

LCQ10: Lantau Closed Road Permits

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

Question:

I have received complaints from residents of Lantau Island alleging that the requirement to apply for a Lantau Closed Road Permit (LCRP) before driving in and out of South Lantau imposes financial pressure on them. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the criteria adopted for delineating the closed area of South Lantau; whether it has regularly reviewed the policy on LCRPs; if so, of the time and outcome of the last review;

(2) of the following information on LCRPs and temporary LCRPs respectively for each of the past three years: (i) the numbers of usual residents and tourists who applied for LCRPs, and (ii) the administrative fees charged by the authorities to each category of such persons (set out in a table);

(3) given that an LCRP is currently required for access to the closed roads in South Lantau and the validity period of a long-term LCRP is one year, whether the Government will consider extending the validity period of LCRPs (to three years, for example) and waiving the LCRP application fees for Lantau residents; if not, of the reasons for that;

(4) whether it will explore cancelling LCRPs in phases to tie in with the future development of Lantau Island; if so, of the timetable; and

(5) as it has been reported that some companies in the community claim to be able to apply for LCRPs on behalf of non-Lantau residents and workers, whether the Government has conducted investigations and taken enforcement actions; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Development Bureau and the Transport Department (TD), the consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Hok-fung is as follows:

To align with Hong Kong's long-term sustainable development, the Government established Sustainable Lantau Blueprint in 2017. Lantau will be developed based on the overarching principle of "Development in the North, Conservation for the South". North Lantau will become a platform for Hong Kong's economic development and will be developed as a new community. For South Lantau which has natural and cultural resources, the Government will focus on conservation to preserve and improve its unique environment of rural

villages. Besides, South Lantau will be used for recreational purpose, including the South Lantau Eco-recreation Corridor proposed earlier by the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) for enjoyment by the residents and the visitors.

(1) Given the designation of South Lantau as a nature conservation area by the relevant government departments, the roads on South Lantau have been designated as 24-hour closed roads since the 1970s to control the number of vehicles entering South Lantau.

All vehicles travelling on the closed roads on Lantau are required to possess valid Lantau Closed Road Permits (LCRPs) issued by the TD, while drivers of the vehicles concerned are required to comply with the conditions stated in the LCRPs and the relevant approval letters.

The TD will review the LCRP application mechanism from time to time to ensure that the LCRPs are issued to persons with genuine needs. For example, the Government last reviewed and improved the application mechanism in January 2022, including abolishing the renewal arrangement for temporary LCRPs, requiring applicants for general LCRPs to provide proof of relationship with the holder of the address proof and the registered vehicle owner, and requiring applicants applying through the Land Registry records to provide additional proof.

(2) The number of LCRPs issued in the past three years is at Annex. Each permit is valid for a period not exceeding 12 months and the fee is \$900 per year or \$75 per month for first issue while the renewal fee is \$660 per year or \$55 per month (any part of a month would be counted as one month). The same fee level applies to general LCRPs, temporary LCRPs and the LCRPs issued under the "Driving on Lantau Island" Scheme (DLS). The above permit fees are set in accordance with the Government's general policy of charging fees on a cost-recovery basis. In vetting applications for LCRPs, in order to avoid abuse, the TD has to prudently verify a range of information and supporting documents (e.g. bills issued by power company or the Rating and Valuation Department, land search document issued by the Land Registry, or rental receipt together with the stamped tenancy agreement, etc as address proof for a resident in South Lantau), and hence more administrative procedures are involved.

(3) and (4) The Government has to ensure that the prevailing planning of preserving South Lantau as a nature conservation area and the capacities of the ancillary transport facilities will not be affected before issuing the LCRPs. Except for temporary LCRPs and LCRPs issued under the DLS, the TD will require address proof from applicants for general LCRPs to ensure that LCRPs are issued only to eligible South Lantau residents and those who have business operation in South Lantau. If the validity period of the LCRPs is extended to more than one year, there is greater chance that people or business operators who have moved out of South Lantau may still be able to drive freely in and out of South Lantau during the validity period, which is in contravention of the principle under which the LCRP was issued. As for the fee waiver, this involves a number of considerations, such as whether it is in conflict with the "user pays" principle, whether the fee waiver may give

rise to abuse and the possible impact on traffic, etc.

The TD reviewed the arrangements for relaxing the closed roads on Lantau and the arrangement of issuing LCRPs in 2015. In the light of the review findings and the views gauged during consultation, the TD has implemented the relevant measures by phases, including raising the maximum number of coaches entering South Lantau from 30 to 40 per day, and launching the DLS which allows 25 private cars to enter the closed roads on Lantau from Mondays to Fridays (except public holidays). Private cars are allowed to travel via closed roads on Lantau to places such as Ngong Ping, Tai O, Cheung Sha and Mui Wo for leisure. Starting from July 2022, the daily quota for the DLS has increased from 25 to 50 (including 10 quotas for electric private cars).

At this stage, the Government has no plan to further adjust the arrangements for Lantau closed roads and the issuance of LCRPs. The Government will continue to review the arrangements in the light of the planning for South Lantau, the implementation of various enhancement measures, etc.

Considering the roads in South Lantau are currently closed roads which still have quite an extent of spare road capacities, there is insufficient justification from traffic flow perspective to support constructing large-scale transport infrastructure connecting North and South Lantau. However, Tung Chung Road is currently the only road connecting North and South Lantau, any serious traffic accidents will severely impact the external road traffic of the South Lantau. Therefore, the CEDD is conducting a study to explore options for improving the north-south connectivity of Lantau with a view to enhancing the resilience of the road network under emergency situations as well as benefiting the development of the South Lantau Eco-recreation Corridor under the overarching principle of "Conservation for the South". The study has commenced since March 2023 and is expected to complete in 2025.

(5) When examining each permit application, the TD has all along taken into account the genuine needs of the applicants to enter the closed roads in accordance with established criteria. The TD has also examined in detail whether the application submitted by the applicant complies with the requirements, the nature and justifications of the application, and the adequacy of supporting documents. If an applicant was found to have breached the permit conditions, including making a false declaration when applying for the LCRP, the TD would refer the case to the Police for follow-up action as appropriate.