

LCQ7: Amendments of speed limits and change of relevant road signs

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Following is a question by the Hon Wong Kwok-hing and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (October 21):

Question:

Recently, it has been reported that after changing the speed limits of certain roads/road sections by notice published in the Gazette, the Transport Department ("TD") did not update the relevant speed limit traffic signs at the same time. Due to difficulties in enforcement, the Police has indicated that prosecution actions against speeding on the roads/road sections concerned would be suspended. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the number of times in the past three years of TD failing to update the traffic signs concerned at the same time the speed limits were changed upon publication of a notice in the Gazette; the names of the roads/road sections concerned and the reasons for not updating the traffic signs at the same time;

(b) whether it has looked into the difficulties posed by the above inconsistencies in speed limits to prosecution actions by the Police against speeding; of the respective numbers of cases involving inconsistencies in speed limits in the past three years in which the Police continued or suspended its enforcement actions, together with a breakdown of the duration of suspension of enforcement actions in respect of each road/road section concerned; and whether the Police has reflected to TD the difficulties it encounters in carrying out enforcement actions on such roads/road sections; if so, of the response; if not, the reasons for that; and

(c) what measures TD will implement to tackle the above problem, as well as when such measures will be implemented?

Reply:

President,

Under section 40 of the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374), the maximum speed at which a vehicle may be driven on any road shall be 50 km/h. The Commissioner for Transport (the Commissioner) may by notice in the Gazette vary the speed limit for any road, and when doing so, the Commissioner shall also cause traffic signs to be so erected, replaced, removed or altered as to ensure that adequate guidance is given to motorists as to the speed limit to be currently observed on that road. In other words, if no speed limit traffic signs are found for a road, the applicable speed limit for it is 50 km/h. Otherwise, traffic signs showing the applicable speed limits would be displayed to guide motorists.

Variation of speed limits has all along been synchronised with the display of speed limit traffic signs. Whenever the Commissioner decides to vary the speed limit of a road (or a section of it), the Transport Department (TD) will request the Highways Department (HyD) to erect the new signs; the signs will be temporarily covered up after their erections. TD will decide on an effective date for imposing the new speed limit, arrange issue of the Gazette notice, and inform Police. TD will liaise with HyD to uncover the new signs on the same date that the new speed limit shall come into effect as stated in the Gazette notice. Therefore, the speed limits shown on the traffic signs as seen by motorists are consistent with the speed limits published in the Gazette notices. Based on a Gazette notice published in 1984, some recent media reports suggested that the speed limits as shown on traffic signs at some road sections were different from the speed limits as specified in the 1984 Gazette notice. In fact, the speed limits

for the concerned road sections have been varied by subsequent Gazette notices according to the provisions stipulated under section 40 of the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374) and are consistent with the on-site traffic signs. Motorists should always observe the speed limits as shown on traffic signs.

Replies to different parts of the question are as follows:

(a) Between 2006 and 2008, TD has published 244 Gazette notices to vary speed limits of about 400 road sections all over Hong Kong. About three quarters of these Gazette notices were concerned with temporary arrangements. As stated above, variation of speed limits for all roads is synchronised with display of updated traffic signs.

(b) The Police implement enforcement actions against speeding offences based on the speed limits as specified in the latest Gazette notices. Variation of speed limits is synchronised with replacement of speed limit traffic signs. Hence, the speed limits as specified in the Gazette notices and the speed limits as shown on the corresponding traffic signs are consistent.

The Police are implementing enforcement action to effectively deter and tackle traffic violations to ensure road safety. In relation to an individual case, the Police needed to seek clarification on certain legal issues. In the interest of the public, the Police had suspended speeding prosecutions on certain road sections during that period, but at the same time carried out additional patrols and snap checks in order to ensure that road safety was not compromised. The Police have resumed prosecution actions on all road sections.

(c) Variation of speed limits is synchronised with display of updated speed limit traffic signs, there is no discrepancy between them. The relevant Government departments review the mechanism from time to time and implement improvement measures when necessary.

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