

LCQ16: Programme for the Shatin to Central Link project

\*\*\*\*\*

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Yau Shing-mu, at the Legislative Council meeting today (July 6):

Question:

According to the original plan of the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), the Tai Wai to Hung Hom section and the Hung Hom to Admiralty section of the Shatin to Central Link (SCL) are scheduled for commissioning in 2018 and 2020 respectively. However, as affected by the litigation relating to the environmental impact assessment (EIA) reports for the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) local projects, MTRCL has earlier on withdrawn three EIA reports on SCL. Previously, in reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council, the Secretary for Transport and Housing said that there were still considerable uncertainties as to whether the programme for the SCL project might be affected. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) as it has been reported that the East Rail Line (ERL), the Ma On Shan Line and the two major interchange stations, namely Tai Wai Station and Kowloon Tong Station, are at present already very crowded, whether the authorities know if MTRCL has assessed the respective increases in the numbers of passengers using the two extensions and the two interchange stations from now on until the commissioning of SCL as originally planned; whether it has assessed the impact of each year of delay in the commissioning of SCL on the crowdedness of the two extensions and the two major interchange stations;

(b) whether a task force will be formed by the relevant government departments, MTRCL and other public transport operators to study how to coordinate and deploy different transport modes to meet the transport demand of members of the public before the commissioning of SCL in case it is delayed; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(c) as MTRCL once indicated that the installation of platform screen doors for SCL and ERL would be implemented in parallel, whether the authorities know if MTRCL will pursue the two projects separately by according priority to the planning and

installation of platform screen doors for ERL in view of the possible delay of the commissioning of SCL; if MTRCL will do so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Shatin to Central Link (SCL) has a total length of 17 kilometres. In the light of the design and construction method used in different regions along the SCL, the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) has set out the environment impact assessment (EIA) together with the adopted environmental mitigation measures for different sections of the SCL project in three EIA reports. However, in view of the court's judgement of the EIA reports of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) local projects, the MTRCL, for the sake of prudence, decided on April 21 this year to withdraw the three EIA reports so as to review the contents of the report.

Our original plan is to complete the statutory consultation process and statutory EIA process in 2012, and then submitted the case to the Executive Council for consideration of authorisation to take forward the project. We aim to commence construction works in 2012, and complete the Tai Wai to Hung Hom section in 2018 and the Hung Hom to Admiralty Section in 2020. However, as we need to review the three EIA reports of the SCL project in accordance with the court's judgement regarding the EIA reports of the HZMB local projects, and if this work takes time and we cannot complete within this year, the original programme for the SCL project may be affected.

At this stage, it is difficult to estimate the time required for the review of the three EIA reports of the SCL. We and the MTRCL are carefully examining the new EIA requirements laid down by the court's judgement regarding the HZMB local projects and how to meet such requirements in the EIA process. We need to discuss with the Environmental Protection Department the views in this regard. It is only after having a clear understanding of how to handle the requirements of the judgement that we can assess how to deal with the three affected EIA reports of the SCL, and the complexity of and time required for the work. We would then be in a better position to assess whether there will be any delay in the SCL programme.

The following is our reply to question by items:

(a) Currently, the busiest sections of the East Rail Line and Ma On Shan Line are the Tai Wai to Kowloon Tong section and the Che Kung Temple to Tai Wai section respectively. During the morning peak hours, the patronage figures in 2010 at these two lines are 56 400 and 14 400. We estimate that there will be a cumulative increase of about 7% in the patronage figures for these two sections during peak hours before the SCL Tai Wai to Hung Hom section comes into operation in 2018. We estimate that there will be a further increase of about 2% up to 2020 for the Tai Wai to Kowloon Tong section and virtually no change for the Che Kung Temple to Tai Wai section before the Hung Hom to Admiralty section comes into operation. Regarding the number of passengers using the Kowloon Tong Station and the Tai Wai Station, currently the peak hours usage are 48 600 and 33 600 respectively. These include passengers entering and leaving the stations, as well as those interchanging between railway lines inside the station. We estimate that there will be a cumulative increase of about 17% and about 6% in the station usage for these two stations respectively in the morning peak hours before the SCL Tai Wai to Hung Hom section comes into operation in 2018. The station usage of these two stations will remain more or less the same before the SCL Hung Hom to Admiralty section is commissioned in 2020.

(b) The planned capacity of the East Rail Line and the Ma On Shan Line is able to cope with the above estimated patronage increase before the full commissioning of the SCL in 2020. At this stage, it is still our goal to strive for commencement of construction works in 2012 and commissioning the SCL project in 2020. Whether the programme of the SCL project will be affected is not yet known as at this stage there are still many uncertainties. We will closely monitor the patronage of the East Rail Line and Ma On Shan Line. Depending on the actual situation, we will study the need to introduce mitigation measures in case that the SCL is opened to traffic later than 2020. In fact, in drawing up the service timetable for each railway line, MTRCL has already taken into consideration the travelling patterns of passengers and patronage of different areas and stations. The Transport Department (TD) will examine the reports submitted by MTRCL regularly on its service performance. TD will also conduct on-site investigations and inspections to ensure that railway service meets passenger demand. If necessary, TD will urge MTRCL to adjust its service arrangements based on changes in passenger demand within the constraints of the operational system (such as the signalling system and number of available tracks).

(c) To implement the installation of platform screen doors along the East Rail Line in conjunction with the implementation of the SCL project is a reasonable solution to

resolve the problem of platform screen doors. Under the current progress of the SCL project, our goal is still to start construction works in 2012. But whether this schedule will be affected is not yet known as at this stage there are many uncertainties. We will closely monitor the progress of the project, and if necessary, to review the schedule of the project and the related issues in due course.

Ends/Wednesday, July 6, 2011

Issued at HKT 17:13