

LCQ10: North Lantau traffic

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (November 7):

Question:

The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) opened to traffic on the 24th of last month. However, the Government estimated last month that due to construction delays, the section of the Southern Connection of the Tuen Mun-Chek Lap Kok Link (a road connecting North Lantau and the HZMB Hong Kong Port) which will connect North Lantau Highway (Tung Chung-bound direction) would not be completed until the first half of next year at the earliest. As such, during the initial stage of commissioning of HZMB, the traffic between Tung Chung and HZMB Hong Kong Port are required to route through North Lantau Highway and the roads on the Airport Island. Some residents on Lantau Island are worried that the commissioning of HZMB may aggravate the traffic congestion on those roads, seriously affecting their daily lives. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Government will implement traffic mitigation measures (such as requesting the MTR Corporation Limited to increase the train frequencies of the Tung Chung Line and the Airport Express) and encourage travellers who come to Hong Kong through HZMB to take the Airport Express to ply the urban areas, so as to ease the traffic load on the section of North Lantau Highway near Tung Chung and the roads on the Airport Island;

(2) as the Government has indicated that if both roads and railway lines are obstructed, it will, where necessary and practicable, consider using the SkyPier for providing emergency ferry services plying between Central Pier and Tuen Mun Ferry Pier, how the Government determines if it is "necessary and practicable" to do so; whether it will study the feasibility of opening up the SkyPier on a regular basis; and

(3) in order to enhance the public transport system connecting the artificial islands of HZMB and Tung Chung Town Centre, whether the Government will study afresh my suggestions below: constructing a regional elevated monorail system with stops to be built at places such as Tung Chung, the Airport Island and the artificial islands, exploring the extension of the terminus of the Tung Chung Line to the Airport Island, and building an additional HZMB Hong Kong Port Station for the Tung Chung Line?

Reply:

President,

The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) was commissioned smoothly on October 24, 2018. With the simultaneous opening of the mainline of the Southern Connection of the Tuen Mun-Chek Lap Kok Link (i.e. the section

between the Hong Kong Port and the North Lantau Highway (urban bound)), the pressure on the roads in Tung Chung and the Airport Island has been eased. Since the commissioning of the HZMB, the traffic at and in the vicinity of the HZMB Hong Kong Port, the airport and Tung Chung has generally been smooth.

My reply to the various parts of the Hon Holden Chow's question is as follows:

(1) To ensure smooth traffic at the HZMB Hong Kong Port, the airport and Tung Chung during the initial period upon the commissioning of the HZMB, the Transport Department (TD) has implemented special traffic arrangements on a temporary basis. For example, Hong Kong/Guangdong cross-boundary private cars with regular quota for using other boundary crossings (including Shenzhen Bay, Lok Ma Chau (Huanggang), Sha Tau Kok and Man Kam To) are not allowed to travel to and from the Zhuhai Port via the HZMB at this stage. Also, some of the local construction vehicles going to the Hong Kong Port and the airport for major works projects are restricted to use the connecting roads in the vicinity of the airport and Lantau Island during non-peak hours only. The TD will continue to closely monitor the traffic at the HZMB and its neighbouring areas, and adjust the temporary traffic arrangements in a timely manner having regard to the capacity of the Hong Kong Port and the connecting roads, thereby optimising the benefits of the HZMB. In addition, the TD will make continuous publicity efforts to encourage visitors to use public transport to go to the Hong Kong Port.

As regards public transport, the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) has been paying close attention to the services and passenger demand of Tung Chung Line, and will make appropriate adjustments where necessary with particular attention to the morning peak hours on weekdays. At present, the Tung Chung Line train services are operating at a headway of about four minutes (Hong Kong to Tsing Yi) and six to eight minutes (Hong Kong to Tung Chung) on average during the morning peak hours. As advised by the MTRCL, the train services are operating smoothly and can meet passenger needs. At Tung Chung Station, the terminus of Tung Chung Line, passengers are usually able to board the first arriving train. As there is usually a large number of passengers at both Tsing Yi Station and Nam Cheong Station heading to Hong Kong Station, the MTRCL deployed two additional special departures from Tsing Yi Station directly to Hong Kong Station early this year to alleviate the crowdedness of Tung Chung Line trains. To enhance the convenience of passengers in using train services when boarding at Tung Chung Station, the MTRCL installed a new passenger information display system at the concourse of the station in January 2018 to show passengers the arrival times of the next four trains. Passengers may also obtain the same information through the MTRCL's mobile phone application "Next Train".

The Airport Express is mainly targeted for business and travelers. Since 2012, the headway of the line has been shortened from 12 minutes to 10 minutes. In 2017, the loading for busy sections during the busiest one hour of morning peaks was 46 per cent, able to meet the needs of passengers.

(2) When North Lantau Highway or Lantau Link and railway lines are

obstructed, the TD will mobilise ferries to provide transport services. The Emergency Transport Co-ordination Centre (ETCC) under the TD will liaise with public transport service operators and the Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK) for co-ordination. Subject to actual circumstances, the ETCC will request ferry operators to endeavour to enhance ferry services (including the "Tuen Mun-Tung Chung", "Central-Discovery Bay" and "Central-Mui Wo" routes). The frequencies of feeder bus services serving the piers of the above routes will also be increased to facilitate travel to and from the airport, Lantau Island and urban areas for those switching to existing ferry services and feeder bus services.

Additionally, the TD has signed an emergency ferry services agreement with the Hong Kong & Kowloon Motor Boats & Tug Boats Association Ltd (MBTA). In case of a serious incident on North Lantau Highway or Tsing Ma Bridge, or full closure of either of the two causing prolonged obstruction to road traffic, the MBTA will provide emergency ferry services between Tung Chung Development Pier and Tsuen Wan West Pier / Disneyland Resort Pier. The Government, together with the MTRCL and the AAHK, will take into account the gravity, timing and duration of the incident; as well as the feasibility and mobilisation of resources by operators, in considering to use the SkyPier for providing emergency ferry services plying to and from Central Pier and Tuen Mun Ferry Terminal to ease the flow of passengers travelling to/from the airport. However, since the external transport link of Lantau Island and the airport has mainly been provided by two land-based mass transit carriers, namely the railway and franchised buses, the role of waterborne transport as an alternative in case of full closure of land links is rather limited given the constraints of capacity and speed of ferries. Notwithstanding that, the Government will continue to co-operate closely with all relevant emergency units with a view to minimising the inconvenience caused to passengers and other members of the public.

Located at the Restricted Area of the airport, the SkyPier provides convenient and speedy ferry services for air-to-sea/sea-to-air transit passengers travelling between Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta (PRD). The AAHK shall operate the SkyPier in accordance with the Deed of Security signed with the Government and meet the security requirements for transit passengers and baggage. Currently, the SkyPier is not open for use by non-transit passengers. As the SkyPier's capacity is limited, and there are already a number of existing public transport services plying between the airport and various districts across the territory, the AAHK will not provide local ferry service to and from the airport. Moreover, the financial viability of such ferry service is also in doubt. Any operators interested in providing local ferry services at other location in Lantau can make such an application to the TD.

(3) According to the information from the Development Bureau (DEVB), the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) is conducting the "Study on Traffic, Transport and Capacity to Receive Visitors for Lantau" to examine the need and feasible options of transport connections amongst North Lantau, the Airport Island and the Hong Kong Boundary Crossing Facilities Island from the overall planning perspective for Lantau. Moreover, CEDD and the Planning

Department are jointly carrying out the "Planning, Engineering and Architectural Study for Topside Development at Hong Kong Boundary Crossing Facilities Island of Hong Kong – Zhuhai – Macao Bridge", which includes the feasibility study on transport options (including Environmentally Friendly Linkage System) amongst Hong Kong Boundary Crossing Facilities Island, North Lantau and the Airport Island.

In view that the Government has invited the AAHK to submit a proposal for the topside development at the Hong Kong Boundary Crossing Facilities Island, the Government will comprehensively review the needs of transport connection and facilities amongst North Lantau, the Airport Island and the Hong Kong Boundary Crossing Facilities Island after the AAHK submits the development proposal.