

LCQ11: Universal Accessibility Programme

Following is a question by the Hon Stanley Li and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (May 18):

Question:

It has been reported that the projects implemented under the Universal Accessibility Programme (the Programme) have been progressing at a slow pace, rendering such an initiative, which is well received by the public, unable to maximise its effectiveness. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as it is learnt that quite a number of projects under the Programme involve only the addition of lifts at suitable locations of existing footbridges or subways, but it takes an average of five years to complete such a project from investigation, design to works completion, of the Government's ways to effectively shorten the time required to two to three years; and

(2) given that as at February this year, the Highways Department (HyD) has only engaged three consultants to undertake the advance works of investigation and design for 129 projects, and 10 contractors to undertake the construction of 93 projects under the Programme, whether the Government has assessed if the HyD has overly relied on these consultants and contractors to carry out the works, resulting in the slow progress of the projects; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the affirmative, whether it will instruct the HyD to engage more consultants and contractors to carry out the works, so as to maximise the effectiveness of the Programme?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been striving to create a barrier-free and accessible environment. In 2012, the Government launched the Universal Accessibility Programme (UA Programme) to proactively retrofit more barrier-free access facilities (i.e. lifts and ramps) at public walkways to facilitate the public to commute, especially for elders and persons in need. As at April 30, 2022, the number of items of barrier-free access facilities completed under the UA Programme across the 18 districts was 179, while 93 items were under construction.

The reply to the question raised by the Hon Stanley Li is as follows:

(1) Lift retrofitting items under the UA Programme have to go through stages of investigation, detailed design, tendering and construction.

Firstly, in terms of investigation and detailed design, as piling is required for installation of lift shaft to support the weight of the lift, the Highways Department (HyD) has to carry out ground investigation or boring works to ascertain the ground condition, and check the layout of underground utilities, so as to identify a suitable location for retrofitting the lift. The HyD will also consult the public on the proposed lift design with a view to meeting the needs of relevant stakeholders. The time required for investigation and design varies depending on the complexity of individual project items. Some projects need to be gazetted under the Roads (Works, Use and Compensation) Ordinance (Cap. 370) and to have objections resolved.

Upon completion of the above-mentioned investigation and design procedures, the HyD will invite tenders for the works and proceed to construction stage, which generally includes foundation works, construction of lift towers, installation of lift components, connection of the lift towers to existing walkways, and installation of associated facilities. Lastly, the HyD has to complete the commissioning tests for the lifts as required by the relevant legislation before they can be opened for public use. Out of the 179 completed project items, 77 were completed in less than five years.

To expedite the progress of items under the UA Programme, the following measures have been adopted:

- To implement items under the UA Programme more flexibly with the "dedicated-funds-for-dedicated-use" practice through the block allocation Subhead 6101TX "Universal Accessibility Programme" under Capital Works Reserve Fund Head 706 "Highways";
- To award works contracts for items in batches in accordance with their respective progress in investigation and design so that more works can be implemented as soon as possible;
- To ascertain the actual location and condition of the underground utilities as early as possible during the design stage so that works can be delivered smoothly at later stages;
- To adopt new works contracts model with Early Contractor Involvement so that contractors would be engaged in the design work at an earlier stage of the project, with the aim to enhance the buildability of the design and shorten the construction time; and
- To adopt the Modular Integrated Construction method under which the lift tower/lift components are installed in the factories before delivery to the sites for final assembly, so as to expedite the construction speed and enhance the cost-effectiveness of the building cost.

By adopting the above measures, the HyD expects that the construction time could be reduced by six to nine months so as to expedite the implementation of these projects.

(2) In view of the large number of projects under the UA Programme, which share similar works procedures and nature, the HyD will thus bundle an appropriate number of project items under the same contract, and invite tenders for the works contract in accordance with the established procurement

procedures for government public works projects. Such arrangement can enhance the cost-effectiveness of the design and construction works and attract more competitive tenders.

Pursuant to the procurement procedures for government public works projects, the tendering process for each consultancy and works contract is open to the fair bidding by different consultancies and contractors, with the contract to be awarded to the most competitive bidder. While it is possible for a consultant to be awarded with more than one consultancy contracts, the firm is obliged to provide resources as committed, and complete its work under the specified timeframe to ensure there is no delay in the project. According to the HyD's records, all consultancy contracts were completed within the specified timeframe over the past five years. On the other hand, the works programme is stipulated in works contracts. In case a contractor fails to complete the works as scheduled, it is required to pay compensation to the Government in accordance with contractual provisions. Among the 179 completed items, only one item could not be completed within its contractual period due to insufficient resources provided by the contractor.

The HyD will also make every effort to expedite the implementation of the projects under the UA Programme so that more projects can be completed as soon as possible to benefit the public. As more items under the UA Programme enter the design or construction stage in future, the HyD expects to attract more consultants/contractors to take part in the implementation of the projects.