

LCQ2: Suggestion to split Transport and Housing Bureau

Following is a question by the Hon Frankie Yick and a reply by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, in the Legislative Council today (December 16):

Question:

The Transport and Housing Bureau oversees two major policy areas concerning the dwellings for and movements of the public, which means that the Bureau needs to formulate housing policies and implement measures for resolving housing issues, and formulate transport policies in relation to air services, land and maritime transport, as well as logistics development, with a view to reinforcing the status of Hong Kong as a premier transportation and logistics hub in Asia as well as an international maritime centre. In view of the heavy workload of the Bureau, there have been voices in society suggesting that the Bureau should be split into two policy bureaux. Besides, as the Chief Executive stated in the 2018 Policy Address, she agreed that there was such a need, and the Government would conduct a study on how to implement the suggestion. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council of the scope of the study, the proposals under consideration, the progress made so far, and the timetable for implementing the proposal concerned?

Reply:

President,

The Government is aware that some members of the public are of the view that the Transport and Housing Bureau (THB) is overburdened and should be split into two policy bureaux. We appreciate that transport and housing are both key policy areas that concern livelihood issues. The suggestion of splitting THB is intended to enable the Government to better focus and consolidate its resources on taking forward policies and initiatives relating to transport, land and housing. In fact, the current-term Government has, since its assumption of office, adopted an innovative mindset and come up with various concrete, viable and pragmatic initiatives that seek to make Hong Kong a better connected and more liveable city.

On the transport front, THB is committed to implementing transport infrastructure projects. Among other projects, the Hong Kong Section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge were commissioned in 2018, strengthening Hong Kong's connection with the Greater Bay Area and the rest of the country. In addition, the Central-Wan Chai Bypass and Island Eastern Corridor Link commissioned last year, together with the Tuen Mun-Chek Lap Kok Tunnel to be commissioned shortly, would help improve Hong Kong's strategic road network.

THB also strives to reinforce Hong Kong's status as an international aviation, maritime and logistics hub. We have been actively expanding our intermodal transport network and enhancing the air cargo handling capacity of the Hong Kong International Airport. The third runway and the entire Three-Runway System will be commissioned as planned in 2022 and in 2024 respectively. THB has implemented various measures over the past few years with a view to enhancing Hong Kong's position as international maritime centre. It has also strengthened and promoted cooperation with international maritime bodies, leading to the establishment of the first-ever overseas branch of The International Chamber of Shipping in Hong Kong in 2018, and the designation of Hong Kong by the Baltic and International Maritime Council as the fourth arbitration venue in its maritime contract this year. THB also enacted the Inland Revenue (Amendment) (Ship Leasing Tax Concessions) Ordinance 2020 and set up regional offices of the Hong Kong Shipping Registry in London, Singapore and Shanghai to provide support services to Hong Kong registered ships.

THB also endeavours to provide the public with comprehensive and affordable public transport services. It has launched the non-means tested Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme and has increased the subsidy rate and raised the monthly subsidy cap since this year to further alleviate commuters' fare burden.

With a view to creating a pedestrian-friendly environment, THB has been actively promoting the "Walk in HK" policy to encourage citizens to walk more. To further facilitate the public to commute, THB also implements the "Universal Accessibility" Programme to install barrier-free access facilities at walkways. In addition, we have been pressing ahead with "Smart Mobility", gradually implementing the Free-flow Tolling System, and taking forward six pilot projects on automated parking systems, etc.

As regards housing policy, THB seeks to increase housing supply. In the past three years, THB, with the full support of the Hong Kong Housing Authority and Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS), has been enhancing our housing policy and implementing new measures. These include raising the share of public housing in new housing supply from 60 per cent to 70 per cent; delinking the selling prices of subsidised sale flats from market prices and setting the prices at an affordable level; regularising the Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Scheme and White Form Secondary Market Scheme, and introducing Starter Homes for Hong Kong Residents pilot projects in order to enrich the housing ladder; as well as revising the land premium arrangement for subsidised housing projects of HKHS to enable the provision of more public housing by HKHS, etc.

Furthermore, we have been facilitating the development of transitional housing in order to relieve the hardship of people living in inadequate housing before the housing supply is in place. Our target is to provide 15 000 units in the coming three years. THB is also studying the feasibility of introducing tenancy control on subdivided units in a proactive manner.

In view of the tight supply of land for housing development, THB closely collaborates with other policy bureaux and departments with a view to increasing the land supply for public and private housing. The Government has identified 330 hectares of land which, after going through all the statutory and administrative procedures, can meet the demand for public housing units in the coming ten years.

President, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region keeps an open mind in principle on proposals to revamp the government's organisation structure. Over the years, it has paid heed to public views on the issue, reviewed from time to time the policy responsibilities, functions and objectives of various bureaux, and reorganised the government's organisation structure in view of the needs and actual circumstances. This is to ensure the proper use of resources to better support the policy objectives of the Chief Executive and the development needs of the community. Shortly after the assumption of office, the current-term Government has already completed two organisational changes by transferring the Efficiency Unit to the Innovation and Technology Bureau and the Legal Aid Department to the Chief Secretary for Administration's Office.

Reorganisation of policy bureaux is an important subject that entails complicated considerations as well as intricate preparation and legislative work. The process takes time and cannot be completed in haste. At present, the COVID-19 epidemic situation in Hong Kong is rather severe and worrying. Our top priority is to make an all-out effort to implement the anti-epidemic measures to suppress the epidemic so that Hong Kong can resume normal as soon as possible. When the epidemic is over, the Government will focus on reviving our economy and relaunching Hong Kong. We will also take forward the various initiatives on the Government's agenda and announced in the Policy Address, including seizing the tremendous opportunities offered by the Greater Bay Area development, to bring benefits and convenience to the public and revitalise our economy. All of these are indeed the prime tasks of the current-term Government in its remaining term of 18 months.

The Government will continue to listen to views from all sectors on how to enhance the work efficiency of THB.

Thank you, President.