

LCQ16: Progress of planning of the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Express Line

Following is a question by the Hon Frederick Fung Kin-kee and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (March 10):

Question:

It has been reported that having considered factors such as economic benefits and short-term urgency, the authorities have decided to defer the commencement of the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Express Line ("WEL") project (formerly known as the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Airport Rail Link), which was one of the 10 major infrastructure projects included in the 2007 Policy Address. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the latest progress of the planning of the WEL project, including the reasons for deferring the commencement of the project, the timetable for its final implementation and whether it will consider shelving the project permanently, etc.;

(b) whether it has considered the impact on the WEL project of the drop in the travellers' demand for domestic flights due to the gradual commissioning of express railway projects on the Mainland; and

(c) of the anticipated impact of the WEL project on the Qianhai area in Shenzhen and the North East New Territories New Development Areas?

Reply:

President,

(a) Major railway projects involve huge investment and have significant socio-economic impacts, and hence demand detailed and careful planning. This often takes several years or even a longer period of time.

The proposed Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Express Line (WEL) is intended to be a multi-function cross-boundary railway. It will provide cross-boundary passengers with environmentally friendly and efficient railway services. It will also facilitate the development of the Northwest New Territories (NWNT) and Qianhai in Shenzhen. Through this railway project, we would also like to enhance the cooperation between the two airports in Hong Kong and Shenzhen, and provide convenient services for passengers of the two places. This may result in a win-win situation. The planning of the WEL will be rather complicated, requiring careful consideration of a considerable number of planning parameters.

The preliminary feasibility study on the WEL has confirmed the technical feasibility of its alignment. As one of the major functions of the WEL is to promote the development of Qianhai and NWNT, it is important for the design of the WEL to take into consideration the planning of these two areas. With the development of Qianhai and NWNT being pushed ahead, more planning parameters for these areas will be available. This will enable us to conduct more in-depth studies on the WEL, and investigate various alignment options and their respective patronage forecasts, the functionality of the railway, its technical standards, operational and service requirements, etc. We have signed with the Shenzhen Municipal Government the "Cooperation Arrangement on Advancing WEL", under which both parties agree to continue with the relevant in-depth studies along this direction. Upon completion of these studies, when we have more concrete information on alignment options and other aspects, we will consult the public, inviting the community to express views on the development of WEL.

(b) The competitive edge of high speed railway (HSR) is normally over areas within 1,000 kilometres in radius. Though the aviation services within the same catchment area will inevitably face competition, HSR can bring along new opportunities to the aviation market, e.g. air-railway inter-modal products may attract new clientele for the aviation sector. At present, the Mainland destinations of the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) are mainly Mainland cities relatively far away from Hong Kong such as Shanghai and Beijing. There are fewer flights to cities within catchment area of the HSR. More importantly, given the rapid economic development in the Mainland, the demand for domestic flights will continue to increase; and same for the demand of international transit flights via Hong Kong. We believe that the HSR network will not undermine the competitiveness of HKIA. The WEL, linking the airports of Hong Kong and Shenzhen, should help the two cities in achieving a win-win situation by complementing each other and enhancing competitiveness.

(c) As a multi-purpose cross-border rail link, the planned WEL will facilitate cross-border land transport and promote the socio-economic development of Qianhai and NWNT. Therefore, the WEL has to tie in with the planning of these two areas for maximum benefits.

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