

LCQ8: Service and safety of MTR West Rail Line

Following is a question by the Hon Tam Yiu-chung and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (May 11):

Question:

Some members of the public have reflected to me that owing to the growing population in areas along the MTR West Rail Line in Tuen Mun, Yuen Long and Tsuen Wan in recent years, the demand for services of the West Rail Line and other modes of transport by local residents continues to increase. Yet, in reply to a question of a Member of this Council in January this year, the authorities said that the average loading of the West Rail Line was 58%, even at the busiest period of the morning peak hours, which showed that service was sufficient to cater for passenger demand, and as such, there was no need to increase the number of train cars at this stage. Regarding the service and safety of the West Rail Line, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether it knows the average daily passenger trips and increases in the number of passengers of the West Rail Line respectively in the past three years;

(b) if it knows whether or not the passenger trips in (a) have included the number of people who changed to the West Rail Line at various interchange stations; if so, of the way of computing the number; if not, the reasons for that, and whether the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) will review the computation of occupancy rates and include the number of people changing to the West Rail Line so as to truly reflect the actual passenger trips, and increase the number of train cars of the West Rail Line from the present seven cars to nine cars which is the original design standard with a view to ameliorating the crowded condition; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(c) whether, since October last year, it has looked into the reasons why cracks were found in a large number of bridge columns of the West Rail Line last year and taken follow-up actions on its safety and also requested MTRCL to review whether safety reasons have resulted in MTRCL not being able to increase the number of train cars of the West Rail Line to the original design standard of nine cars; if so, of the results; if not, the reason for that; and

(d) if it knows whether in the near future MTRCL will increase the train frequency of the West Rail Line from the urban area to the New Territories during nighttime so as to ease the crowded condition; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

For the various parts of the question, our reply is set out below -

(a) The average daily number of passengers entering the West Rail Line in the past 3 years is set out below:

Year	Average Daily Number of Passengers Entering the West Rail Line	Year-on-year Change
2008	223,000	-
2009	298,000	+34%
2010	333,000	+12%

(b) and (d) As the MTR railway network operates as an open system, passengers can interchange to different railway lines after entering the network. Therefore MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) does not have ridership information for each individual railway line or actual number of passengers making interchanges between railway lines. Since passengers pass through entry and exit gates when they enter and exit the network, the number of passengers entering and exiting each individual railway line is recorded.

When formulating train frequencies and service levels of railway lines, MTRCL considers a number of factors including train loading in the busiest section and during the busiest period, and situation of passengers waiting at platforms through site observations, in addition to the number of passengers entering the railway lines.

During the early stage of operations of the West Rail Line in 2003, trains ran at a frequency of 3.5 minutes during peak periods, with a carrying capacity of 39,900

per hour in one direction. Following the opening of the Kowloon Southern Link in 2009, which extended the West Rail Line from Nam Cheong Station to Hung Hom Station, train frequency has been enhanced to 3 minutes, raising the carrying capacity to 46,900 per hour in one direction in order to meet the anticipated passenger growth.

Currently, the period between 8am and 9am on a weekday is the busiest on the West Rail Line with the busiest section being the one from Kam Sheung Road Station to Tsuen Wan West Station. The average number of passengers carried in this section is 27,400 per hour (Note), and the average train loading is 58%. As such, the current train service and its level are sufficient to cater for the passenger demand. According to the site observations at platforms conducted by MTRCL from time to time, most passengers can board the first arriving train during the period between 8am and 9am at stations between Tuen Mun Station and Kam Sheung Road Station.

With regard to the service during the nighttime, taking the period between 8pm and 10pm as an example, the average carrying capacity for the busiest section from Tsuen Wan West Station to Kam Sheung Road Station is 21,100 per hour in one direction. The average number of passengers carried in this section is 8,300 per hour, and the average train loading is about 40%. The current service is sufficient to meet the need of passengers.

MTRCL will continue to closely monitor the patronage of the West Rail Line and make service adjustments if necessary to meet the overall passenger demand.

(c) MTRCL has been conducting visual inspections and hammer tapping tests regularly to monitor the building structures of the West Rail Line (including the viaduct piers) and the condition of the cracks. During the annual inspection of the structures of the viaducts of the West Rail Line in March 2010, 16 were found to have minor surface cracks that would require repair. The concerned repair works commenced in August 2010 and are expected to be completed in 2011.

MTRCL understands the public concern of the matter and has already engaged an independent consultancy firm to conduct a detailed structural assessment of the condition of the cracks. The assessment has been completed and the findings indicate that the viaduct piers are structurally safe on the whole. The Buildings Department agrees with the aforementioned findings and is now following up with the independent consultancy firm on some technical details.

As to whether the number of cars of a train on the West Rail Line will be increased, according to MTRCL, considerations are made based on passenger demand and it is not related to the aforementioned issue of cracks.

Note: Number of passengers entering stations in the Northwest New Territories (i.e. stations between Tuen Mun Station and Kam Sheung Road Station), excluding those who exit at stations within the area.

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