

# LCQ21: Feeder bus services of MTR Corporation Limited

Following is a question by the Hon Frankie Yick and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Ms Mable Chan, in the Legislative Council today (January 22):

Question:

It is learnt that the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) started to operate feeder bus (MTR feeder bus) services because of the inadequacy of land transport services in the New Territories in the 1980s, and MTR feeder buses were able to carry residents of remote districts to and from nearby railway stations. However, there are views pointing out that up to the present day, with the continuous expansion of the railway network, the number of passengers of non-rail public transport (except for MTR feeder buses) has continued to drop, and quite a number of minibuses have even been left idle due to insufficient patronage. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the details of the newly-introduced MTR feeder bus services in the past five years, including the tender invitation dates, commencement dates, routes serviced and patronage;

(2) given that there are views pointing out that at present, some MTR feeder bus routes overlap with franchised bus routes, of the criteria adopted by the Government for approving the introduction of the MTR feeder bus services mentioned in (1) (including the reasons for not replacing such services with other non-rail public transport); and

(3) as there are views that existing land transport services in the New Territories are becoming more comprehensive, and that non-rail public transport has been affected by the continuous expansion of the railway network, whether the Government will consider suspending the approval for MTRCL to introduce new feeder bus services; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Transport Department (TD), my consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Frankie Yick is as follows:

The Government has a set of holistic transport strategies and planning principles. Through a three-pronged policy approach of continuously improving transportation infrastructure, expanding public transport services, and properly managing road usage, we seek to meet the needs of the travelling public and socio-economic development. With the public transport oriented

policy and the use of railway as the backbone of our transport system, we provide convenient, environmentally-friendly and efficient mass transport services to the public. As for other modes of public transport services, each of them has a clear positioning with respect to their functionalities and characteristics, and plays an important role in the division of labour for flexible connection to the railway network. The Government will endeavour to co-ordinate various public transport services arrangements with the goal of making good use of transport resources, promoting complementary advantages among different services, reducing vicious competition and avoiding service duplication, with a view to improving the efficiency of Hong Kong's overall transport system, striving to provide the public with diversified public transport services, as well as enabling the sustainable development of various public transportation services.

Based on the abovementioned transport strategies and planning principles, the Government takes into account a range of factors when planning for public transport services in individual districts, including local development, demographic changes, commuting needs, commissioning of transport infrastructure, existing and planned public transport services, traffic condition, carrying capacity, service targets and positioning of different modes of public transport and local residents' views. Taking the Northwest New Territories (NWNT) as an example, currently, over one million of the population in the district mainly use the high-capacity and highly efficient heavy rail system (i.e. the Tuen Ma Line) for inter-district commuting. The Light Rail (LR), which has commenced operation since 1988, is both a key transport mode for commuting within the district and for connecting to the heavy rail system. In the meantime, franchised buses, which have high carrying capacity and are relatively more flexible in service arrangement, provide both intra-district and inter-district services, as well as feeder services to the railway network. Green minibuses (GMB) serve areas with relatively lower passenger demand or where the use of high-capacity transport modes is not suitable, and play a supplementary feeder role. The feeder buses operated by the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) mainly provide services for residents in relatively remote areas in Tuen Mun and Yuen Long districts to facilitate their interchange with the LR and the Tuen Ma Line. Different public transport services and passenger transport modes complement each other's strengths and play their respective roles to meet the needs of residents. The TD will also closely monitor changes in public transport service demand in various districts and update its planning and adjust public transport service arrangements from time to time.

Currently, there are about 100 franchised bus routes and 50 GMB routes in Tuen Mun and Yuen Long districts respectively, while the MTRCL operates 15 feeder bus routes (The franchised buses, GMBs services and MTR feeder buses involved do not include supplementary services, short-distance or special services during peak hours, etc.) within the Transit Service Area in the NWNT (mainly Tuen Mun and Yuen Long districts), which is a much smaller scale in comparison.

Generally speaking, the MTRCL will consider applying for the introduction of MTR feeder bus service only when there are passenger needs

for interchange services to the railway. For Tuen Mun and Yuen Long districts, the MTRCL will consider applying for the introduction of MTR feeder bus service in areas that are not directly accessible by the LR. The TD will carefully process the applications in a prudent manner based on the factors mentioned above, in consultation with the District Councils and relevant local stakeholders. In the past five years (2020 to 2024), the MTRCL introduced one new feeder bus service and rationalised three existing routes. Details are set out at the Annex. The TD granted approvals for the MTRCL to introduce or rationalise the concerned routes mainly to enhance the existing MTR feeder bus services connecting to railway stations in Tuen Mun and Yuen Long districts, so as to cater for the additional demands arising from local infrastructural development (e.g. Tsang Tsui Columbarium) and housing development (e.g. Tuen Mun Area 54 and areas around So Kwun Wat), and respond to the views and suggestions of local residents. For Tuen Mun Area 54, with the relatively large planned population, after consulting local stakeholders, in addition to introducing the abovementioned MTR feeder bus route, the TD has also introduced six franchised bus routes, providing residents with bus services to and from various areas within the Tuen Mun District, as well as to and from Hong Kong Island, Yau Tsim Mong, Kowloon East, and New Territories North. The TD has not granted approval for the MTRCL to introduce new feeder bus services in the NWNT since 2022.

On the other hand, franchised bus companies have offered section fares for 74 routes in the district. As the franchised bus service network continues to expand in the district, franchised bus companies have also offered two-way section fares for the existing 36 inter-district routes in Tuen Mun and Yuen Long districts since August 2020. This facilitates residents' usage of these inter-district routes for short-distance feeder trips within the district, as well as interchange to the railway. At the same time, there are GMBs in the districts that offer rail interchange discounts. These arrangements duly reflect our transport strategies and planning principles, which are to make good use the existing transport services with a view to providing residents with different travel options and enabling the sustainable development of the transport services.

The TD will continue to prudently examine the need for introducing MTR feeder buses, and at the same time actively invite other public transport operators to play a role in the operations in the NWNT, in order to serve the additional residential and working population in the region's new development areas.