

LCQ6: MTR fares and station facilities

Following is a question by the Hon Andrew Cheng and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Yau Shing-mu, at the Legislative Council meeting today (June 9):

Question:

The MTR Corporation Limited ("MTRCL") will increase its fares by 2.05% on average with effect from June 13 this year. Regarding the fares and station facilities of MTRCL, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) given that MTRCL had earned a net profit of over \$72,200 million in the past decade, whether the Government will immediately study the allocation of the revenue from dividends distributed by MTRCL to the Government annually to establish a fund to stabilise train fares, so as to relieve the burden on members of the public; if it will, of the details and the work timetable; if not, the reasons for that; whether it knows if MTRCL will introduce Day Pass, Weekly Pass and Monthly Pass schemes for all railway lines; if so, of the details and the implementation timetable; if not, the reasons for that;

(b) given that after the fare increase, there will be situations in which "Octopus fares will be higher than single journey ticket fares" for individual journeys, whether the Government knows the route combinations in which such situations will occur and their details; whether MTRCL has any solution; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; whether such situations are contradictory to the original intent of setting up the Octopus Card Payment System; and

(c) whether it knows if MTRCL will cancel the extra charge

of \$0.1 for each Octopus journey for the retrofitting of platform screen doors; if it will, of the details and the timetable; if not, the reasons for that; of MTRCL's progress and expected completion date of collating and analysing the test data of the trial of the mechanical gap filler system; what method MTRCL has to prevent the recurrence of accidents of passengers falling onto rail tracks at those stations which have not yet installed platform screen doors or automatic platform gates; whether MTRCL has further plans to provide toilets at the various stations; if so, of the details and the timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

(a) The MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL)'s fare adjustment mechanism (FAM) was formulated during the rail merger after extensive discussion at the Legislative Council. Upon the rail merger in December 2007, MTRCL has reduced its fares immediately and committed not to increase fares on or before June 30, 2009. After June 30, 2009, MTRCL's fares are to be adjusted according to the FAM which is objective and transparent. Under the mechanism, fare adjustments will be made in accordance with a direct-drive formula linked to changes in the Composite Consumer Price Index (CCPI), Nominal Wage Index (Transport Services Sector) and a fixed productivity factor. The CCPI used in the FAM reflects the macroeconomic environment and public affordability to a certain extent. Nominal wage index reflects staff cost.

The FAM has only been implemented since 2009 and fares will be increased for the first time in 2010. We do not have any plan to change the newly set up FAM at present.

As regards fare concessions, MTR has announced that the fare concessions which are due to expire on June 30, 2010, including "Sheung Shui - East Tsim Sha Tsui Monthly Pass",

"Tuen Mun - Nam Cheong Monthly Pass", "Tuen Mun - Hung Hom Monthly Pass" and "Tuen Mun - Nam Cheong Day Pass", will be extended for one year to June 30, 2011.

The Government will continue to encourage public transport service operators, including the railway corporation, to provide fare concessions to passengers taking into account the operators' respective operating conditions.

(b) 2010 is the second year that the FAM has been implemented by MTRCL. According to the FAM, the overall fare adjustment rate for 2010 is +2.05%.

As regards the calculation of individual fares, the FAM allows MTRCL to apply the following principles which MTRCL has used in its calculation:

(i) adjustments to Octopus fares are rounded to the nearest 10-cents; and

(ii) adjustments to Single Journey fares are rounded to the nearest 50-cents,

but the weighted average of all individual fare adjustments shall equal to +2.05%.

According to MTRCL, in calculating individual fares in accordance with the above principles, some Single Journey fares (most of which are concession fares for children and the elderly) would have a substantial increase if they are to be adjusted by 50 cents. Therefore, MTRCL has decided not to adjust these Single Journey fares now and address the issue in the next fare adjustment. Although the arrangement would mean that a small number of Octopus fares are 10 to 20 cents higher than the Single Journey fares of the same journey, MTRCL has considered that adjusting such Single Journey fares would represent a substantial increase and decided to maintain these Single Journey fares at their existing levels.

Passengers using Octopus will still pay a lower fare than using Single Journey tickets in most journeys. Moreover, using Octopus is very convenient and can benefit from a wide variety of promotions offered by MTRCL.

Based on the information provided by MTRCL, there are only around 100 journeys under which Octopus fares are slightly higher than those of Single Journey fares, representing a very small portion out of a total of 40,000 fare combinations. Details of these journeys are at the Annex. MTRCL has uploaded such information on its website.

(c) At present, MTRCL collects 10 cents per Octopus journey for the retrofitting of platform screen doors (PSDs) at 30 underground stations and automatic platform gates (APGs) at eight aboveground or at-grade stations. The former MTR Corporation Limited announced its plan to retrofit PSDs at underground stations in phases in early 1999. As the works require a high capital cost of HK\$2 billion which was not covered in the original investment plan of the urban lines of MTR, after discussion in the Legislative Council, half of the project cost would be borne by the Corporation while the remaining half of the project cost (i.e. \$1 billion) would be met through collecting 10 cents per Octopus trip from passengers.

Subsequently, MTRCL decided to retrofit APGs at the eight aboveground and at-grade stations in the former MTR system in 2008. The cost of the retrofitting works is about \$300 million, half of which would also be funded by collecting 10 cents per Octopus trip from passengers.

Collection of the 10 cents per Octopus trip began in July 2000. By the end of 2009, \$730 million had been collected. MTRCL indicated that the 10-cent collection arrangement will continue according to the original programme until the said cost is recovered in full. Based on financial records of the past few years, it is projected that the 10-cent collection

arrangement will continue until 2017. The actual time it would take to fully recover the project costs will depend on patronage levels.

As regards retrofitting APGs on the East Rail Line, as there are platforms with relatively greater curvatures and wider platform gaps at some stations of the East Rail Line, the problem of wide platform gaps has to be properly resolved before APGs are installed at stations along the line in order to reduce the risk of passengers inadvertently stepping into the platform gaps because of sight line obstructions caused by the APGs. Therefore, the pre-merger Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation decided to study the effect of installing Mechanical Gap Fillers (MGFs) at station platforms with wider gaps first. The MGF system is new and has never been used in Hong Kong. In fact, it is also uncommon in other railway systems internationally. As such, MTRCL needs to develop a MGF system that is suitable for the East Rail Line and conduct on-site trial at platforms during train service hours to test its effect. MTRCL's trial on MGFs was conducted at Lo Wu Station in three phases. The whole trial commenced in July 2008 and was completed at the end of last year.

The MGF system needs to have a sophisticated interface with various railway systems, such as signalling, train control, etc. During the trial, MTRCL found that, since elaborate verifications for the communications between the MGF system and the various railway systems are required, additional platform dwell time and lengthening of total journey time are incurred. MTRCL is now collating and analysing the data collected to assess the system's performance and implication on train service.

We understand the public's views on the installation of APGs at platforms. However, before installing any facilities in the railway system, consideration has to be given to implications on operational safety and railway service. Based on the test data collected by MTRCL from the trial on the MGF

system, preliminary analysis shows that reliability of the MGF system was not satisfactory. Also, the operation of MGFs still incurs additional platform dwell time and some technical difficulties. The signalling system and trains may have to be substantially upgraded to solve the problems. Hence MTRCL has to continue to study the matter.

The design of the existing station platforms in the railway system is safe. MTRCL has also taken measures, including installing platform gap fillers to narrow the gap and installing illumination and flashing lights under the platforms and at the edge of the platforms respectively at locations where the gap between the platform and the train is relatively wide so that passengers would pay attention to the gap. Yellow tactile strips are also installed along platform edges to remind passengers not to stand beyond the yellow line. Door chimes are broadcast before train doors close to remind passengers not to charge doors and public announcements are made on platforms and in train compartments in Cantonese, Putonghua and English to remind passengers to mind the platform gaps. Moreover, MTRCL conducts education activities from time to time to raise the safety awareness of the public. Furthermore, CCTV system is installed at platforms to facilitate effective platform monitoring and management.

With regard to the provision of public toilets near MTR stations, as most pre-merger MTR stations were built in the 1970s and 1980s, in view of the short travelling time and availability of public toilets in the vicinity of most commercial buildings or shopping arcades located in the urban areas, public toilets were not a built-in feature for those MTR stations. Substantial technical difficulties have been identified in retrofitting public toilets at existing railway stations.

In fact, amongst the 84 stations in the system, public toilets are already available in 38. Public toilets have also

been built by MTRCL in the public transport interchanges connecting to four stations on the Tseung Kwan O Line. At other stations, passengers may request to use staff toilets in the stations. MTRCL has also agreed to provide public toilets within, or adjacent to, stations of future new lines and extensions.

In addition, MTRCL has conducted a survey on the location of public toilets in the vicinity of stations within a walking distance of 200 metres (i.e. an approximately four-minute walk). It ascertained that, with the exception of Ngau Tau Kok, Prince Edward and Quarry Bay Stations, public toilets are available within a 200-metre distance of all other stations within the MTR system.

The toilets at Ngau Tau Kok and Quarry Bay Stations will be retrofitted at street-level of the stations. MTRCL indicated that they would complete the procedures required for such retrofitting works as soon as practicable.

For the plan to provide public toilets in the vicinity of Prince Edward Station, MTRCL previously proposed two locations and submitted initial design proposals to the relevant government departments for consideration and consultation with the local community. However, the proposals were rejected. As the Government will implement the Area Improvement Plan for the Shopping Areas of Mong Kok, which includes a greening project for Nullah Road, MTRCL is making initial contact with the relevant department implementing the project to explore the feasibility of providing a public toilet under this programme.

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