

LCQ2: Expediting construction of Pak Shek Kok Station of MTR East Rail Line

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (November 1):

Question:

There are views that as there will still be residential units completed in the vicinity of Pak Shek Kok in the future, and Stage 2 of the Expansion Programme of the Hong Kong Science Park (the Science Park) is underway, the transport infrastructure in the area is in a dire need for enhancement. On the other hand, the Government has confirmed in the 2022 Policy Address the construction of the Pak Shek Kok Station of the MTR East Rail Line, with a view to completing the construction of the station in 2033 or earlier. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the Shenzhen branch of the Science Park located in Futian has already commenced operation, and the first batch of buildings of the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park located in the Lok Ma Chau Loop will be completed next year, whether the Government will expedite the construction of the Pak Shek Kok Station, so as to strengthen the cross-border connections of Pak Shek Kok, Futian and the Lok Ma Chau Loop as soon as possible; if so, of the details; if not, the short to medium term measures in place to strengthen the cross-border connections of such areas;

(2) whether it has envisaged the difficulties that will be encountered in the construction of the Pak Shek Kok Station, and of the corresponding plans in place; and

(3) whether the time required for constructing the Pak Shek Kok Station is subject to the development of its topside housing or other commercial projects; if so, whether it will consider implementing other development projects only after taking forward the construction of the station, so as to bring early benefits to the residents in Pak Shek Kok and members of the public working in the Science Park; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The current term Government advocates the "infrastructure-led" and "capacity-creating" planning approach. In order to allow Ma Liu Shui and Pak Shek Kok areas to better leverage their advantages as the Eastern Knowledge and Technology Corridor and unleash the development potential of adjacent land, the Government has earlier invited the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) to study the construction of a new Pak Shek Kok Station of the East Rail Line

to improve connectivity of the Pak Shek Kok and Science Park area. The target is to commission the Station by 2033. The Government will also seize this opportunity to make the best use of the additional station to unleash the development potential of its adjoining land, to provide more housing and parking spaces, shops, and public facilities for local residents.

In consultation with the Development Bureau and the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau, my reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Hak-kan is as follows:

(1) The planning of the Pak Shek Kok Station is underway. We will expedite completion of detailed planning and design, and statutory procedures, with a view to commencing construction works as soon as possible for commissioning the station by 2033.

The Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park (HSITP) is located within the Lok Ma Chau Loop (the Loop) and is about one km away from the East Rail Line Lok Ma Chau MTR Station. The first three buildings of batch one of the HSITP will be completed in phases from end-2024 onwards. To align with this schedule, road networks connecting the Loop to nearby areas are scheduled for completion from end-2024 to 2025. Such roadworks include Western Connection Road connecting the Loop and San Tin, Direct Road Link connecting to Lok Ma Chau MTR Station, as well as slip roads connecting Lok Ma Chau Road and Fanling Highway/San Tin Highway. Two public transport interchanges at the Loop and Lok Ma Chau MTR Station will also be provided. The Transport Department will continue to maintain close liaison with relevant departments and in light of the development of relevant areas, arrange public transport operators to provide appropriate public transport services to meet the travel needs of users in the area.

In the long run, we will provide railway services to the HSITP. The proposed Northern Link (NOL) Spur Line will be connected to the Main Line in San Tin and the new Huanggang Port in Shenzhen, with intermediate stations at Chau Tau and the HSITP in the Loop. The NOL Main Line will serve as the main transportation backbone of the Northern Metropolis, connecting to the East Rail Line and the Tuen Ma Line, forming a railway loop linking up the New Territories and Kowloon. We are actively working with the Mainland authorities and the MTRCL on the planning of the NOL Spur Line, with a view to reaching consensus on the implementation arrangement with the Mainland authorities and commencing detailed planning and design in 2024.

(2) Since the Pak Shek Kok Station project involves the construction of an additional station on the existing East Rail Line, the construction works must be carried out without affecting the safe operation of the existing East Rail Line. Therefore one of the challenges of the project is that part of the construction works can only be carried out during non-traffic hours after the railway service at night. According to the MTRCL's preliminary proposal, such works include the construction of station platforms, adjustment of existing overhead line and power supply system equipment, trackworks and crossover tracks, electrical and mechanical systems, installation of platform screen doors as well as trackside construction, testing and commissioning. The MTRCL must ensure that the works are carried out safely and that the railway

operation can resume normal on time. In carrying out the construction, the MTRCL also needs to take into account the regular railway maintenance and other concurrent projects in various locations along the East Rail Line, as well as the co-ordination of train dispatching work. In this connection, the allowable construction time during the non-traffic hours is very limited, only about two hours every night. In addition, since the Pak Shek Kok Station is positioned close to nearby residential buildings, night works must also comply with relevant statutory environmental protection requirements. Appropriate construction methods also need to be adopted in order to reduce the nuisance to the community.

In consideration of the above constraints, the MTRCL is exploring the feasibility of packaging part of the works as advanced works, with a view to completing the project as soon as possible. In addition, the MTRCL is also exploring different innovative construction methods, such as Modular Integrated Construction (MiC) and Design for Manufacture and Assembly (DfMA), to increase efficiency and shorten the construction period.

(3) According to the information provided by the Development Bureau, based on the current plan and due to technical considerations, the Pak Shek Kok Station will only comprise facilities with direct relevance to railway operation but not topside developments. Depending on the exact location of the station, the development of sites in the vicinity will not have substantial impact on the development programme of the station. The MTRCL is now refining the details of the land and station development proposals. According to the latest plan, the Government will put forward the proposals around mid-2024 and commence statutory town planning procedures for the relevant development sites in 2025.

â€‹Thank you, President.

LCQ1: The seventh District Council Ordinary Election

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Yung and a reply by the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Erick Tsang Kwok-wai, in the Legislative Council today (November 1):

Question:

The seventh District Council (DC) Ordinary Election (the Election) will be held on December 10 this year. There are views that the Election represents a new stage in district governance and holds great significance as it is the first DC election after the improvement of the electoral system. As such, the preparation work for the Election is crucial to ensuring its smooth conduct. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) how it enhances the atmosphere of the Election and encourages electors to vote actively;

(2) as there are views that quite a number of changes have been made to the arrangements for the new DC election, including the expanded size of the District Council geographical constituencies (DCGCs) following their re-delineation, as well as the return of District Committees constituency (DCC) seats by indirect election, and that these arrangements are relatively new to electors, of the authorities' specific plans in place to enhance DCGC electors' knowledge of their respective constituencies and DCC electors' understanding of the polling arrangements; and

(3) how it makes proper arrangements for the election day, including ensuring adequate power supply and stable network connection for polling stations to enable the smooth operation of the Electronic Poll Register System, facilitating electoral staff to go to the polling stations in their respective constituencies to cast their votes, providing timely responses to enquiries from candidates and the media on election-related matters, and promptly clarifying false or inaccurate information about the election?

Reply:

President,

The 2023 District Council Ordinary Election (DCOE) will be held on December 10 this year. This election is the first large-scale territory-wide election being held after the reform of the District Councils (DCs) and improving the district governance system, and is of particular significance. Improving district governance on one hand aims to revert the DCs to their original positioning under the Basic Law, viz. while providing consultation services to the Government on district management, district organisations are not organs of political power; on the other hand, it also marks the final mile for the full implementation of the principle of "patriots administering Hong Kong" in the district governance structure.

The new term DCs will be formed through various channels and methods, selecting the best amongst all, gathering patriots with different backgrounds and professions to contribute to district administration. The new district governance structure and DCs relate to good governance as well as stability to prosperity, they also relate to the contentment and happiness as well as well-being of every citizen. All sectors of the community care a lot about this DC election. Political parties as well as patriots who are dedicated in serving the community have demonstrated their enthusiasm by running for the election. In order to promote the new district governance structure and DCs, the Government has launched the publicity efforts earlier and stepped up its scale. Through a series of promotional activities, the Government hopes the public would better grasp the importance of the new DCs and district governance structure, while at the same time foster their understanding of the new electoral system as well as the new constituencies, and in turn encourage electors to vote for their preferred candidate on the polling day.

In response to the Hon Chan Yung's question, our reply is as follows.

(1) The Government is making every effort in taking forward various election promotional activities. Besides traditional publicity methods, such as posters, banners, buntings, advertisements, TV APIs, TV programmes, the Government has also adopted novel and down-to-earth methods, such as hosting "Night Vibes DC Election", "DC Election at Halloween" and over 100 "DC Election into the Community" events, proactively going into the community and engaging in communication with the public in a zero-distance manner, as well as setting up exhibitions, game booths, "check-in" spots, parent-child interactive workshops. We have also leveraged on social media platforms popular with the younger generation in disseminating election information. Also, we are producing different TV series of TV programmes, including "Improving District Governance under Different Perspectives", "Fun Facts about DC election", "Election in Every District". These programmes aim to introduce the improved district governance system, composition of the new DCs, electoral arrangements and other election-related facts etc in an easily understandable manner. We have also invited social elites to film the call for action clips, with a view to encourage voter turnout. At the same time, we will also organise a number of election forums for candidates from late November to early December, so that the public can understand candidates' agendas, their determination and ability.

(2) The Registration and Electoral Office (REO) has organised seminars for each of the 18 districts in Hong Kong, with the seminar content and info-packs prepared in accordance with the district's situation. REO has also explained the nomination mechanism and polling arrangements of the election to members of the District Committees in detail, as well as promptly addressed the questions raised at the seminars.

With regards to the District Council Geographical Constituencies (DCGCs), the REO has issued letters to all electors notifying them of their newly assigned DCGC, and has published on social media info-packs containing infographics comparing the new DCGCs with the old constituencies. At the same time, we have designed some dedicated games, flyers and exhibition panels, as well as arranged dedicated staff to explain to the public at the "DC Election into the Community" events, with a view to enable their understanding of the delineation of the new DCGCs. To facilitate the public to check their new DCGCs, we will upload a simplified district boundary map onto the dedicated election website for the purpose.

We will also publicise the formation and composition of the DCs on different TV programmes as well as TV and radio APIs, in addition to reminding electors of points-to-note with regards to the polling arrangements. The relevant videos and soundtracks will also be uploaded to the dedicated election website and social media platform for the public to review at any time.

(3) The Electronic Poll Register (EPR) System will be used for issuing ballot papers at most of the polling stations for the 2023 DCOE. The REO has entrusted the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department to engage contractors to inspect all polling stations and ensure that there is adequate power supply. As for network connections, the REO will arrange dual Internet

network services (i.e. broadband plus fifth-generation mobile communication technology (5G)) to ensure stable network connectivity. At the same time, the EPR System at the polling stations will be connected to the Government Cloud Infrastructure Services to ensure safe and secure data storage. The REO will also arrange technical personnel to carry out installation and testing work in the polling stations in advance. That said, to ensure the smooth conduct of the election, the REO will co-ordinate with relevant departments to fully prepare for the contingency plans and arrangements.

Regarding the measures to facilitate electoral staff to cast their votes, we will assign electoral staff to work in polling stations located close to their residence as far as possible. Presiding Officers will also arrange electoral staff to take turns as far as possible to cast their votes having regard to the actual manpower and operational needs at the polling station on the polling day. If there is a long queue for voting at the allocated polling station, the electoral staff can use the special queue to collect ballot papers upon presentation of their electoral staff identification, so that they can resume their duties as soon as possible.

For election-related enquiries raised by candidates on the election day, apart from calling REO's enquiry hotline at 2891 1001, they can make an enquiry to the Returning Officers of their respective constituencies, or approach the Presiding Officers directly to enquire about arrangements related to the polling stations.

For the media, REO will set up a hotline which specifically handles media enquiries. Moreover, REO will set up a dedicated team to monitor the related reports by various media as well as other news related to the election throughout the day. If any erroneous information or untruthful report is found, the Government and the Electoral Affairs Commission will make clarifications as soon as possible through press releases, media stand-ups, or social media, etc to set the record straight.

Immigration Department reminds public that special arrangement for applications for extension of stay due to pandemic will be discontinued next January 1

The Immigration Department (ImmD) today (November 1) reminded the public that the special arrangement under the pandemic for Hong Kong non-permanent residents outside Hong Kong to apply for an extension of stay will be

discontinued on January 1, 2024. In other words, for extension of stay applications reaching the ImmD on or after January 1, 2024, the applicants are required to be physically present in Hong Kong, namely both at the time of application and at the time of collection of the "e-Visa" for the extension of stay.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ImmD allows Hong Kong non-permanent residents who are outside Hong Kong and are unable to return to Hong Kong in time to apply for an extension of stay. Such a special arrangement has been in place since April 8, 2022. Taking into account that society has resumed normalcy in full, and the steady recovery of cross-boundary and international travel, the ImmD announced on June 29, 2023, the discontinuation of the abovementioned special arrangement on January 1, 2024 (www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202306/29/P2023062900637.htm), so as to allow ample time for eligible non-permanent residents who intend to apply for an extension of stay to make suitable arrangements.

Under the special arrangement which is to be discontinued, eligible non-permanent residents who are admitted into Hong Kong under the following immigration policies/schemes and whose limit of stay is about to expire (generally within four weeks) but are presently outside Hong Kong may apply for an extension of stay:

1. General Employment Policy (including both employment and investment as entrepreneurs);
2. Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals;
3. Quality Migrant Admission Scheme;
4. Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates;
5. Admission Scheme for the Second Generation of Chinese Hong Kong Permanent Residents;
6. Technology Talent Admission Scheme;
7. Capital Investment Entrant Scheme;
8. residence as dependants; and
9. students enrolled in full-time study programmes.

Non-permanent residents are reminded that the approval of an extension of stay does not constitute any implication or acknowledgement from the ImmD that they can fulfil the ordinary residence requirement under the relevant provisions of the Immigration Ordinance (Cap. 115) for acquiring the right of abode. Even if their applications for an extension of stay are approved, whether they can fulfil the seven-year continuous ordinary residence requirement for acquiring the right of abode in Hong Kong will have to be assessed by the ImmD at the time when they apply for verification of eligibility for a permanent identity card. The said special arrangement is set out on www.immd.gov.hk/eng/ext/npr.html.

For enquiries, please call the ImmD enquiry hotline 2824 6111, or send enquiries to the ImmD by fax at 2877 7711 or by email at enquiry@immd.gov.hk.

LCQ8: Assisting small and medium enterprises in business development on the Mainland

Following is a question by the Hon Maggie Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Algernon Yau, in the Legislative Council today (November 1):

Question:

There are views that the Government should help more small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Hong Kong collaborate with Mainland enterprises mutually, facilitate the optimization of measures adopted by Mainland authorities at various levels to assist Hong Kong businessmen, and provide one-stop support to help SMEs develop their businesses on the Mainland. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it has compiled statistics on the current number of branch offices established by Hong Kong SMEs on the Mainland and the major industries such SMEs engage in;
- (2) whether it has conducted studies on the major projects invested by Hong Kong SMEs on the Mainland, the total amount of investment, as well as the scale and characteristics of such projects;
- (3) whether regular official exchanges have been conducted with the Mainland Government regarding the policies to support Hong Kong SMEs, with a view to assisting Hong Kong SMEs in promoting "Brand Hong Kong" in the Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area; if so, of the implementation situation of the relevant policies; and
- (4) given that Biz Expands Easy launched by the Hong Kong Productivity Council is a one-stop integrated platform providing consolidated information on various government funding schemes, whether the Government has measures in place to promote the online platform, so as to help SMEs apply for suitable funding schemes to develop their businesses on the Mainland; if so, whether it has assessed the effectiveness of such measures?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau and the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau, the consolidated reply to the four parts of the question is set out below:

The Mainland Offices of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) have been actively serving as an important bridge between Hong Kong and the Mainland, including enhancing communication and liaison with their Mainland counterparts, representing and promoting Hong Kong's commercial interests, as well as providing information to the Hong Kong business sector on the latest laws and regulations, policies and significant regional developments on the Mainland through various channels including delivering public speeches, giving media interviews, conducting briefings, issuing information circulars, newsletters and press releases, etc. The Government of the HKSAR does not have any data on the establishment of offices and investment situation of Hong Kong enterprises on the Mainland.

To help drive the harmonisation of rules in different sectors in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and improve product and service quality, the Governments of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao strive to develop the GBA Standards for different products and services for voluntary adoption by the trade and, on April 24, 2023, signed a Memorandum of Understanding on jointly promoting the development of the GBA Standards and announced the first batch of a total of 110 GBA Standards. The Guangdong provincial authorities recently issued the guidelines on the formulation of a new batch of GBA Standards, and are inviting applications from the trade in the three places. The Trade and Industry Department (TID) will continue to liaise with relevant authorities of Guangdong Province and Macao, and co-ordinate within the Government of the HKSAR to jointly take the work forward.

For promoting Hong Kong brands, we continue to provide funding support to enterprises under the Dedicated Fund on Branding, Upgrading and Domestic Sales (BUD Fund). Since the launch of the BUD Fund in June 2012 and up to end September 2023, over 5 100 applications targeting the Mainland market had been approved, involving funding of around \$3.1 billion which accounts for about 75 per cent of the total funding approved under the BUD Fund.

The Chief Executive announced in the 2023 Policy Address a range of measures to support SMEs in developing electronic commerce (e-commerce) business. These include launching "E-commerce Easy" under the BUD Fund to enable each enterprise to make use of \$1 million for the implementation of e-commerce projects within the cumulative funding ceiling of \$7 million; organising Hong Kong Shopping Festivals on e-commerce platforms; as well as strengthening the provision of information to SMEs on conducting e-commerce on the Mainland, to be led by the Support and Consultation Centre for SMEs (SUCCESS) under the TID with the co-operation of the other three SME centres (including the SME Centre under the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, the SME One under the Hong Kong Productivity Council (HKPC), and the TecONE under the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation), with a view to assisting SMEs in leveraging e-commerce to promote awareness of Hong Kong brands for developing the Mainland domestic sales market.

Since the launch of the Biz Expands Easy (BEE) platform by the HKPC in September 2022 and up to mid October 2023, there have been more than 460 000 views. The HKPC also launched the mobile application "BEE@HKPC" in end March

2023 to facilitate SMEs to receive information on Government funding schemes. The HKPC has been working closely with relevant Government departments to promote the BEE platform in relevant media, including the websites of the Innovation and Technology Fund, the TID's "SME Link" and SUCCESS, as well as that of Invest Hong Kong, to strengthen the promotion of support measures for SMEs, including on applying for suitable funding schemes to develop business on the Mainland.

LCQ21: Search and rescue operations under adverse weather conditions

Following is a question by the Hon Nixie Lam and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Security, Mr Michael Cheuk, in the Legislative Council today (November 1):

Question:

In recent years, the occurrence of extreme weather conditions in Hong Kong has become increasingly frequent. However, it has been reported that some members of the public have disregarded the Government's warnings and engaged in outdoor activities when typhoons or rainstorms hit Hong Kong, making it necessary for the Hong Kong Fire Services Department (FSD) and the Government Flying Service (GFS) to conduct search and rescue (S&R) operations under adverse weather conditions from time to time. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of cases received by the authorities in each of the past three years in which people sought assistance due to dangerous situations encountered while engaging in outdoor activities under adverse weather conditions, together with a breakdown by the type of adverse weather conditions (e.g. storms and rainstorms) and the nature of the requests for assistance; the respective numbers of such cases in which the Hong Kong Police Force, the FSD and the GFS were involved in S&R operations;

(2) of the average cost of the S&R operations conducted by the GFS during adverse weather conditions; and

(3) as it has been reported that there have been cases of misuse of the S&R services of the GFS, whether the authorities will (i) step up publicity and education to call on members of the public not to misuse such services, (ii) review the existing mechanism and S&R guidelines, (iii) follow up on cases of service misuse, and (iv) by making reference to overseas practices of adopting deterrent measures, impose charges on a cost-recovery basis on those who seek assistance due to dangerous situations encountered while engaging in outdoor activities under extreme weather; if so, of the details; if not, the

reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Government Flying Service (GFS), the Fire Services Department (FSD) and the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF), our consolidated reply to the question raised by the Member is as follows.

(1) Since 2020, the FSD and the HKPF have been deployed to handle a total of 35 mountain rescue or immersion incidents when an Amber, Red or Black Rainstorm Warning, or Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 3 or above was issued by the Hong Kong Observatory (see table below). Among these incidents, 11 required the deployment of the GFS to provide air search and rescue services.

Year	Number of mountain rescue incidents		Number of immersion incidents	
	When a Rainstorm Warning Signal was in force	When Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 3 or above was in force	When a Rainstorm Warning Signal was in force	When Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 3 or above was in force
2020	1	0	2	0
2021	2	3	1	1
2022	7	3	0	1
2023 (as at September 30)	5	3	6	0
Total	15	9	9	2

(2) The annual average direct operating costs of the helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft deployed by the GFS for search and rescue call-outs in 2022 are tabulated below. The figures only include the maintenance cost and fuel cost of the aircraft type concerned, and have not taken into account the salary cost of the staff deployed and the related administrative cost of the department in the calculation. The GFS has not maintained a statistical breakdown of the operating cost under inclement weather either.

	Average direct operating cost per hour flown (\$)
Helicopter H 175	26,740

Helicopter EC 155B1	42,020
Fixed-wing aircraft CL 605	17,970

(3) The Government has always accorded top priority to public safety and the protection of people's life and property. When calls for various emergencies are received, the HKPF and the FSD will immediately assess the nature of each incident and deploy appropriate resources to the scene. The GFS will be requested to provide air search and rescue services if deemed necessary upon assessment. Members of the public cannot directly call up the GFS for assistance. Upon receiving an emergency request, the GFS will make prompt and appropriate deployment having regard to the conditions and location of the wounded and the sick, and arrange aircraft and/or helicopters services to provide appropriate emergency support for those in need of help or to evacuate them from dangerous locations as soon as possible. While the Government strongly discourages the public from taking risks to perform outdoor activities under inclement weather, effective, reliable and efficient emergency services will still be provided to people in distress or in need under all circumstances. The last thing we want to see is those in need being hesitant in seeking emergency call services due to any reasons, including levy.

Different government departments have been appealing to members of the public through various channels for their special attention to the risks of engaging in outdoor activities under inclement weather to prevent accidents. Relevant departments have also constantly reviewed their emergency response capabilities during accidents, and stepped up their educational and publicity efforts to raise effectiveness. For instance, the GFS has disseminated information through its website and social media platform pages about safety in outdoor activities, including knowledge about safe hiking, tips on pre-trip preparation, points to note on safety during the activities and ways to seek help when in distress. The GFS has also joined with the FSD and the Civil Aid Service, etc, to regularly organise the Mountaineering Safety Promotion Day with a view to enhancing public knowledge and safety awareness of mountaineering activities.