

LCQ18: Railway service in Tseung Kwan O

Following is a question by the Hon Lam So-wai and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (April 27):

Question:

Some residents of Tseung Kwan O (TKO) have relayed that with the rapid increase in the population of the district in recent years, residents have seen increasingly crowded train compartments when travelling by MTR, and hence there is an urgent need for enhancing the railway network in TKO and increasing the train frequency. On the other hand, it has been reported that the proposed alignments of the proposed North Island Line (NIL) and the East Kowloon Line (EKL) to be connected to the MTR Tseung Kwan O Line (TKOL) will be shortened (including cancelling a station for extension to TKO). Such residents are worried that the new railways may not be able to divert TKOL's passenger traffic and support those areas in the district which are not yet covered by railways (e.g. Hong Sing Garden and Tsui Lam Estate). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will, in the near future, make public the latest proposed alignments for NIL and EKL submitted by the MTR Corporation Limited to the Government, and the Government's comments provided to the Corporation in this regard, so as to enhance the transparency of the development of new railway projects; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will draw up a definite time schedule for the construction of NIL and EKL, and conduct a feasibility study on the further development of TKOL (including but not limited to extending TKOL to TKO Area 137); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as it is learnt that there is a continuous increase in the population of LOHAS Park and its residents rely heavily on MTR service for commuting, but the train frequency at LOHAS Park Station is low at present, whether it knows the maximum number of additional train trips that can be provided at LOHAS Park Station during peak hours upon completion of the signalling system upgrading project for TKOL, and whether this project can tie in with the population intakes of the various phases of LOHAS Park?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Lam So-wai is as follows:

(1) and (2) Railway projects involve huge capital investment, and the Government has to plan in a prudent manner. The new railway projects proposed in the Railway Development Strategy 2014 (RDS-2014) involve complicated

issues of different nature, which entails planning and design process of varying complexity. As clearly stated in the RDS-2014, the taking forward of individual proposed railway projects set out in the Strategy will be subject to the outcome of detailed engineering, environmental and financial studies relating to each project, as well as updated demand assessment and availability of resources. Therefore, the indicative implementation windows recommended in the RDS-2014 may be adjusted having regard to any change in circumstances.

The planning of the proposed North Island Line under the RDS-2014 involves complicated technical issues, including the co-ordination of the railway alignment with the planning of the new Harbourfront on the northern shore of Hong Kong Island, the works which would pass underneath the town centre and be in close proximity to existing buildings and infrastructures (including the Central-Wan Chai Bypass and existing railway tunnel), the diversion of underground utilities along the railway alignment during the construction. Hence, the usable works area is limited and the construction becomes more difficult. Various technical challenges require detailed studies to develop appropriate solutions. As for East Kowloon Line (EKL), it would be built in hilly terrains and constrained by the climbing capability of heavy rail, some sections of the EKL have to be built deep underground. It is anticipated that the works would have considerable technical difficulties, mainly in overcoming technicalities arising from the hilly topography. Regarding the above two projects, having taken into consideration the Government's comments, the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) is conducting further study on the feasible options to improve the design of the projects. When the details of a proposed railway scheme such as the alignment, location of station(s) and implementation timetable are available, the Government will announce the way forward of the project in due course. Regarding Tseung Kwan O Line, the Civil Engineering and Development Department and the Planning Department are conducting a study on the development potential of Tseung Kwan O Area 137. We will explore further development of the Tseung Kwan O Line taking into account the results of the above study.

(3) The Government and the MTRCL have been closely monitoring the train services of various railway lines, and will make timely adjustments according to passenger demand. With the changes in patronage along the Tseung Kwan O Line, the MTRCL enhanced the services between Tiu Keng Leng station and LOHAS Park station during non-peak hours in August 2021. Before the fifth wave of the pandemic, headway of most of the train services between the two stations during non-peak hours was enhanced from 12 minutes to 8.2 to 10 minutes; as for peak hours, headway of train services between LOHAS Park station and North Point station was 6.7 minutes. The MTRCL will also flexibly adjust train services to meet passenger demand. In addition to the signalling system upgrade project, the MTRCL will also implement multi-pronged measures to improve passenger flow and enhance passengers' travelling experience, including flexible adjustment of train service, strengthening of passenger flow control measures, and improvement of the station layout, etc.