LCQ13: Development of intelligent transport systems in Hong Kong

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Following is a question by the Hon Kam Nai-wai and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (May 5):

Question:

In recent years, the Transport Department (TD) has been promoting the development of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) and conducting research and development of Transport Information System in Hong Kong. Apart from gradually installing Variable Message Signs (VMS), it also posts closed-circuit television (CCTV) snapshots of traffic conditions on the Internet, so as to provide information on real-time traffic conditions. Yet, quite a number of motorists have complained to me that the authorities have only installed such facilities on Hong Kong Island trunk roads and many other major traffic spots are not covered. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the locations where the aforesaid VMS and CCTV cameras which capture snapshots of traffic conditions for display on the Internet have been installed on Hong Kong Island since the implementation of the ITS, the dates on which they came into operation and the costs involved respectively; whether the authorities will install more such facilities on Hong Kong Island; if so, of the details;

(b) given that quite a number of the CCTV cameras currently installed on Hong Kong Island are mainly for traffic monitoring purposes by government departments, of the number of such CCTV cameras, the criteria adopted by TD for determining the images of real-time traffic conditions to be displayed on the Internet; whether it will, upon strong request by the public, post on the Internet all the images

captured by such CCTV cameras; if it will, of the procedure;

(c) whether TD will, in the near future, install more VMS in areas such as Eastern and Western Mid-Levels, Pok Fu Lam, Ap Lei Chau and Deep Water Bay, etc. within a short period of time, so as to provide information on real-time traffic conditions for motorists; if not, of the reasons for that; whether district councils may install and manage such message signs on their own expenses and connect them with TD's central systems while the work of installation and maintenance, etc. is co-ordinated by TD, so as to promote the development of the ITS; and

(d) of the Government's new plan to further develop real-time traffic condition services in Hong Kong in the future for reference or use by members of the public?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the four parts of the question is as follows:

(a) Currently, there are four Variable Message Signs (VMSs) installed on the Hong Kong Island. The VMSs, together with the 21 closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras capturing images for display at the website on Snapshots of Traffic Conditions of the Transport Department (TD), provide the public with real-time road traffic information of the Hong Kong Island. The location and launch time of these VMSs and CCTV cameras are set out in Annexes 1 and 2. The average cost is $1.5 million for a VMS and $0.3 million for a CCTV camera.

The TD plans to install in late 2010 a VMS at the westbound lane of Wong Chuk Hang Road near Wong Chuk Hang Recreation Ground and mount VMSs at various ingresses of Central - Wan Chai Bypass for operation upon completion of the bypass.

(b) The TD operates a total of 41 CCTV cameras on the Hong Kong Island, 20 of which are mainly used for incident management and the other 21 monitoring of traffic conditions of major roads. These 21 cameras provide images for the snapshot website except when they are used for incident management (during which they are adjusted to film certain locations and unable to provide traffic conditions of major roads). To increase the number of real-time traffic images available to the public and avoid service disruption due to incident management, the TD has secured the necessary fund for installing 31 separate CCTV cameras dedicated for providing traffic images for the snapshot website. The installation works are scheduled for completion in the latter half of 2010. By then, the 31 dedicated cameras will replace the 21 cameras now also used for incident management for disseminating information to the public.

(c) When planning the installation, design and operation of traffic facilities such as VMSs, the overall traffic management arrangements of the districts they serve have to be taken into account. Other factors to be considered include the feasibility of erecting the gantries and constructing the foundation. Moreover, the section in front of a VMS has to be a relatively long straight road such that motorists may read the messages on the display panel in a safe manner. The display panel itself also occupies some nearby space of the road. As most roads in Southern District and Mid-levels are narrow and winding, they are generally not suitable for installing VMSs. We welcome any specific suggestions from the district councils to the TD on suitable VMS locations. The TD will examine in detail the feasibility of the suggestions.

(d) The TD has been disseminating special traffic news to the public via the media such as the television and radio. In recent years, the TD strives to release via its homepage special traffic news, CCTV snapshots, the estimated time of the cross-harbour journey from the Hong Kong Island to Kowloon and the speed map indicating the traffic speed of major roads.

Also, the TD has explored new channels for message dissemination, including offering the PDA version of the above online services and providing mobile service operators with traffic information such as CCTV snapshots and special traffic news for their dissemination to clients. Looking forward, the TD plans to install cross-harbour journey time indicators at seven locations in Eastern District of the Hong Kong Island and the Kowloon side (the relevant works are scheduled for completion in mid-2010); mount VMSs on Tuen Mun Road, Tolo Highway and Fanling Highway (the relevant works are scheduled for completion in 2014); and erect speed map panels at five locations in the New Territories to indicate traffic conditions ahead with graphic images (the relevant works are scheduled for completion in early 2012). We will continue to explore new channels to disseminate real-time traffic information to help the public make informed choices in travelling routes and transport modes based on the latest traffic conditions, thus reducing and alleviating traffic congestion.

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