

# LCQ11: Hong Kong's transport infrastructure

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

For several consecutive days of last month, the train services of various railway lines (especially the East Rail Line) were reduced or even suspended due to vandalism of facilities and blockage of trunk roads such as the Tolo Highway. As a result, the external transport for residents in the New Territories (especially those living in Tai Po and North District) almost came to a halt, thus seriously affecting their work and daily lives. There are comments that such a situation has revealed the vulnerability of Hong Kong's transport network. Besides, some members of the public have relayed that as roads and railway stations have been frequently closed in haste due to demonstrations and they have difficulty in getting to know the latest traffic news and arrangements, they have experienced great inconvenience in travelling. In respect of improving Hong Kong's transport infrastructure, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of cases of (i) the facilities of the East Rail Line being vandalised and (ii) the Tolo Highway being blocked, in each of the past three years, and the details of such cases;

(2) whether it will, by drawing the experience from the aforesaid incidents, improve the planning for the transport network with a view to enhancing its capability to withstand any attack; if so, of the details; of the relief transport arrangements to cope with various contingencies;

(3) whether it will improve the existing mechanism and channels for disseminating traffic news to ensure that members of the public can conveniently get to know the latest traffic news and arrangements; and

(4) as it has been reported that the reinstatement works for MTR University Station are almost of a scale of reconstructing the station, whether the Government will discuss with the MTR Corporation Limited to upgrade the facilities of that station along with the reinstatement works, including (i) extending the cover to the entire platform, (ii) narrowing the gap between the platform and the train, and (iii) building a new exit and connecting it to the Hong Kong Science Park by a pedestrian link installed with travellers?

Reply:

President,

Since early June 2019, over 900 protests, processions and public meetings have been staged in Hong Kong, many of which eventually turned into violent illegal events, including maliciously blocking various strategic routes and cross-harbour tunnel facilities, paralysing the traffic, as well as wantonly damaging road safety facilities (such as traffic lights, railings and road signs). These reckless acts have jeopardised public order and public safety and severely affected the mobility of the general public.

After consulting the Security Bureau, my reply to the various parts of the Hon Chan Hak-kan's question is as follows:

(1) The Tolo Highway was blocked for several days in November this year. Between 2016 and 2018, the Transport Department (TD) did not receive any reports on vandalism or blockage of the Tolo Highway.

As regards the East Rail Line (EAL), according to the information provided by the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), there was no case of vandalism of the EAL facilities between 2016 and 2018 which led to delay of train service for eight minutes or more. In February this year, the overhead lines near MTR Tai Wo Station of the EAL were struck by a falling metal object suspectedly thrown from a footbridge above the overhead lines, causing a failure of the power supply system, which in turn temporarily disrupted train service on the EAL. The MTRCL reported the case to the Police.

Since June this year, Hong Kong has seen large-scale public order events taking place continuously with some of the events turning into violent clashes, which have had severe impact on MTR services. In particular, from July to November, the MTR network (including the EAL) and the facilities of numerous MTR stations (e.g. platform screen doors, closed circuit televisions, lifts, escalators, fire service installations and entry/exit gates, etc.) were vandalised, and fires were set to station entrances/exits as well as trains. Trackside signalling equipment was also vandalised. The walls and floors of stations were defaced extensively with graffiti. Fire hoses in stations were abused to flood station floors. Emergency exit ramps of trains were improperly released. Miscellaneous objects and petrol bombs were hurled at overhead lines, tracks and trains in operation. All the above acts have posed serious threat to the safety of passengers, MTR staff and the railway.

(2) The Emergency Traffic Co-ordination Centre (ETCC) under TD, which operates 24 hours a day, closely monitors the situation of traffic and transport services. ETCC liaises and co-ordinates with relevant government departments, public transport service operators and organisations concerned in handling traffic incidents; and disseminates the latest traffic news to the public.

In addition, TD has all along put in place contingency plans for individual strategic routes and rail lines. In case of an incident, TD, relevant government departments (such as the Police and works departments), public transport service operators as well as tunnel and bridge management

companies, etc. will maintain contact and co-ordinate appropriate actions according to the procedures set out in the contingency plans. The contingency measures concerned include traffic diversion, strengthening of alternative services by other public transport service operators and dissemination of relevant information to the public so as to minimise the impact of the incidents on various road users as far as possible.

On the other hand, it is the statutory duty of the Police to take actions to maintain public safety and public order, as well as to ensure that the traffic remains smooth. When public order and public safety are severely threatened by incidents such as illegal road blockage and paralysed traffic, the Police must take appropriate actions to maintain law and order and safeguard public peace.

The Police will continue to enhance co-operation and liaison with various public transport service operators and relevant government departments, and will formulate appropriate contingency plans and strengthen relevant organisations' awareness of security through regular meetings, thereby enhancing the security level and resilience of the transport network system.

(3) On information dissemination, ETCC of TD issues electronic press releases to the media as soon as practicable after occurrence of traffic incidents, and disseminates the latest traffic and transport information to the public via TD's mobile application "HKeMobility", the department's website ([www.td.gov.hk](http://www.td.gov.hk)) and variable message signs on highways. In addition, designated staff are deployed by ETCC to make radio broadcasts on information relating to the incidents and call for public attention to the unexpected road situation of individual districts and the latest arrangements on public transport service.

ETCC also updates the incident information on "HKeMobility" in a timely manner and announces specific traffic and transport arrangements, including individual roads being affected, links to websites on public transport service arrangements of franchised bus companies, etc. Text version of the above-mentioned messages aside, TD also uses graphics to display information about affected stations and road situation. In this regard, maps about the railway service status and major road status are added to "HKeMobility", enabling the public to have a better grasp of the detailed traffic information and make appropriate travel arrangements accordingly.

So far, the cumulative number of downloads of the mobile application "HKeMobility" has reached 2.1 million. We will continue to enhance its functions with a view to providing various road users with more comprehensive and accurate traffic and transport information.

Moreover, in case of railway service disruption, the MTRCL will disseminate promptly updated train information to passengers via its website, its mobile application "MTR Mobile", broadcasts at stations and inside train compartments as well as the media, so that passengers can make early planning for their trips.

(4) Major public order events in recent months have led to vandalism and violent behaviour, with their scale escalating since August. For instance, a number of facilities and trackside signalling equipment at the University Station of the EAL have been seriously and maliciously damaged. The University Station is still closed and trains will not stop there. Repair works of the Station are underway and are expected to take a longer period of time.

During the course of reinstatement works, the MTRCL will consider replacing station facilities as appropriate, depending on the actual circumstances. However, extending the cover to the entire platform and building new exits may involve significant changes to the station structure. Relevant government departments and the MTRCL will need to give thorough and careful consideration to such suggestions. As for narrowing the gap between the platform and the train, since it was necessary to ensure compatibility with different geographic settings of different sections and to support the operational needs of different trains back then when EAL was constructed, wider gaps have been constructed for the EAL platforms. Furthermore, some of the stations along the EAL (including the University Station) are located in a curve position, which also result in wider platform gaps. Nonetheless, the MTRCL has all along given the highest priority to passenger safety. Various measures have therefore been adopted to alert passengers to the platform gaps so as to avoid accidents.