LCQ1: Resolving congestion problem of road harbour crossings

Following is a question by the Hon Shang Hailong and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (November 13):

Question:

The Government has implemented time-varying tolls at the three road harbour crossings (RHCs) since December 17 last year. According to the paper provided by the Transport and Logistics Bureau for the Panel on Transport of this Council on May 17 this year, after the implementation of time-varying tolls, the overall traffic at the three RHCs during peak hours with higher tolls had decreased, but the traffic had obviously shifted to the Western Harbour Crossing (WHC) as the average longest traffic queue at WHC during peak hours had increased from 0.6 kilometres (km) in December last year to 1.6 km in April this year, which was close to the 1.8 □km average traffic queue of the Cross-Harbour Tunnel. Moreover, many members of the public have relayed to the media that the morning congestion problem at WHC is even more serious than that before the implementation of time-varying tolls. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Government had anticipated that congestion at WHC would become more serious after the implementation of time-varying tolls; whether the Government can provide figures of the average traffic flow at the three RHCs in each time slot in each day after the implementation of time-varying tolls;

(2) as there are views pointing out that while there is no stopping for paying tolls when crossing RHCs after the implementation of HKeToll, the speed limit within the area of the former toll plazas of the RHCs and on some road sections outside the tunnel tubes (the areas) remains at 50 km per hour (km/h), and the speed limit of the roads leading to the areas is usually 70 km/h to 80 km/h, whether the Government will consider enhancing or relaxing the speed limit arrangements of the roads, thereby improving the traffic situation at RHCs; and

(3) as it has been reported that the Secretary for Transport and Logistics indicated earlier on that in the long run, the congestion problem of existing RHCs needs to be resolved with the construction of a fourth cross-harbour tunnel at the Kau Yi Chau Artificial Islands, whether the Government will conduct a feasibility study in this regard, and of the relevant timetable?

Reply:

President,

(1) The Government has implemented time-varying tolls since December 17,

2023, at the three road harbour crossings (RHCs), namely the Western Harbour Crossing (WHC), the Cross-Harbour Tunnel (CHT) and the Eastern Harbour Crossing (EHC). The Transport Department (TD) has been closely monitoring the traffic condition after implementation of the new tolls. With the co-operation of motorists and adjustments to their commuting patterns, the distribution of total cross-harbour traffic flows among the three RHCs has become more even than before. While the traffic flows at CHT and EHC have decreased, the traffic flow of WHC has increased as a result of the reduction in tolls, which is within the Government's expectation; the WHC now has the highest traffic flow among the three RHCs.

The total traffic demand of the three RHCs, before the implementation of time-varying tolls, has far exceeded the total capacity of the three RHCs, particularly during peak hours. From January to September 2024 (excluding summer holidays, public holidays, days with inclement weather and the associated days affected), the overall weekday traffic flows of the three RHCs remained similar to the condition before the implementation of time-varying tolls. Despite the reduced total cross-harbour traffic flows during peak hours, occurrence of traffic queues were still inevitable. The total cross-harbour traffic flow about half an hour immediately before and after peak hours increased. As for other time periods that account for nearly 80 per cent of the time of a day, the traffic of the three RHCs (including the CHT which remained congested for a long time in the past) was smooth and congestion-free. The case of non-cross-harbour local traffic being affected by the queues tailing back from the tunnels was significantly reduced. Details of the average daily traffic flow of the three RHCs on weekdays with respect to time slots are at Annex.

The above figures show that time-varying tolls have effectively utilised the capacity of the three RHCs, and have encouraged some motorists to commute outside peak hours, thereby rationalising the uneven distribution of traffic in the past, which is in line with the Government's policy objectives and expectation. The implementation of time-varying tolls brings benefits to motorists, the public transport trades, the commercial vehicle trades, cross-harbour bus passengers, and the community as a whole. The figures show that the cross-harbour traffic conditions are still changing, and the traffic flow varies in different quarters of the year. The Government will continue to collect data and keep the cross-harbour traffic condition under review so as to comprehensively analyse the impact of time-varying tolls on the cross-harbour traffic.

In view of the increased traffic flow at WHC, the TD is planning to construct an additional lane at the exit of WHC on Hong Kong Island towards Central and Sheung Wan to increase the carrying capacity of the road section and reduce weaving activities, so as to smoothen the traffic flow at the tunnel portal and its surrounding areas. The related road works are expected to commence in 2025 for completion in 2026.

(2) The HKeToll, a free-flow tolling service, brings convenience and smoother road experience to motorists. The Highways Department is now dismantling all the toll booths and toll islands, and is adjusting the arrangement of traffic lanes. It is expected that the relevant works involving the three RHCs will

be completed in the second quarter of 2025. The TD will continue to monitor the traffic conditions around the original toll plaza and the existing bus stops, and review the speed limits of the relevant road sections in the light of the actual situation and needs. In considering whether to revise the speed limits, the TD needs to take into account the impact on the operation of bus stops to ensure that buses can safely re-enter traffic lanes from bus stops during peak and non-peak hours of the tunnel.

(3) The Government promulgated the Hong Kong Major Transport Infrastructure Development Blueprint in December last year, which formulates a planning framework for the city's future transport infrastructure development. The planned Tuen Mun Bypass, Route 11, Tsing Yi-Lantau Link and Hong Kong Island West-Northeast Lantau Link can provide more commuting options, reduce journey time, and effectively alleviate the pressure on existing major roads.

To facilitate the Kau Yi Chau Artificial Islands project, the Government is carrying out planning study for the transport infrastructures, including the Hong Kong Island West-Northeast Lantau Link under the project.