

LCQ7: Loading pressure borne by MTR East Rail Line during peak periods of outbound travel

Following is a question by the Hon Dominic Lee and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Liu Chun-san, in the Legislative Council today (April 24):

Question:

It has been reported that during the long Easter holidays from the end of last month till early this month, there were over 1.98 million outbound passenger trips bound for the Mainland made by local residents. It is learnt that the flow of outbound passengers mainly concentrated at two rail-based boundary control points (BCPs), namely, Lo Wu and Lok Ma Chau Spur Line, and the MTR East Rail Line (ERL) had been overloaded by a large number of cross-boundary passengers. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the daily total number of passenger trips carried by ERL between the 28th of last month and the 1st of this month;

(2) given that there are views that as the Labour Day holiday of the Mainland is approaching, a large number of Mainland residents will, upon arrival at Hong Kong via local rail-based BCPs, board ERL trains bound for the urban areas, whether the authorities have assessed the additional patronage that will be brought to ERL by Mainland visitors during the Labour Day holiday of the Mainland; and

(3) as there are views pointing out that ERL has been overloaded by a large number of cross-boundary travellers during the peak period of outbound travel, whether the authorities will arrange tour coaches travelling between urban areas and Heung Yuen Wai BCP as well as Shenzhen Bay Port during the peak period of outbound travel, so as to avoid ERL being overcrowded; if not, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Transport Department (TD) and the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), my reply to the question raised by the Hon Dominic Lee is as follows:

(1) According to the information provided by the MTRCL, the total patronage of the East Rail Line (EAL) between March 28 and April 1, 2024 is tabulated below:

	March 28 (Thursday)	March 29 (Friday)	March 30 (Saturday)	March 31 (Sunday)	April 1 (Monday)
EAL Total Patronage	907 700	738 600	718 200	749 300	653 200

During the Easter holidays, the MTRCL kept close contact with the relevant departments at the boundary control points (BCPs) and made corresponding adjustments to train frequencies in light of the situation at the BCPs. It also stepped up information dissemination and public announcement, and deployed additional staff to assist passengers and maintain station order.

(2) To meet the travel needs of passengers during festive periods, the relevant government departments will coordinate with the public transport operators in advance so as to enhance public transport services and crowd management according to the anticipated passenger flow. During the festive period, all relevant parties will also closely monitor and respond to the actual situation of travellers using the various BCPs and public transport services, to make timely adjustments to service arrangements.

For railway services, the MTRCL will assess patronage during the Labour Day holidays of the Mainland this year by making reference to the patronage and travel patterns of passengers in the past festive periods and make preparations, including enhancing the services of various railway lines as needed. During the festive period, the MTRCL will maintain close contact with relevant departments at the various BCPs, so as to flexibly adjust the EAL train services in a timely manner according to the situation at the BCPs. Moreover, additional staff will be deployed to the busier stations to facilitate passenger flow and assist passengers. The MTRCL is devising plans for the train services during the Labour Day holidays and will announce the details in due course.

(3) There are currently a total of seven land BCPs between Hong Kong and Shenzhen. The Government has always been planning the appropriate public transport connections having regard to the respective nature and positioning of the BCPs. The Government and the public transport operators also closely monitor the changes in travel patterns and number of travellers, with a view to adjusting the relevant services as and when needed to facilitate the flow of people between the two places.

The TD has been working with the public transport operators to draw up plans ahead of the peak periods of cross-boundary travel to cope with the transport demand during the period. Regarding cross-boundary coach services, to address the transport demand of cross-boundary travellers and facilitate their travel via various BCPs/Ports during the Labour Day holidays, the TD has coordinated with the relevant Mainland authorities to issue additional ad-hoc quotas of 140 for Shenzhen Bay Port and 100 for Heung Yuen Wai Control Point to cross-boundary coach operators, so that the number of daily trips of the relevant cross-boundary coaches will increase by 30 per cent from 1 498 on normal days to 1 978 in total. The cross-boundary coach operators will also deploy adequate staff at the BCPs/Ports and major passenger pick-up

points in the city to assist in maintaining order in passenger queueing and waiting.

Travellers can also make use of the various existing local franchised buses and public light buses to travel to/from the land BCPs, including Shenzhen Bay Port, Heung Yuen Wai Control Point and Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point. The TD is co-ordinating with the various public transport operators to arrange for adequate staff and vehicles to meet the demand for cross-boundary land transport during the Labour Day holidays. The public transport operators will closely monitor changes in the number of travellers during the holidays and increase the service frequency timely during periods of particularly strong passenger demand, so as to expedite the dispersal of passengers.

LCQ16: Cross-boundary arrangement for Guangdong-Hong Kong cross-boundary private cars

Following is a question by the Hon Gary Zhang and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Liu Chun-san, in the Legislative Council today (April 24):

Question:

It is learnt that at present, Guangdong-Hong Kong cross-boundary private cars with a Guangdong-Hong Kong cross-boundary private car regular quota and a valid Closed Road Permit for cross-boundary vehicles are allowed to cross the boundary via Lok Ma Chau Control Point (LMCCP) during overnight hours after the closure of the designated boundary control points (BCPs) at night or midnight, and such arrangement applies to BCPs not providing round-the-clock services. However, Guangdong-Hong Kong cross-boundary private cars allocated to use Heung Yuen Wai Control Point (HYWCP) are not allowed to cross the boundary via LMCCP after the closure of HYWCP at night. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of Guangdong-Hong Kong cross-boundary private car trips diverted to LMCCP for boundary crossing due to the closure of various designated BCPs at night or midnight in each month of the past 12 months (broken down by BCP allocated for use by such private cars); and

(2) of the reasons why Guangdong-Hong Kong cross-boundary private cars allocated to use HYWCP are not allowed to cross the boundary via LMCCP after the closure of HYWCP at night, and whether such private cars will be permitted to do so in the future; if so, of the timetable; if not, the

reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

At present, according to the arrangements agreed between Guangdong and Hong Kong, cross-boundary private cars holding the regular quota and closed road permit (the permit) for Lok Ma Chau Control Point can cross the border using that control point 24 hours a day. As for the cross-boundary private cars holding the regular quotas and permits for Shenzhen Bay, Man Kam To and Sha Tau Kok Control Points, they can cross the border using Lok Ma Chau Control Point during overnight period (i.e. from midnight to 6.30 the next morning) after the respective designated control points are closed. Cross-boundary private cars holding permits for various land control points (including Heung Yuen Wai Control Point) can cross the border using the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) Hong Kong Port 24 hours a day.

Having consulted the Transport Department and the Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department, our reply to the Hon Zhang's question is as follows:

(1) By each month in 2023, the numbers of trips of cross-boundary private cars that switch to use Lok Ma Chau Control Point after Shenzhen Bay, Man Kam To and Sha Tau Kok Control Points close at night are as follows:

2023	Numbers of trips of cross-boundary private cars that switch to use Lok Ma Chau Control Point after Shenzhen Bay, Man Kam To and Sha Tau Kok (Note 2) Control Points close at night (Note 3) (rounding up to nearest hundred)
January (Note 1)	0
February	2 900
March	5 800
April	7 600
May	9 600
June	10 400
July	11 600
August	13 000
September	12 300
October	14 300
November	13 400
December	15 100

Note 1: Lok Ma Chau Control Point has resumed operations at normal opening hours after the full resumption of travel between the Mainland and Hong Kong in February 2023.

Note 2: Cross-boundary passenger transport services at Sha Tau Kok Control Point remains suspended after the full resumption of travel between the Mainland and Hong Kong in February 2023.

Note 3: As some cross-boundary private cars hold permits for more than one control points, the above list does not include breakdown by control points.

(2) To facilitate cross-boundary private cars to cross the border beyond the operating hours of the respective designated control points, Guangdong and Hong Kong agreed to allow cross-boundary private cars holding the regular quotas and permits for Man Kam To and Sha Tau Kok Control Points, as well as the regular quota and permit for Shenzhen Bay Control Point to cross the border using Lok Ma Chau Control Point during overnight period starting from 2003 and 2008 respectively. Heung Yuen Wai Control Point was opened in 2020 and cross-boundary private cars began to use the control point after the full resumption of travel in February 2023. Currently, cross-boundary private cars holding the permit for that control point can cross the border using that control point from 7am to 10pm every day, as well as using the HZMB Hong Kong Port to cross the border 24 hours a day. Regarding the suggestion of allowing cross-boundary private cars holding the regular quota and permit for Heung Yuen Wai Control Point to use Lok Ma Chau Control Point during overnight period, the HKSAR Government is discussing with the relevant Mainland authorities and will release information in due course.

EDB announces arrangements for fourth round of Basic Law and National Security Law Test in 2023/24 school year

The Education Bureau (EDB) today (April 24) announced that the fourth round of the Basic Law and National Security Law Test (BLNST) in the 2023/24 school year will be open for application from 9am on April 26 to 5pm on May 9. The test will be held on June 16 (Sunday).

The target participants for the fourth round of the test are persons without a bachelor's degree and planning to join or change to another secondary school, primary school or kindergarten to take up a teaching post. Applications can be made through the EDB's online application system (www.edb.gov.hk/en/blnst). Limited places for the test will be available on a first-come, first-served basis. Please note that a pass result in the test at a non-degree level is only applicable for applying for non-graduate teaching posts. Those who have already obtained a pass result in the BLNST organised by the EDB, the Civil Service Bureau or recruiting departments/grades will

not be accepted to sit the test again.

Starting from this school year, all newly appointed teachers in public sector schools, Direct Subsidy Scheme schools and kindergartens joining the Kindergarten Education Scheme (including newly joined teachers, and teachers changing schools) are required to pass the BLNST in order to be considered for appointment. The requirement applies to all ranks of the teacher grade including principals.

The EDB is conducting five rounds of the BLNST for degree holders and non-degree holders respectively in this school year. Details are available on the EDB webpage (www.edb.gov.hk/en/blnst). The fifth round will be open for degree holders and will be held on July 20 (Saturday). Relevant arrangements will be announced in due course.

Old and Valuable Tree in Fan Leng Lau Pleasure Ground removed by LCSD

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) today (April 24) removed an Old and Valuable Tree (OVT) with a potential risk of collapse in Fan Leng Lau Pleasure Ground to ensure public safety.

The tree being removed was a *Ficus microcarpa* listed on the Register of OVTs (registration number LCSD N/12) with a height of 13 metres.

The LCSD had been closely monitoring the tree's health and structural condition, and the tree's health was found to be declining since 2016 with four major branches supporting the tree crown being removed or collapsed due to fungal infection and inclement weather. Though the LCSD had taken immediate mitigation measures to preserve the tree, including crown cleaning and application of organic mulches and fungicides, the health condition and structural integrity of the tree continued to deteriorate and posed a risk of collapse.

Having consulted the North District Council, the Urban Forestry Advisory Panel and the Greening, Landscape and Tree Management Section of the Development Bureau, the LCSD removed the tree today and will replant one *Pterocarpus indicus* at the location.

A spokesman for the LCSD reiterated that the department will continue to adopt a prudent approach in inspecting and managing trees under its care. Removal of problematic trees will be undertaken only when no other viable risk mitigation measure is available.

LCQ17: Strengthening measures to improve people's livelihoods

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Tik Chi-yuen and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (April 24):

Question:

The Government has repeatedly indicated that the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance will render Hong Kong's business environment more stable, which is conducive to economic development, and that the Government will make every effort to improve people's livelihoods upon completion of the legislative exercise for the Ordinance. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has estimated the growth in Gross Domestic Product and the number of employment places in the coming three years;

(2) as it is learnt that carers are currently facing heavy life stresses and the existing support cannot really help them resolve their difficulties, how the Labour and Welfare Bureau will strengthen the support provided to carers through economic improvement; and

(3) as it is learnt that there has been no significant improvement in the problem of disparity between the rich and the poor in Hong Kong, how the authorities will introduce more targeted poverty alleviation measures through economic improvement?

Reply:

President,

Following the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance officially taking effect on March 23, Hong Kong has put up a shield and strengthened the defensive wall of its national security under the transition from chaos to order, allowing its efforts to be focused on pursuing economic growth, advancing development, improving people's livelihoods and bringing fulfilment to the people.

In consultation with the Office of the Government Economist, the reply to the three parts of the question raised by the Member is as follows:

(1) In February this year, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region forecast that the Gross Domestic Product would grow by 2.5 per cent to 3.5 per cent in real terms in 2024. For the period from 2025

to 2028, the forecast trend growth rate is 3.2 per cent per annum. The sustained economic growth will support local labour demand and create more jobs.

(2) On providing financial support to carers, the Government has since October 2023 regularised the following four financial assistance schemes under the Community Care Fund:

(i) the Scheme on Living Allowance for Carers of Elderly Persons from Low-income Families;

(ii) the Scheme on Living Allowance for Low-income Carers of Persons with Disabilities;

(iii) the Special Care Subsidy Scheme for Persons with Severe Disabilities (Special Care Subsidy); and

(iv) the Scheme on Providing Subsidy for Higher Disability Allowance Recipients in Paid Employment to Hire Carers (Scheme to Hire Carers).

The monthly allowance of the two Subsidy Schemes for low-income carers has been increased from \$2,400 to \$3,000; the monthly full grant of the Special Care Subsidy has been increased from \$2,000 to \$2,500; and the monthly allowance of the Scheme to Hire Carers is \$5,000. The above financial support involved an annual funding of about \$527.5 million. The eligibility criteria for the carer allowances, which mainly subsidise low-income carers, are already more lenient than those of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme, which provides assistance to those in financial need. To ensure the proper use of public money, the Government will review in due course the implementation of various financial assistance schemes/subsidies upon regularisation, and make adjustments as and when necessary.

(3) The Government has devoted sustained efforts to improving social welfare and introducing new measures on social security, elderly services, rehabilitation services, child care, family support, youth support, etc. Among others, the Government has been allocating more and more resources in the form of cash assistance on initiatives for improving people's livelihood, alleviating poverty and supporting the disadvantaged. Taking social welfare expenditure as an example, the estimated recurrent expenditure in 2024-25 has added up to \$127.4 billion, accounting for 22.0 per cent of the estimated total recurrent government expenditure. This represents an increase of over 50 per cent (56.2 per cent) within five years when compared with \$81.5 billion in 2019-20.

With a rapidly ageing population in recent years, the overall workforce has started to shrink, thereby hampering the momentum of economic growth. There are views in society that the underprivileged face more difficulties than just low income, and that the Government's cash assistance alone may neither address their needs fully nor solve the poverty problem in the long run. Instead of relying on "giving out cash" solely, the Government should implement targeted poverty alleviation by teaching people how to stay out of

poverty (empowering those who are able to help themselves) and providing assistance to needy and special groups (supporting those who are unable to help themselves).

The current-term Government has adopted a strategy of targeted poverty alleviation by directing resources to those most in need. The Commission on Poverty (CoP) supports the Government's targeted poverty alleviation strategy. Based on the Government's statistics and by making multidimensional analyses of household characteristics, employment and income situation, coverage of government cash benefits, living environment, rental burden, burden of supporting dependants, etc, the CoP has identified three groups for targeted poverty alleviation, namely households residing in subdivided units (SDUs), single-parent households and households with elderly members only (including singleton, doubleton and three-person-and-above elderly households). The CoP also agrees that a two-pronged approach should be adopted to address the specific needs of different target groups. In other words, the Government should on the one hand empower those who are able to help themselves (such as SDU households and single-parent households) to achieve self-reliance and improve their lives, thus releasing the potential labour force of society, and on the other hand continue to plug existing service gaps to support those who are unable to help themselves (such as households with elderly members only). The Government has implemented various targeted poverty alleviation projects catering to the needs of the target groups. These projects include:

- (i) Implementing the Strive and Rise Programme – Through tripartite collaboration of the Government, the business sector and the community, focused support is given to secondary students from underprivileged families, particularly those living in SDUs;
- (ii) Launching the Pilot Programme on Community Living Room – Through tripartite collaboration of the Government, the business sector and the community, the Pilot Programme provides SDU households with additional living space and help them establish interpersonal networks, thereby enhancing their living standard and sense of belonging to the community;
- (iii) Rolling out the School-based After School Care Service Scheme – Primary students in need (especially those from single-parent families) can stay at school outside school hours for care and learning support, thereby enabling their parents to go to work; and
- (iv) Engaging District Services and Community Care Teams with Tsuen Wan and Southern Districts as pilot points – Elderly households in need can be identified through visits or contacts, and referred to relevant social welfare service units for follow-up.

The Government will review the experience accumulated in each of the targeted poverty alleviation projects and examine their effectiveness to decide the way forward, with a view to carrying on related work in an in-depth and systematic manner.