

LCQ11: Impacts of Japan's earthquake on repair parts for public transport vehicles

Following is a question by the Dr Hon Pan Pey-chyou and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng in the Legislative Council today (June 15):

Question:

Earlier on, some practitioners in the public transport industry relayed to me that some repair parts for public transport vehicles had been in tight supply or out of stock since the earthquake in Japan, and given that quite a number of public transport vehicles were imported from Japan, the aforesaid situation may have different degrees of impact on their daily repairs. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether it knows for how long the stock of repair parts kept by the MTR Corporation Limited, franchised bus companies and the local agents of public light buses and taxis can last under normal circumstances;

(b) whether it knows if the stock of repair parts for the transport vehicles in (a) is still sufficient since the earthquake in Japan; if so, for how many months the current stock can last; if not, of the number of such repair parts which have been out of stock or experiencing disruption to their supply for more than a month;

(c) whether it knows, among the existing repair parts for the various public transport vehicles, of the number of those which need to be imported from Japan, and if all such parts can be substituted by those manufactured elsewhere; and

(d) whether the Government has assessed the impact of the tight supply or shortages of mechanical parts which are made in Japan on the operation and repairs of the various public transport vehicles in Hong Kong, and what measures the authorities have to address and monitor the situation?

Reply:

President,

The Government has all along attached great importance to the safe operation and service level of public transport vehicles, and kept in view the operation of the industry through regular meetings with public transport operators and the trade. As far as we know, immediately after the major earthquake that occurred in Japan on March 11, 2011, local vehicle agents once reflected to the trade that some vehicle manufacturers in Japan had suspended their production because of various problems such as aftermath of the earthquake and insufficient electricity supply. However, since the incident has happened for some time, vehicle manufacturers in Japan have generally resumed normal operation.

Our reply to various parts of the question is as follows:

(a) and (b) According to the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), under normal circumstances, the company keeps six to nine months' stock of various types of repair parts. Currently, about 700 types of MTRCL's repair parts (7% of all types) are imported from Japan. After the major earthquake that occurred in Japan on March 11, 2011, MTRCL has switched to procuring these repair parts from other countries or regions, and most of the parts can be purchased from countries or regions other than Japan. In fact, MTRCL has been able to keep a normal stock of repair parts since the major earthquake in Japan occurred.

Buses manufactured in Japan represent less than 1% of the entire franchised bus fleet. According to the franchised bus companies, only a few of their bus spare parts are imported from Japan and they will generally keep not less than three months' stock of spare parts. Since the major earthquake occurred in Japan in March 2011, the franchised bus companies have not encountered any problem concerning shortage of spare parts.

In addition, we have also checked with local public light bus (PLB) and taxi agents about the supply situation of repair parts. In general, they keep one to two months' stock of frequently-used original repair parts. According to the agents, their stock remains sufficient and the supply of vehicle repair parts has not been affected by this major earthquake in Japan.

(c) According to the MTRCL, some original spare parts of a small proportion of equipment purchased from Japan cannot be replaced by parts produced in other countries or regions and therefore still have to be ordered from the original equipment manufacturers in Japan. To ensure the availability of such spare parts, MTRCL has

contacted the suppliers in Japan immediately after the earthquake and obtained their confirmation of a sustainable supply of spare parts. In addition, for prudence's sake, MTRCL has also placed additional orders for these parts from the suppliers in Japan and arranged for their early delivery to ensure that a sufficient stock can be maintained.

With regard to the supply of repair parts for PLBs and taxis, apart from the original spare parts imported from Japan, ample amount of replacement spare parts produced in other countries or regions are available as alternatives. The supply of these replacement spare parts currently remains normal. According to information provided by the PLB and taxi agents as well as the vehicle maintenance trade, at present, there is no problem with the supply of either the original repair parts produced in Japan or of those repair parts made in other countries or regions. As for the franchised bus companies, as mentioned above, only a few bus spare parts are imported from Japan and this major earthquake in Japan has not led to any shortage of spare parts.

(d) Given that vehicle manufacturers in Japan have generally resumed normal operation, MTRCL, the franchised bus companies as well as local PLB and taxi agents have indicated that the stock and delivery of repair parts remain sufficient and normal, and that replacement spare parts produced in other countries or regions are available in the market, the earthquake in Japan does not have any impact on the operation or maintenance of public transport vehicles in Hong Kong. The Administration will continue to maintain close liaison with the public transport operators and the transport trade through regular meetings, and monitor the progress on recovery in Japan to ensure that the safe operation of public transport vehicles will not be affected by the shortage of spare parts.

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