

LCQ9: Recent traffic contingency measures

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (December 11):

In recent months, demonstrators repeatedly blocked trunk roads and damaged traffic lights in an attempt to paralyse the traffic. Regarding the traffic contingency measures, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that on the 13th of last month, the Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited (KMB) suspended the service of the cross-harbour bus route No. 680 while the New World First Bus Services Limited provided as usual the bus service of the same route on that day, and that on the 18th of last month, KMB changed all terminating points on the Hong Kong Island to Sheung Wan in respect of certain cross-harbour buses which departed from the New Territories West while the cross-harbour bus routes of the Citybus Limited followed the original routing on the same day, whether prior approvals had been obtained from the Transport Department (TD) for such service alterations; if so, of the vetting and approval procedures;

(2) given that during the periods when the Cross-Harbour Tunnel in Hung Hom and the trunk roads in Kowloon region were blocked, quite a number of vehicles (including buses) were diverted, resulting in traffic congestion on the Tsing Sha Highway and at the West Kowloon Cross Harbour Tunnel, whether TD and the franchised bus companies had, prior to making decisions on the re-routing of bus routes, considered the carrying capacity of the relevant roads; if so, of the details;

(3) as some members of the public have relayed that it has been difficult for them to get to know the temporary arrangements for the shuttle bus services provided by the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), of the existing channels through which TD and MTRCL disseminate the related information to passengers, and whether improvements will be made; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) given that the Government earlier on provided members of the public with free temporary ferry services plying between Hung Hom and Wan Chai, between Kowloon City and Wan Chai, as well as between Wu Kai Sha and Tai Po, of (i) the total expenditure on such services and (ii) the total number of person-trips; whether the Government will consider purchasing ferries to cater for emergency needs; and

(5) of the current number of staff members responsible for the repair of traffic lights; the average time taken for repairing each set of damaged traffic lights, the considerations for determining the priority for repairing traffic lights, as well as the total estimated expenditure on the repair works; whether the Police will deploy staff to direct traffic at busy road

junctions during peak hours before the completion of the repair of the traffic lights thereat?

Reply:

President,

Upon consultation with the relevant government departments, my reply to the Hon Chan Hak-kan's question is as follows:

(1) Owing to the blockage of various road sections and the vandalism done to traffic facilities (e.g. traffic lights and road signs) in recent months, certain franchised bus routes need to be suspended or re-routed. The Transport Department (TD) will co-ordinate bus service alterations among franchised bus companies and activate its Emergency Traffic Co-ordination Centre, which, in collaboration with representatives of relevant government departments and franchised bus companies, will co-ordinate and formulate diversion arrangements for franchised buses and release to the public the latest traffic and transport information. As the resource distribution (such as bus parking locations), catchment areas, risk assessments, bus captains' acquaintance of different road networks, etc. for different franchised bus companies are not entirely the same, they may adopt different provisional service arrangements in the event of contingencies.

Take the cross-harbour bus Route 680 (Note) (Lee On – Admiralty (East)) as an example. On 13 November 2019, having assessed the road conditions, NWFB considered that while certain sections of roads that Route 680 would pass by (e.g. Hennessy Road and Yee Wo Street) had been obstructed, bus service could continue upon diversion (e.g. via Victoria Park Road instead of Hennessy Road and Yee Wo Street). TD therefore agreed that NWFB would implement diversion arrangements for Route 680 for the continuous provision of limited service. As regards KMB, as many as about 100 buses of the company were trapped on or around Tolo Highway and Tai Chung Kiu Road overnight due to large-scale road blockages in Sha Tin and Tai Po on the night of November 12. This had a grave impact on the rest time of bus captains, which in turn led to a shortage of KMB's buses and manpower in Sha Tin and Tai Po on the next day (i.e. November 13), and only limited bus services could be provided. Upon co-ordination with the franchised bus companies, TD decided that NWFB would be responsible for providing bus service on Route 680, while KMB would suspend its service on the same route with a view to pooling the company's limited resources for those Sha Tin and Tai Po bus services having high patronage or having no alternative routes, so as to meet the needs of passengers.

Separately, on November 18, public order events around Central on Hong Kong Island caused traffic obstruction with roads being blocked. TD therefore co-ordinated with the franchised bus companies for bus service adjustments. In particular, having assessed the road conditions and risks, Citybus Limited (Citybus) considered that while its franchised bus routes between the New Territories West and Hong Kong Island, such as Route 930 (Tsuen Wan (Discovery Park) – Wan Chai North) and Route 962B (Tuen Mun (Chi Lok Fa Yuen) – Causeway Bay (Moreton Terrace)), were affected by public order events around Central, since services could continue with diversion of the affected

routes via Lung Wo Road to Wan Chai and Causeway Bay and the bus captains were familiar with the diversion route, arrangements were made to divert the relevant bus services to route through Lung Wo Road so as to continue providing the bus service. KMB had also considered the same diversion option, but since KMB's major catchment areas were in Kowloon and the New Territories, bus captains might not be familiar with the aforementioned diversion route via Lung Wo Road. Therefore, having assessed the operational and safety risks, KMB decided that its routes between the New Territories West and Hong Kong Island, such as Route 960 (Tuen Mun (Kin Sang) – Wan Chai North) and Route 968 (Yuen Long (West) – Causeway Bay (Tin Hau)), would terminate at Sheung Wan.

(2) If roads are temporarily closed or blocked due to public order events, TD will strive to continue to provide bus services by co-ordinating with the franchised bus companies to arrange diversions as far as practicable. In the course of formulating route diversion, TD and franchised bus companies will take into consideration different viable alternative routes and how well the bus captains are acquainted with these routes.

When the Cross Harbour Tunnel was closed earlier, franchised buses could only run between Hong Kong Island and Kowloon via Eastern Harbour Crossing (EHC) and Western Harbour Crossing (WHC). Other vehicles also had to divert to these two tunnels, resulting in an upsurge of about 30 per cent and 60 per cent in traffic flow for EHC and WHC respectively. Meanwhile, traffic flow along the roads connecting to EHC and WHC was also heavier during that period. For instance, the traffic flow along Tsing Sha Highway showed an approximately 7 per cent increase during the closure of Cross Harbour Tunnel. It should be noted that buses adopting diverted routes only accounted for about 2 per cent to 5 per cent of the extra traffic flow at the above-mentioned roads. The impact was relatively insignificant.

(3) In case of service disruption or suspension arising from more serious railway incidents, the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), under safe and practicable circumstances, will arrange free shuttle buses to help passengers to continue with their journey. MTRCL will disseminate updated train information to passengers via its website, mobile application "MTR Mobile", broadcasts at stations and inside train compartments as well as the media, so as to enable passengers to make early planning for their trips. Besides, MTRCL staff in the stations will offer assistance as appropriate to the passengers taking shuttle buses.

After notification from MTRCL of the occurrence of railway incidents and corresponding shuttle bus arrangements, TD will make the announcement as soon as possible via its website and mobile application "HKEMobility", so that members of the public could make travel arrangements accordingly. TD and MTRCL will review the information dissemination arrangements relating to public transport services from time to time so as to enhance the arrangement.

(4) To facilitate the commuting of the public during the closure of the Cross-Harbour Tunnel and the blockage of Tolo Highway earlier, the Government arranged two special free ferry services between Hung Hom and Wan Chai and between Kowloon City and Wan Chai from November 20 to November 29, and free

ferry services between Tai Po and Wu Kai Sha from November 15 to November 18. The expenditure involved in the provision of such services was approximately \$2 million and \$450,000 respectively. The total number of passenger trips for ferries plying between Hung Hom/Kowloon City and Wan Chai was about 53 000 and that for ferries plying between Tai Po and Wu Kai Sha was about 23 700. It is the Government's established policy that public transport services, including all franchised and licensed ferry services, should be run by the private sector in accordance with commercial principles to enhance efficiency and cost-effectiveness. TD has not considered purchasing ferries for backup.

(5) The maintenance of traffic lights is mainly undertaken by the staff of the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department and its maintenance contractors. The number of maintenance personnel deployed and the maintenance time required depend on the degree of damage of individual traffic lights. Generally speaking, it takes several hours to several weeks for each set of traffic lights to be repaired. Road safety is the foremost consideration in setting the maintenance priorities for individual traffic lights. Priority is also given to traffic lights installed at busier junctions and road sections with heavier public transport usage. The expenditure incurred for repairing the traffic lights damaged in recent months is still under assessment.

As regards the suggestion of deploying police officers to direct traffic at junctions where traffic lights are damaged, the Police will prioritise their operations as appropriate having regard to the actual traffic conditions and availability of manpower resources. That said, if members of the public are aware of any out-of-order traffic lights at particular road sections which may pose a serious danger to road users, they are welcome to report such to the Police. Police officers will be deployed to deal with the situation on site as soon as possible.

Note: Jointly operated by New World First Bus Services Limited (NWFB) and Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited (KMB).