

LCQ9: Fares for cross-boundary journeys on MTR East Rail Line

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Yuet-ming and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (June 21):

Question:

It is learnt that the Lo Wu Control Point and the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point are the two land boundary control points with the largest numbers of inbound and outbound passenger trips in Hong Kong. Compared with the fares for cross-boundary journeys on the MTR East Rail Line (ERL) (i.e. for travelling between Sheung Shui Station and Lo Wu Station/Lok Ma Chau Station), the fares for the same journeys on other public transport modes (e.g. franchised buses or public light buses) are lower. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it knows the justifications for the fare structure adopted for cross-boundary journeys on ERL;
- (2) whether it knows the fare revenue of the MTR Corporation Limited in respect of cross-boundary journeys on ERL in each of the past 10 years (set out in a table);
- (3) whether it will review the fare structure as well as the reasonableness of the fares for cross-boundary journeys on ERL in the light of the initiative for the joint development of the Shenzhen-Hong Kong Boundary Control Points Economic Belt by Hong Kong and Shenzhen to foster the flow of people; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) whether it will consider introducing more policies or measures which will facilitate cross-boundary transport for people who need to commute between Hong Kong and Shenzhen every day, such as cross-boundary students and cross-boundary workers, so as to reduce their travelling expenses; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by Hon Chan Yuet-ming is as follows:

(1) and (3) Generally speaking, fares of the heavy rail system of the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) are basically determined according to distance, taking into account other factors such as market competitiveness, trip nature (e.g. whether cross-harbour or cross-boundary journeys are involved) and the existing overall fare structure. Fares of new railway lines commissioned in recent years, such as the Kwun Tong Line Extension, South Island Line, the

full Tuen Ma Line and the East Rail Line (ERL) cross-harbour extension, are determined in accordance with this principle.

â€‹The ERL commissioned as early as 1910, providing domestic services between Kowloon and the New Territories as well as carrying passengers to Lo Wu for crossing the boundary to Shenzhen. Since commencing operation in 2007, the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line has provided another boundary crossing option for passengers. With the commissioning of the ERL cross-harbour extension on May 15, 2022, the ERL becomes the fourth cross-harbour railway line in Hong Kong. It directly connects Hong Kong Island with Lo Wu and Lok Ma Chau without interchanging while linking five other railway lines with its four interchange stations, thereby facilitating the travelling of both local and cross-boundary passengers.

â€‹Unlike other railway lines, the ERL is a railway line combining domestic and cross-boundary services. Its fares have been determined according to its own fare structure, which has its historical factors and special circumstances, before the rail merger in 2007. Specifically, target passengers of cross-boundary journeys via Lo Wu Station and Lok Ma Chau Station are different from those of domestic journeys. Their fares, to a certain extent, are also subsidising those of the latter. Therefore, the fares of the ERL should not be compared directly with those of the other railway lines under the heavy rail system.

(2) The fare revenues of the MTRCL in respect of the cross-boundary services of the ERL in the past decade are tabulated below.

Year	Fare revenue from cross-boundary services of the ERL (HK\$ million)
2013	2,923
2014	3,049
2015	3,172
2016	3,252
2017	3,277
2018	3,472
2019	3,164
2020	516
2021	5
2022	4

(4) Cross-boundary transport has been a key component of the transport and traffic network promoting connectivity between Hong Kong and the Mainland, as well as facilitating the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. The Government has been encouraging public transport operators to suitably respond to public aspirations by offering more concessions upon balancing different considerations, including the overall socio-economic environment, market situations, their operating and financial conditions, and

passenger demand.

Elderly and child passengers taking the ERL for crossing the boundary can enjoy the same concessions of about 50 per cent fare discounts as those for domestic journeys. The MTRCL also provides various promotional offers from time to time in light of market situations. For example, between February 1 to July 31 this year, Fare Saver discounts of \$6 are offered for passengers taking same-day round trips between Hong Kong and Shenzhen via Lok Ma Chau Station with Adult Octopus cards and JoyYou Cards (for those aged 60-64), or \$3 for only taking a one-way southbound trip to Hong Kong, by tapping their Octopus cards on the MTR Fare Saver (Note).

Other public transport operators like franchised bus companies have also offered different types of fare concessions on their routes, including bus routes serving boundary control points, to reduce travel expenses of passengers. Such concessions include section fares, bus-bus interchange concessions, monthly ticket concessions, return trip concessions and half-fare concessions for children.

Besides, in order to relieve the fare burden of commuters who travel on local public transport services for daily commuting and whose public transport expenses are relatively high, the Government introduced the Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme (the Scheme) in 2019. It covers major public transport services operating in Hong Kong, including the ERL and bus routes serving boundary control points within Hong Kong. According to the existing temporary special measures of the Scheme, which have been extended until late October this year, if the commuters' eligible monthly public transport expenses exceed \$200, the Government will provide a subsidy amounting to one-third of the part in excess of \$200, subject to a maximum of \$500 per month.

Note: Passengers who travel to Shenzhen via Lok Ma Chau Station and return to Hong Kong on the same day taking Shenzhen Metro Line 4 may enjoy a \$6 discount when interchanging via Lok Ma Chau station to Hong Kong by tapping the MTR Fare Saver with the same Octopus cards within the paid area at Futian Checkpoint station. Those who only take a one-way southbound trip to Hong Kong may also enjoy a \$3 discount by tapping their Octopus cards on the MTR Fare Saver.