

LCQ14: 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 (June 13):

Question:

Some members of the transport sector have relayed that with the continuous growth in the population of Tung Chung in recent years, coupled with the imminent commissioning of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB), it is expected that the traffic in North Lantau will become busier day by day. Moreover, the road traffic between the Lantau Island/airport and the urban areas will be paralyzed whenever a traffic incident has occurred on the North Lantau Highway and the Lantau Link. On the other hand, the Journey Time Indication Systems (JTISs) currently neither cover all trunk roads nor provide important information such as the occurrence of traffic incidents on the road ahead, rendering drivers often unable to switch in time to roads with smoother traffic. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the passenger throughput of the MTR Tung Chung Line is already close to its maximum capacity during peak hours, and passengers departing from and arriving at Hong Kong via HZMB upon its commissioning will add a burden on the Tung Chung Line, whether the authorities will request the MTR Corporation Limited to increase the train frequency of the Tung Chung Line by that time; if so, of the specific arrangements and timetable;

(2) whether the Transport Department will (i) study the provision of additional information by JTISs such as the occurrence of traffic incidents on the road ahead, and (ii) install JTISs along the various trunk roads (including Lung Cheung Road) connecting with the Lantau Link and at both ends to the Western Harbour Crossing; and

(3) whether it will consider providing ferry services plying the urban areas from the Skypier and Tung Chung Development Ferry Pier whenever a traffic incident has occurred on the North Lantau Highway and the Lantau Link?

Reply:

President,

The Emergency Transport Co-ordination Centre (ETCC) of the Transport Department (TD) monitors traffic conditions 24-hour a day. Its task is to liaise and co-ordinate among government departments, public transport operators and relevant organisations on the handling of traffic incidents. It also disseminates to the public the latest traffic arrangements associated with the incidents concerned.

In view of the imminent commissioning of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, the ETCC will continue to monitor traffic conditions closely, and co-

ordinate arrangements having regard to the actual situation in a timely manner.

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

(1) 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 to address the demand along busy sections of Tung Chung Line. To cater for the large number of passengers at Tsing Yi Station and Nam Cheong Station heading to Hong Kong Station during morning peak hours on weekdays, the MTRCL has deployed two additional departures this year operating directly from Tsing Yi Station to Hong Kong Station to alleviate crowding situation on trains. Moreover, through adjusting train services, the MTRCL has evened out the train service headways departing from Tung Chung Station and Tsing Yi Station. 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 morning peak hours. According to the MTRCL, the train services are now operating smoothly and can meet passenger needs.

In addition, the MTRCL is progressively replacing the signalling system for seven railway lines (namely Tsuen Wan Line, Island Line, Kwun Tong Line, Tseung Kwan O Line, Disneyland Resort Line, Tung Chung Line and Airport Express Line). With the full completion of the signalling system upgrading works in 2026, the overall carrying capacity of these seven MTR lines can be increased by around 10%.

(2) There are currently 10 sets of Journey Time Indication Systems (JTISs) and five sets of Speed Map Panels (SMPs) Systems in Hong Kong. JTISs are installed at critical diversion points of cross-harbour routes (including routes leading to the Western Harbour Crossing) to inform motorists of the estimated journey time from the diversion points to the exit portals of the respective cross-harbour tunnels. On the other hand, SMPs are installed at critical diversion points of strategic routes in the New Territories heading to Kowloon, using different colours on the panel to indicate real-time traffic conditions on the roads ahead and the estimated journey time. Apart from this, the TD has installed variable message signs on strategic routes leading to the Lantau Link, including the section of West Kowloon Highway after the Western Harbour Crossing (Kowloon Exit), Tsing Kwai Highway, Tuen Mun Road, Stonecutters Bridge and Ting Kau Bridge, so as to disseminate traffic information to motorists in the form of text messages when traffic congestion occurs on the Lantau Link and Ting Kau Bridge.

To further enhance the dissemination of traffic information, the TD is planning to install about 1 150 sets of traffic detectors on strategic routes and major roads, as well as an addition of 16 sets of JTISs at critical diversion points of strategic routes, including an additional set of JTIS each on the West Kowloon Highway, Long Tin Road and Hung Tin Road and enhance the set of Speed Map Panel on San Tin Highway so as to provide more traffic information on journeys to the airport. The installation works will be carried out in phases, some of which will be commissioned in end-2018 at the

earliest. The whole project is expected to be completed by end-2020.

(3) In case of serious obstructions on the North Lantau Highway or Lantau Link, the TD will contact the MTRCL immediately and make a request for strengthening train services on the Airport Express and Tung Chung Line so as to address the passenger demand. Upon discussion with the Government, the MTRCL agreed to enhance the services of Tung Chung Line and Airport Express within a short time in case of emergency so as to address the passenger demand between North Lantau or the airport and urban areas.

In the event that both road links and the railway lines are obstructed, the TD will mobilise ferries to provide transport services. The ETCC of the TD will liaise with public transport service operators and the Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK) for co-ordination. Subject to actual circumstances (including the resource deployment by operators, time of incident and its duration), 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. Where necessary and practicable, the Government will also consider using the SkyPier for providing emergency ferry services plying to and from Central Pier and Tuen Mun Ferry Pier to ease the flow of passengers. However, since the external transport links of Lantau Island and the airport have mainly been 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.

For more effective dissemination of information, the TD will promptly inform the public of any traffic incident on Lantau Link and North Lantau Highway, and the latest updates on traffic conditions and public transport services on radio and television and via the websites and mobile phone applications of both the Department, major public transport service operators (including franchised bus companies and the MTRCL) and AAHK. This will enable the public to plan their journeys early or consider switching their routes or travelling modes. The TD will also make use of the variable message signs installed at Tsing Ma Control Area, Tsing Sha Control Area and other trunk roads, and the radio re-broadcasting system in road tunnels to alert drivers to the latest updates on traffic incidents.