

LCQ7: Proposed East Kowloon Line

Following is a question by the Hon Wilson Or and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (November 18):

Question:

In the Railway Development Strategy 2014, the Government put forward the implementation of seven new railway projects and, for the East Kowloon Line (EKL) among such projects, initially proposed an implementation timetable of 2019 to 2025. In July this year, the Secretary for Transport and Housing revealed that upon conducting a preliminary study, the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) had found that the topography along the alignment of EKL was too steep for trains to run through, and that MTRCL was exploring whether there were new technologies to overcome such problem. As a result, an implementation timetable for EKL was not available. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as it has been reported that the Government already learnt about the problem of steep topography along the proposed alignment of EKL in as early as 2014, and that upon conducting a study, the consultancy firm considered at the time that such problem could be overcome technically, of the reasons why the authorities are currently still exploring ways to overcome such problem; apart from such problem, what other difficulties the authorities have encountered in the planning work of EKL;

(2) of the latest progress of the planning work of EKL; whether it knows how much longer it will take for MTRCL to explore new technologies to overcome the topographic problem; whether the alignment of EKL will be modified so that EKL can be implemented in time before 2025; and

(3) given the frequent occurrence of traffic congestion on a number of roads in East Kowloon at present, the unavailability of an implementation timetable for EKL, and the continuous growth of the population of East Kowloon in the coming decade, of the authorities' plans to prevent the transport in East Kowloon from being paralysed?

Reply:

President,

Regarding the East Kowloon Line (EKL) project proposed under the Railway Development Strategy 2014 (RDS-2014), the Transport and Housing Bureau (THB), the Highways Department (HyD) and other relevant bureaux/departments offered comments on the proposal submitted by the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) and requested MTRCL to improve the technical design as given in the proposal. MTRCL is considering Government's comments and is exploring feasible options to improve the design of the project.

After consulting HyD and Transport Department (TD), our reply to the various parts of the Hon Wilson Or's question is as follows:

(1) Railway projects involve huge capital investment and the Government has to plan in a prudent manner. As pointed out in the RDS-2014, the indicative implementation window is for planning purpose only. The actual implementation details are contingent upon the engineering and financial studies in the detailed planning stage. Given that the railway line will be built in hilly terrains and constrained by the climbing capability, some sections of the EKL have to be built deep underground. We anticipated then that the works would have considerable technical difficulties, mainly in overcoming technicalities arising from the hilly topography. But the actual level of difficulty can only be ascertained upon further assessment. Notwithstanding this, we have requested MTRCL to further assess the nearby environment and other factors, and to improve the technical design given in the proposal. We have also urged MTRCL to explore the feasibility of expediting the project.

(2) The Government has offered comments on the proposal submitted by MTRCL and asked MTRCL to further improve the design in order to tackle the technicalities of the EKL project. The relevant study is still under way. The Government will closely monitor the progress to ensure that the proposal is practically feasible and can bring maximum benefits to the community. In line with established procedures, prior to the finalisation of any new railway scheme, the Government will consult the public, including the Legislative Council and the relevant District Councils on the details of the scheme.

(3) The Government has been closely monitoring the road network and traffic conditions of Kowloon East, and will review the 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 the implementation of new road infrastructure projects or road improvement works.

The Government has formulated a number of measures to cope with the transport demand of Kowloon East. For instance, taking the opportunity of the massive redevelopment of Kwun Tong Town Centre by the Urban Renewal Authority, there are a number of traffic improvement measures to be implemented in phases, such as the upcoming construction of an exclusive left-turn lane from Hip Wo Street southbound to Kwun Tong Road eastbound at the Hoi Yuen Road/Kwun Tong Road roundabout to further improve the traffic in Kowloon East.

In addition, the Government takes the opportunity of developing the two Action Areas in Kowloon East, i.e. Kwun Tong Action Area (KTAA) and Kowloon Bay Action Area (KBAA), to further improve the traffic conditions of Kowloon East, which will include building a new road extending from Kei Yip Lane in KTAA to divert traffic from the Wai Yip Street/Hoi Yuen Road roundabout and converting the roundabout into a signal-controlled junction to rationalise traffic flows. As for KBAA, the Government is studying the widening of Sheung Yee Road and the improvement to the Hoi Bun Road/Cheung Yip Street junction to increase the traffic capacity. In addition, the two feasibility studies on improving the pedestrian environment in the Kwun Tong Business Area and the

Kowloon Bay Business Area included formulation of 22 traffic improvement schemes, of which 16 have been completed, such as provision of kerbside loading and unloading bays as well as enhancement of road junction layouts, which are conducive to improving road usage and junction capacity. The Government is striving to complete the remaining improvement works as soon as possible.

On inter-district roads, the Government is taking forward the Route 6 projects to provide an east-west express link between Tseung Kwan O and West Kowloon. The Route 6 projects comprise the Tseung Kwan O – Lam Tin Tunnel, the Central Kowloon Route, and the Trunk Road T2 and the Cha Kwo Ling Tunnel. Expected to be fully open to traffic by 2026, the projects will relieve the traffic burden on the existing major road links in Kowloon East.

On public transport service arrangements, TD will make adjustments in due course, having regard to local development, completion of transport facilities, and public transport services in the district, to meet the travel needs of the public. When making these arrangements, TD will take into account such relevant factors as traffic assessment reports, proposals of public transport operators, traffic conditions of roads nearby, and views from the local community, etc.

Thank you, President.