

LCQ22: Transport issues in New Territories East

Following is a question by the Hon Elizabeth Quat and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (June 24):

Question:

Some residents of New Territories East (NTE) have relayed that the local and external traffic congestion problems have become increasingly serious. For example, there are heavy traffic congestions at the Lion Rock Tunnel, the Tate's Cairn Tunnel and Tai Po Road (Sha Tin Section) during the morning peak hours every day, causing the residents to spend a lot of time travelling to work or to school, and affecting the livelihood of professional drivers. They have also pointed out problems such as the serious shortage of car parking spaces in the district. Regarding the transport issues in NTE, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the improvement measures implemented in the past four years by the Government in the Sha Tin District to alleviate the traffic congestions and the relevant details;

(2) whether it will (i) construct a new trunk road linking Ma Liu Shui and the Eagle's Nest Tunnel, so as to divert the traffic of the North District and Tai Po District to and from Kowloon, thereby relieving the traffic load of roads in Sha Tin and Ma On Shan, and (ii) take forward the construction of Trunk Road T4 as soon as possible; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether it will (i) construct at the Sha Tin town centre an underground network of roads to replace the existing trunk roads, so as to free up above ground spaces for provision of pedestrian areas, and (ii) expeditiously construct multi-storey smart public car parks underneath the Sha Tin town centre and Ma On Shan Sports Ground, so as to address the serious shortage of car parking spaces in the district; if so, of the details and timetables; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) given that the same sections of the various cross-harbour bus routes running in NTE have different fares, whether the Government will urge the franchised bus companies concerned to make improvement; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that;

(5) whether it knows the details (including completion dates) of the works carried out by the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) in respect of the stations along the East Rail Line (EAL) for (i) installing platform gates for all stations and (ii) narrowing the gap between the platform and the train; and

(6) as MTRCL is currently upgrading the signalling system of EAL in tandem

with the Shatin to Central Link project, whether the Government has stepped up its monitoring of the upgrading work to ensure that the testing will not affect the train safety and services of EAL?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been closely monitoring the road network and traffic conditions in the New Territories East, and will review changes in the medium to long term traffic demand for the major roads in the region in a timely manner, with a view to considering taking forward new road infrastructure projects or implementing road improvement works.

After consulting the Transport Department (TD), Highways Department (HyD) and Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD), our reply to the various parts of the Hon Elizabeth Quat's question is as follows:

(1) To improve the traffic between the New Territories East and the urban areas, the Government commenced the works for a section of Tai Po Road (Sha Tin Section) of approximately 1.1 kilometre-long between Sha Tin Plaza near Sha Tin Rural Committee Road and Man Wo House of Wo Che Estate near Fo Tan Road to widen it from a dual two-lane carriageway to a dual three-lane carriageway. Commenced in July 2018, the relevant works are expected to be completed in 2023. Upon completion of the project, it will help divert traffic from the Lion Rock Tunnel and the Tate's Cairn Tunnel to the Eagle's Nest Tunnel and the Sha Tin Heights Tunnel.

For improvement to local roads, the TD and the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) have been implementing progressively in Sha Tin since 2017 a series of road improvement works on roads connecting to or associated with the Tate's Cairn Tunnel and the Lion Rock Tunnel, so as to rationalise and ease the traffic conditions in the vicinity of the two tunnels. Completed road works and improvement measures include the road markings enhancement and lane adjustment works at the junctions of Tai Chung Kiu Road/Lion Rock Tunnel Road, Tai Chung Kiu Road/Shatin Wai Road, Fo Tan Road/Yuen Wo Road and Tai Chung Kiu Road/Siu Lek Yuen Road as well as the adjustment of time allocation for traffic signals at the junction of Sha Tin Rural Committee Road/Yuen Wo Road. Road improvement works underway include extension of the right-turn traffic lane at the junction of Tai Chung Kiu Road/Fo Tan Road and junction widening works at Tai Chung Kiu Road/On Sum Street/On King Street. The CEDD expects that the two above-mentioned works items will be completed in the third quarter of 2020 and the second quarter of 2021 respectively.

Besides, to alleviate the traffic congestion at the Tate's Cairn Tunnel, the TD implemented traffic management measures in the tunnel control area during peak hours, which include placing temporary traffic cones between the first and the second left lanes near the Kowloon-bound toll booths to prevent other vehicles from obstructing the entrance of the Bus-Bus Interchange (BBI) for buses, and arranging staff of the tunnel management company to direct traffic at the BBI exit. On the other hand, in order to smooth further the

operation of the BBI, the TD is liaising with the HyD to widen the entrance of the BBI, so as to alleviate traffic congestion at the tunnel caused by buses queueing into the BBI. The works are expected to be completed in end 2020.

(2) (i) and (ii) The CEDD is conducting an investigation study on the construction of Trunk Road T4. Trunk Road T4 will be a dual two-lane carriageway connecting Sha Tin Road and Shing Mun Tunnel Road/ Tsing Sha Highway. It will provide a direct road link between Ma On Shan and Tsuen Wan/West Kowloon bypassing local roads within Sha Tin District, thereby further improving the traffic conditions in the area. The investigation study is expected to be completed in early 2021. The CEDD will then proceed with the relevant statutory procedures and design work after which funding approval from the Legislative Council will be sought.

In the long term, the Transport and Housing Bureau plans to take forward the "Strategic Studies on Railways and Major Roads beyond 2030" on the basis of the conceptual spatial requirements to be firmed up under the "Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030" (Hong Kong 2030+) planning study, which is being conducted by the Development Bureau and the Planning Department. Based on the latest planning information, the TD and HyD will examine the demand for and supply of the transport infrastructure, including railways and major roads, in Hong Kong from 2031 to 2041 or later. Based on the final development strategy of the Hong Kong 2030+ planning study, the TD and HyD will conduct strategic studies, which include examining the layout of the proposed railway and major road infrastructure (including the strategic routes between North District/Tai Po and Kowloon), in order to meet the needs for the overall long-term land use developments of Hong Kong. The TD and HyD will also examine the impact of the proposed transport infrastructure on the existing transport network in order to formulate the corresponding strategies.

(3) (i) As the construction of underground transportation networks would have impacts on various aspects including transportation, environment, drainage, sewerage, land use and planning, provision of relevant facilities should in general be studied in the planning of new development areas. In planning the development of Sha Tin New Town, the Government already provided elevated pedestrian walkways and footbridges at suitable locations to separate the pedestrians from vehicular traffic as far as possible. Sha Tin town centre is currently a highly developed area. The construction of an underground transportation network in the town centre will require significant planning changes and will seriously affect private lands, properties and traffic conditions in the area. The TD therefore considers the proposal not feasible. In addition, complete separation of pedestrians from vehicular traffic is often not the most appropriate arrangement. For example, in order to facilitate loading and unloading of goods for shops on the ground floor, the footpaths outside such shops should be connected directly to the carriageways. There are also needs for emergency exits at suitable locations in the area to facilitate the operation of rescue vehicles.

(3) (ii) The Government will continue to provide public car parking spaces in suitable "Government, Institution or Community" facilities and public open

space projects in line with the "single site, multiple uses" principle. Insofar as Sha Tin is concerned, the Government plans to incorporate a public car park in the "Amenity Complex in Area 103, Ma On Shan" project, involving about 400 parking spaces. As for the existing Ma On Shan Sports Ground site, subject to technical feasibility, the Government will also actively consider providing an appropriate number of public car parking spaces thereat when the site is redeveloped in future.

(4) The fares of franchised bus services are determined according to the scales of fares made under section 13 (1) of the Public Bus Services Ordinance (Cap 230). The scales of fares specified the maximum fare chargeable based on the journey distance and route group of a bus route. Since different bus companies have different operating history, mode of operation and district network, their respective scales of fares are not the same. In determining the fares for individual routes, franchised bus companies will, apart from making reference to the scales of fares, take into account actual circumstances including the operating environment of each route, and the fares of other similar public transport services, etc.

The TD has been urging franchised bus companies to charge similar fare levels for cross-harbour bus routes serving similar catchment areas as far as possible. In fact, for the 39 cross-harbour bus routes now serving four districts in New Territories East (North District, Tai Po, Sha Tin and Tseung Kwan O), similar fare levels are charged for routes with similar catchment areas. However, the actual fare levels of individual routes may slightly differ from others having similar catchment areas due to differences in actual journey distance and the frequency and magnitude of fare adjustment of different franchised bus companies.

(5) (i) and (ii) The construction works of automatic platform gates (APG) along the East Rail Line (EAL) stations is under way. The strengthening works for the EAL platforms, construction of associated system equipment rooms and facilities have been substantially completed. Currently, part of the advance works for APG installation is being implemented. To suit the door locations of new trains, installation of APG will commence after the 9-car train replacement on EAL is completed. According to the work plan of the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), installation will be carried out in stages and the first stage will be completed by the end of 2022.

On the other hand, as the 9-car trains are wider than the existing trains on EAL, the platform gaps will be slightly narrowed. Therefore, issues on the platform gaps will be resolved after the installation of the APG.

(6) The signalling system of the EAL is being replaced under the Shatin to Central Link project. As with other major railway systems and equipment, the MTRCL is conducting rigorous multi-stage tests for the new signalling system. The new signalling system of the EAL shall only be allowed to put into service after the EMSD has verified that it is in safe and sound condition to do so.