

LCQ4: High wind traffic management at Lantau Link and Ting Kau Bridge

Following is a question by the Hon Alice Mak and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Transport and Housing, Dr Raymond So Wai-man, in the Legislative Council today (May 16):

Question:

To ensure road safety, the Tsing Ma Control Area operator implements high wind management measures (HM measures) at the Lantau Link and the Ting Kau Bridge during strong wind conditions. HM measures include closure of the centre lanes, lowering the speed limit for vehicles, etc. It has been reported that serious traffic congestion occurred from time to time at the Lantau Link and the Ting Kau Bridge, as well as in areas within and surrounding Kwai Ching and Tsuen Wan while HM measures were in force. Furthermore, some drivers opine that the two-way toll collection of the Lantau Link implemented in August last year has made it necessary for vehicles travelling to and from Lantau via the Lantau Link to slow down or stop at the toll plaza to pay the toll, resulting in a traffic bottleneck. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of times in each of the past five years for which HM measures were implemented in the Tsing Ma Control Area and traffic congestion occurred in the areas concerned while such measures were in force; the measures taken by the Tsing Ma Control Area operator and the Transport Department before and during the implementation of HM measures to divert traffic flow and inform drivers of the situations;

(2) whether the authorities will, before the approach of this year's typhoon season, review the impacts of the implementation of HM measures on traffic, and formulate measures to prevent HM measures from causing serious traffic congestion in extensive areas; if so, of the details; and

(3) whether the authorities will comprehensively review if the two-way toll collection arrangement at the Lantau Link has led to traffic congestion, and consider abolishing the toll collection as well as improving vehicle flow control and road design, in order to reduce the occurrences of traffic congestion at the Lantau Link; whether the authorities will expeditiously plan for the construction of new trunk roads to connect Lantau with urban areas, so as to alleviate the traffic load of the Lantau Link in the long run?

Reply:

President,

To ensure the safety of motorists, when high wind situations occur at the Lantau Link and Ting Kau Bridge in Tsing Ma Control Area (TMCA), high

wind traffic management measures will be implemented in phases commensurate with prescribed wind speeds. Since the implementation of traffic management will lead to fewer available traffic lanes on the bridge deck, lowered speed limits and traffic diversion, traffic flow on related approach roads and major bridges will inevitably be affected.

My reply to the various parts of the Hon Alice Mak's question is as follows:

(1) From January 2013 to April 2018, there were altogether 84 instances of implementing Stage I (with hourly mean wind speed in excess of 40 kilometres per hour (kph)) and 12 instances of implementing Stage II (with the hourly mean wind speed in excess of 65 kph) of high wind traffic management on the Lantau Link and Ting Kau Bridge. Among those instances, the Transport Department (TD) recorded 14 instances of traffic congestion of varying degrees when traffic management was in force. The number of such instances by year is at Annex.

Before and during the implementation of high wind traffic management, the TD and the management company of the TMCA will take traffic management and contingency measures as appropriate in accordance with the established procedures and mechanism to ease traffic flow and notify the public, with a view to minimising the impact as far as practicable while ensuring the safety of motorists. Such measures include:

(i) notify the public as early as possible, at about 45 minutes in advance of the implementation of Stage I of high wind traffic management, through, inter alia, radio and other media, and the websites and mobile applications of the TD, public transport service operators (including bus companies and the MTRCL) and the Airport Authority, to disseminate the message of the high wind traffic management and latest information on traffic and public transport services;

(ii) make use of the message signs on the major roads of TMCA and Tsing Sha Control Area and those on some major roads in other districts, as well as the radio broadcasting system inside various tunnels, to remind motorists of traffic conditions on the Lantau Link and keep the travelling passengers informed so that they can consider switching to railway services; and

(iii) contact public transport service operators, including the MTRCL, so that these operators can adjust their services according to the needs of passengers. The service frequency of the Airport Express Line and Tung Chung Line of MTR will also be increased to cope with the additional passenger demand.

(2) and (3) As observed by the TD through the traffic control and surveillance system, since the implementation of two-way toll collection arrangement on the Lantau Link on August 20, 2017, the traffic to the Airport at the Lantau Link Toll Plaza remained smooth and there was no congestion during the high wind traffic management. Therefore, the traffic congestion at Tsing Yi was not related to the implementation of two-way toll collection arrangement on the Airport bound of Lantau Link.

To minimise the impact of high wind traffic management on the public, the Highways Department (HyD) and the TD have commissioned a study on the high wind traffic management on the Lantau Link to review the existing overall traffic arrangement in the event of high wind and consider traffic improvement measures during high wind. The study is expected to be completed in mid 2018. Separately, the TD is reviewing the current detailed arrangement of traffic diversion (including the temporary traffic arrangement at the diversion points of Lantau Link) in order to improve the traffic flow at the diversion points. When the high wind traffic management are in force in future, the TD will make use of message signs on more major roads (including the message signs at West Kowloon Highway and the new message signs to be added at North Lantau Highway) to display the concerned information, and explore the use of additional channels, such as message signs at major public transport interchanges, to inform the public on matters relating to high wind traffic management.

As for road design and planning of new trunk roads, the HyD is carrying out in full swing the construction works of Tuen Mun – Chek Lap Kok Link (TM CLKL) – Northern Connection, which is expected to be completed in 2020 at the earliest. The completed project will serve as the most direct route connecting the Northwest New Territories (NWNT) and Lantau Island, linking up Tuen Mun, Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, the Airport, North Lantau and Tung Chung. Part of the traffic capacity of the existing routes (such as the Lantau Link and Ting Kau Bridge, etc) will also be released to further relieve the traffic flow. The TM CLKL – Northern Connection will then become another road corridor connecting the Airport and North Lantau with the urban area, offering an alternative to the Lantau Link and North Lantau Highway.

In addition, to cope with the traffic demand generated by the future NWNT developments and to build the third vehicular access to Lantau Island, upon granting of funding approval of the feasibility study on Route 11 by the Legislative Council Finance Committee on April 13, 2018, the HyD has commenced a feasibility study on Route 11, which also looks into the need of planning for the Tsing Yi – Lantau Link (TYLL) and related road traffic options, with a view to allowing the traffic flow between NWNT and the urban area to make use of the TYLL without having to route through the North Lantau Highway and Lantau Link. The feasibility study is expected to be completed in 2020.