LCQ5: Electronic Road Pricing Pilot Scheme

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Kennedy Wong and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (February 21):

Question:

The Government has conducted a number of studies on the implementation of an electronic road pricing scheme in Hong Kong, and has proposed launching an Electronic Road Pricing Pilot Scheme (the Pilot Scheme) in Central and its adjacent areas. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as the Government has indicated that it will determine when and how to implement the Pilot Scheme in the light of the traffic conditions of the adjoining roads of the three Road Harbour Crossings (RHCs) and of Central upon adjustment of the tolls of the three RHCs, whether the Government has assessed the effectiveness of the implementation of the Time-varying Toll Plan for the three RHCs in alleviating traffic congestion in Central;

(2) given that the Government set up an International Expert Panel in 2020 to give advice on the implementation of the Pilot Scheme in Central, of the advice given by the Expert Panel, and how the Government has adopted such advice; and

(3) regarding the implementation of the Pilot Scheme in Central and its adjacent areas, whether the Government has an implementation timetable and roadmap, and whether it has projected the vehicular flows and the revenue after the implementation of the Pilot Scheme; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Our reply to the question raised by Dr the Hon Kennedy Wong is as follows:

The Government has previously proposed taking forward an Electronic Road Pricing Pilot Scheme (ERP Pilot Scheme) in Central and its adjacent areas with the aim of alleviating traffic congestion in the locality. The Transport Department (TD) established an International Expert Panel in 2020 to advise the Government on the following:

(i) enhancing complementary measures to encourage motorists and passengers to make good use of public transport or enter the charging area during off-peak hours;

(ii) considering providing exemptions or concessions for certain vehicles,

such as giving exemptions for those only passing through Central; and

(iii) putting more emphasis on the continued use of a multi-pronged approach to address traffic congestion in Central and its adjacent areas, when formulating the publicity and public engagement strategy.

In this connection, with a view to reducing congestion caused by illegally parked vehicles in Central, the TD has been collaborating with the Hong Kong Police Force to put into use an Automatic Traffic Enforcement System (ATES) at Queen's Road Central on a trial basis since 2022 through utilising video analytics, artificial intelligence and automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) technologies to analyse vehicle movements in real time, identify traffic contraventions and record relevant cases of roadside traffic contraventions and the licence plate numbers of offending vehicles. The ATES aims to strengthen deterrence and reduce congestion in the subject road section. At present, the TD and the Hong Kong Police Force are reviewing the effectiveness of the ATES.

In addition, in order to further divert the traffic heading for the Central and Western District, the TD has suitably adjusted the traffic signal timings at the junctions of Connaught Road West and Eastern Street to ease the vehicle flow in that area during peak hours. Furthermore, the TD is planning to construct an additional lane at the Hong Kong Island exit of the Western Harbour Crossing in the direction of Central and Sheung Wan to increase the capacity of the road section and smooth traffic flow at the tunnel exit and its surrounding areas. The TD is studying the plan with the relevant government departments. If it is proven to be technically feasible, the Government will proceed with detailed design and draw up an implementation timetable.

The Government successfully implemented the HKeToll free-flow tolling service at all government-tolled tunnels or control area in 2023, as well as implemented time-varying tolls at the three road harbour crossings (RHCs) to achieve traffic management objectives. The time-varying tolls at the three RHCs are yielding positive results since when they were implemented two months ago, thanks to the co-operation of motorists in adjusting their travel arrangements. The overall traffic queues and congestion at the tunnel entrances have been alleviated. We anticipate that motorists will still need time to adapt, including adjusting their commuting patterns, timing and route choices. The TD would have to continue to closely monitor the cross-harbour traffic situation as well as the implication brought by time-varying tolls on the traffic flow and pattern in various districts on the northern part of Hong Kong Island (including Central). As such, there is no timetable for the implementation of ERP Pilot Scheme in Central and its neighbouring areas, before comprehensive data would be available for making a sound assessment of the impact of the implementation of time-varying tolls on the traffic in Central.

The ERP Pilot Scheme involves the conversion of currently free roads into tolled roads. The Government must carefully assess the impact of the scheme on the traffic and the community. Apart from considering the effectiveness of various initiatives, including the effectiveness of the

congestion relief arrangements mentioned above and the resulting changes in local traffic, it is also necessary to take into account the impact of the scheme on road users and local residents, as well as the prevailing overall economic situation of the society. The Government will adopt a multi-pronged approach to tackle traffic congestion in Central and its neighbouring areas, including the proactive implementation of ATES in Central by making use of artificial intelligence and ANPR technologies, as well as exploring other traffic management measures. The TD will further look into this in the context of the Traffic and Transport Strategy Study which is currently underway and outline the vision and feasibility of putting in place a smart traffic management system in the report to be completed by the end of 2025.

Thank you, President.