whether the Government will expeditiously embark on the fourth comprehensive transport study, so as to meet the needs for cross-boundary transport networks and support facilities arising from the Development Plan for a City Cluster in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Bay Area; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to Dr Hon Lo Wai-kwok's question is as follows:

Having regard to the indicative implementation window recommended in the

Railway Development Strategy 2014 (RDS-2014), the Transport and Housing Bureau (THB) had invited the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) to submit proposals for the implementation of the Tuen Mun South Extension, Northern Link (and Kwu Tung Station), East Kowloon Line, Tung Chung West Extension (and Tung Chung East Station) and North Island Line. MTRCL submitted proposals for these five railway projects to the Government in end December 2016, end March 2017, end July 2017, end January 2018 and end July 2018 respectively. The THB, the Highways Department and relevant bureaux/departments are evaluating the proposals and have requested the MTRCL to provide additional information and supplement details. In carrying out the evaluation, our main focus is to ensure that the proposals are practically feasible and can bring maximum benefits to the society.

Due to the tight housing supply and the potential housing supply that may be brought about by railway development, the Government is reviewing the proposals for the Tuen Mun South Extension and Northern Link (and Kwu Tung Station) and will strive to undertake public consultation on these proposals as soon as possible. We will also carry on with the detailed planning for the East Kowloon Line, Tung Chung West Extension (and Tung Chung East Station) and North Island Line, and will embark on detailed planning for Hung Shui Kiu Station and the South Island Line (West).

In line with established procedures, prior to the finalisation of any new railway scheme, we will consult the public, including the Legislative Council and the relevant District Councils, on the detailed alignment, locations of stations, mode of implementation, cost estimate, mode of financing and actual implementation timetable of the scheme. The construction industry may also express their views through relevant channels. The Government (including the Development Bureau) reviews manpower of the construction industry and co-ordinates implementation of public works of the Government, so as to implement the public works (including infrastructure projects) in an orderly manner.

Besides, when formulating the RDS-2014, our consultant at that time evaluated in detail the feasibility of constructing a railway along the coastline between Tuen Mun and Tsuen Wan. According to the consultant's analysis, the local population is mainly concentrated at the eastern and western ends of the coastline between Tuen Mun and Tsuen Wan; while the development density of the remaining areas is relatively low and no basis for new source of passengers is anticipated. Meanwhile, due to the technical difficulties involved, solely the construction cost of a railway along the coastline between Tuen Mun and Tsuen Wan is expected to be very high. The RDS-2014 states that the cost-effectiveness of Tuen Mun-Tsuen Wan Link can hardly be established, according to the information at that time; and in longer term, the Government would consider revisiting the railway proposal if there are further changes in the planning circumstances and population as well as an increase in transport demand in the coastal areas between Tuen Mun and Tsuen Wan, or other relevant new considerations in the planning for development in the region.

The Chief Executive just mentioned the "Lantau Tomorrow Vision" in the Policy Address. A part of the proposed railway corridor as referred to in

the "Lantau Tomorrow Vision" is similar to the alignment of Tuen Mun-Tsuen Wan Link (Tuen Mun to Tsing Lung Tau). The THB plans to take forward the "Strategic Studies on Railways and Major Roads beyond 2030" (RMR2030+ Studies) on the basis of the conceptual spatial requirements to be firmed up under the "Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030" ("Hong Kong 2030+ Study"), which is being conducted by the Development Bureau and the Planning Department. Based on the latest planning information, including cross-boundary transport data, RMR2030+ Studies will examine the demand and supply of the transport infrastructure, including railways and major roads, in Hong Kong between 2031 and 2041, and study the loading of the heavy rails in the Northwest New Territories beyond 2030. We will consider the planning studies and the recommended strategic transport corridors in relation to the "Lantau Tomorrow Vision", as well as look into the layout of the proposed railway and major road infrastructure with regard to the transport infrastructure required for the longer-term strategic growth areas of "Hong Kong 2030+ Study" (such as the New Territories North), to ensure that the planning of large scale transport infrastructure can meet the needs of the overall long-term land use developments of Hong Kong. RMR2030+ Studies will also examine the impact of the proposed transport infrastructure on the existing transport network and formulate corresponding strategies. The Panel on Transport expressed support for the above studies in June 2017. Since "Hong Kong 2030+ Study" has not yet been finalised, we will seek funding approval in due course for implementing RMR2030+ Studies.

The Government completed the third comprehensive transport study (CTS) in October 1999. The study comprised three main aspects: (i) planning of transport infrastructure; (ii) the roles, positioning, and co-ordination of each public transport mode; and (iii) other topical transport studies. The third CTS laid down a number of broad directions, including (1) better integration of transport and land use planning; (2) better use of railway as the backbone of the passenger transport system; (3) provision of better public transport services and facilities; (4) wider use of advanced technologies in traffic management; and (5) implementation of more environmentally-friendly transport measures. These broad directions remain applicable today.

After completion of the third CTS, the THB has been conducting different studies for the various aspects of the CTS. On planning of transport infrastructure, the Government announced the "Railway Development Strategy 2000" and "Railway Development Strategy 2014" in 2000 and 2014 respectively. The Government also conducted regular internal reviews on the planning of strategic road projects in Hong Kong; took forward major road projects including Central-Wan Chai Bypass and Island Eastern Corridor Link, Central Kowloon Route, Tseung Kwan O-Lam Tin Tunnel, Cross Bay Link, etc. in a timely manner; and will commence the RMR2030+ Studies. On public transport services, the Government recently announced the "Public Transport Strategy Study" in June 2017. On topical transport studies, the Government will continue to implement various measures to relieve road traffic congestion, including conducting a study to comprehensively review the hierarchy and level of tolls of all government tolled tunnels and the Tsing Ma and Tsing Sha Control Areas, and taking a series of short-term and medium to long-term measures to

relieve inadequate parking spaces in various districts by increasing their supply, and actively prepare for the Electronic Road Pricing Pilot Scheme in Central and its Adjacent Areas, etc.

The above studies on different transport topics can basically serve the purpose of a CTS. Moreover, compared to the previous approach of conducting an one-off CTS to cover the above three main aspects, THB considers that the arrangement of conducting studies on different aspects and topics at appropriate times, on one hand, allows flexibility to respond effectively to the ever-changing traffic demand arising from local developments. On the other hand, it is a more suitable approach to complete the studies in an orderly and flexible manner for early promulgation of the findings of each study, without undergoing protracted preparatory and co-ordination process for an extensive study and with resources progressively deployed.

Thank you, President.