

LCQ10: External transport services for Tuen Mun and Tsuen Wan

Following is a question by the Hon Steven Ho and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (December 5):

Question:

It has been reported that with the intake of more than 20 housing estates in Yuen Long and Tuen Mun in the past five years, the population of the two districts has increased by 67 000 in the past decade. Some residents of Tuen Mun and Tsuen Wan who travel daily to Hong Kong Island for work have relayed that the traffic congestion along Tuen Mun Road and the crowdedness in train compartments of the West Rail Line during peak hours every day are aggravating, making it both time consuming and very tiring for them to commute to and from work. They hope that the Government will introduce measures expeditiously to improve the external transport services for those districts. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has surveyed the respective average times taken by members of the public to commute, by various means of transport, (i) between Tuen Mun and Central and (ii) between Tsuen Wan and Central, during peak and non-peak hours in each of the past five years; if so, of the details;

(2) whether it has surveyed the (i) average daily vehicular traffic flow of Tuen Mun Road and (ii) average daily patronage of the West Rail Line in each of the past five years; if so, of the details; whether it has projected the relevant figures for each of the coming five years; if so, of the details;

(3) whether it will re-commission the ferry route between Central and Tsuen Wan as well as that between Central and Tuen Mun to provide service full-day or during peak hours; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) of the specific plans and measures, implemented now and in future, to alleviate the hardship suffered by Tuen Mun and Tsuen Wan residents in commuting to and from work?

Reply:

President,

Residents of Yuen Long, Tuen Mun and Tsuen Wan, which are located in New Territories West and Kowloon West, are served by various kinds of convenient public transport modes connecting to the city. They may commute by means of railway lines, including Tsuen Wan Line, Tung Chung Line and West Rail Line; and depending on availability of services in their localities, residents in Tuen Mun may take light rail and transfer to the West Rail Line. Franchised buses and non-franchised buses are plying between Yuen Long/Tuen Mun/Tsuen

Wan and Central via Route 3, Tuen Mun Road, Ting Kau Bridge and Western Harbour Crossing.

My reply to the various parts of the Hon Steven Ho's question is as follows:

(1) The Transport Department (TD) does not have statistics on the average time taken by members of the public to commute, by various means of transport between Tuen Mun/Tsuen Wan and Central during different periods of a day. The actual time for journeys are subject to a host of factors, including modes of commuting, road traffic, rail passenger flow, and the actual places where the journeys start and end. The public may make use of the all-in-one mobile application "HKeMobility" launched by the TD to search for routes of different transportation modes, journey times and fares, and obtain real-time traffic news to plan for the most appropriate travel arrangements.

According to information available, a journey during peak hours between Tuen Mun and Central, by means of railway with interchange at Nam Cheong to Tung Chung Line or West Rail Line, generally takes about 50 minutes; and a journey between Tsuen Wan and Central via Tsuen Wan Line takes about 29 minutes. Journey time for non-peak hours is more or less the same. As for the franchised bus services connecting Tuen Mun and Tsuen Wan with Central during peak hours, KMB Route No. 961 (Shan King Terminus – Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre in Wan Chai), for example, takes about 60 minutes to get to Central. City Bus Route No. 903 (Tsuen Wan West Station/Discovery Park – Wan Chai North) takes about 45 minutes to get to Central.

(2) The annual average daily traffic volume of Tuen Mun Road (between Sham Tseng and Tsing Long Highway) over the past five years and the estimated annual average daily traffic volume between 2018 and 2022 are respectively set out in the Annex. We anticipate that upon full commissioning in 2020, the Tuen Mun – Chek Lap Kok Link will provide another trunk road for linking up New Territories West and Lantau and help divert traffic on Tuen Mun Road. The average daily patronage of the West Rail Line in each of the past five years is also set out in the Annex.

As regards the patronage for the West Rail Line in the coming five years, much will depend on the impact of the commissioning of the Tuen Ma Line under the Shatin to Central Link, which is under construction, on the existing West Rail section. But, in general, the flow of passengers does not stabilise during the early stage of commissioning of new railway lines. Thus, the Government will normally conduct continuous monitoring of the flow of passengers after commissioning and then assess future patronage. If the factor of the opening of the Tuen Ma Line is discounted and on the basis of the data for the past five years, the flow of passengers for the West Rail Line generally rises in the range of 0.6 per cent to 2.3 per cent every year.

(3) In tandem with the continuous enhancements in traffic network and ancillary transport facilities in recent years, the two ferry routes, "Central – Tsuen Wan (via Tsing Yi)" and "Central – Tuen Mun", ceased operation in July 2000 as a result of inadequate patronage. The TD invited

tenders for the two ferry routes of "Central – Tsuen Wan (via Tsing Yi)" and "Central – Tuen Mun" in March and April 2000 respectively with a view to selecting suitable ferry operators to provide licensed ferry services for the above routes. Yet, no tender submission was received. In August 2010, at the request of members of the local community, the TD conducted a new round of tender exercise for the "Central – Tuen Mun" route. Despite the relaxation of the tender requirements, no tender submission was received. The TD considered that the results of the tender exercises reflected the market assessment that the operation of the two services was not financially viable under the operating environment at that time with low patronage. Nevertheless, the Government welcomes application from operators interested in launching new licensed ferry services. However the TD has not received any proposal to operate new licensed ferry services between Tsuen Wan/Tuen Mun and Central up till now. In case a proposal is received, the TD will assess the service proposal having regard to such factors as passenger demand, financial and operational viability of the abovementioned ferry services.

(4) At present, the external public transport services for Tsuen Wan and Tuen Mun are generally adequate for meeting passenger needs.

With regard to railway service, the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) has been committed to enhancing the capacity of its network. The Corporation has increased the train frequency during peak hours where possible, and has adopted various passenger flow management measures to alleviate crowdedness during peak hours. On the West Rail Line, the current train frequencies for the morning and evening peak hours are around 3 and 3.5 minutes respectively. During the busiest period of the morning peak hours, the MTRCL additionally provides a regular special train trip departing from Tin Shui Wai Station for Hung Hom. To dovetail with the Shatin to Central Link project, the West Rail Line has deployed 8-car trains on a full scale since late May this year, resulting in an increase of around 14 per cent in the overall capacity of the line. The above measures were observed to effectively alleviate crowdedness at the busiest sections during the said hours. As regards the Tsuen Wan Line, the MTRCL is currently proceeding with the replacement of the signalling systems of the line, the completion of which will help increase both the capacity and efficiency of train service. Moreover, during the evening peak hours, the MTRCL currently arranges individual direct train trips to Admiralty Station without pick-up at Central Station so as to ease passenger flow at the platform of Admiralty Station, where numerous passengers are waiting to board trains bound for Tsuen Wan. The Corporation also deploys platform assistants to platforms of busy stations on all lines with a view to assisting passengers with orderly and smooth boarding and alighting, thereby enabling on-time departures and efficient operation of trains.

The MTRCL will continue to closely monitor the loading of relevant lines. To cope with demand generated by future patronage, the Corporation will review and consider proposals from time to time, including enhancing station management measures to ease passenger flow, increasing train frequency where practicable, and offering fare concessions to alleviate the heavy loading of trains during peak hours.

In respect of franchised bus services, the TD and franchised bus companies jointly formulate bus route planning programmes on an annual basis. As for Tsuen Wan and Tuen Mun districts, the franchised bus companies concerned will adjust their bus services in the light of the needs of passengers in these two districts. The TD will continue to keep in view the developments in Tsuen Wan and Tuen Mun, and will consider supportive transport measures and adjustments to public transport services where necessary.

In the long term, the Chief Executive just mentioned the Lantau Tomorrow Vision in the Policy Address, in which 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 Transport and Housing Bureau plans to take forward the Strategic Studies on Railways and Major Roads beyond 2030 (RMR2030+ Studies) on 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, RMR2030+ Studies will examine the demand for and supply of 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 (including 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 (including the West Rail Line) and formulate corresponding strategies. The Legislative Council Panel on Transport expressed support for the above studies in June 2017. Since Hong Kong 2030+ Study has not yet been completed, we will seek funding approval in due course for implementing RMR2030+ Studies.