

LCQ17: Cycling safety

Following is a question by the Hon Miriam Lau Kin-yee and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (October 19):

Questions:

Hong Kong's cycling athletes achieved excellent results in international sporting events, and cycling has become an increasingly popular sport in the territory, but serious bicycle accidents occur rather frequently. The number of persons so far killed in traffic accidents this year involving bicycles has exceeded the relevant figure for the whole of last year. Early last month, two fatal traffic accidents involving bicycles occurred one after another within four days in Shatin District, arousing concern about cycling safety. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the respective numbers of traffic accidents involving bicycles which occurred on cycle tracks and at other locations in the past three years, as well as the casualties involved;

(b) of the number of prosecutions instituted by the Police against cyclists who breached road traffic laws in the past three years, together with a breakdown of such number by the offence involved and, among such cases, the percentage of those in which the cyclists were convicted, as well as the heaviest and lowest penalties imposed for each type of offences involved;

(c) whether the authorities have assessed which sections of cycle tracks are accident black spots; if they have, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(d) given that certain sections of existing cycle tracks located in Shatin, Tai Po, the North District and Tseung Kwan O are connected to carriageways and certain sections even terminate abruptly, and cyclists have to use the carriageways together with other vehicles, whether the Government will conduct a comprehensive review of the design of existing cycle tracks and carry out improvement works to enhance the safety level of cycle tracks; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(e) whether the authorities will reconsider requiring cyclists to use safety gear (such as safety helmets, gloves or reflective clothing, etc.), so as to enhance the safety of cyclists; if they will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(f) of the current progress of the policies and measures implemented by the Government to enhance public awareness of cycling safety?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong is densely populated. To address the problems of traffic congestion and air pollution, the Government has been actively implementing the policy of using the public transport system as the main transport mode and encouraging the public to make use of the highly efficient mass transit transport systems and other public transport services. Any measure to encourage cycling as a means for commuting must take into account the fact that Hong Kong is a small city with a dense population and concentrated development, and cycling safety should be the most important consideration. While we have well-developed road network and public transport system in Hong Kong, our road traffic is heavy and the roads and footpaths are highly congested, making it difficult to provide spaces to develop tracks designated for cycling. Allowing a large number of bicycles to use busy roads together with other vehicles in urban areas without providing designated cycle tracks will increase the risk of accidents.

In view of the above safety consideration, the Government does not encourage the public to use the bicycle as a transport mode in urban areas. Compared with urban areas, new towns in the New Territories or new development areas, where density is relatively low, have better conditions for using bicycle for short-distance travel. If situation permits, we will provide cycle tracks and ancillary facilities in new towns and new development areas to enable the public to cycle safely for recreational purposes and short distance travel.

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

(a) The numbers of accidents involving bicycles and the casualties involved as categorised by whether the accidents occurred on cycle tracks over the past three years are at Annex I.

(b) The numbers of prosecutions against cyclist offenders over the past three years are at Annex II. The Police does not have information on the percentage of cyclist offenders who are convicted and the penalties incurred in the related cases.

(c) The Government has been very concerned about cycling safety and conducts regular inspection on cycle tracks and ancillary facilities to ensure that they are kept in good conditions. To further enhance safety of cycle tracks, the Transport Department (TD) has engaged a consultant to study the records of cycling accidents, analyse major contributory factors regarding accident-prone sections, and recommend specific and feasible improvement options. The consultant will study in the first stage the records of cycling accidents along cycle tracks in Shatin and Tai Po over the past three years. The study is scheduled for completion in mid-2012.

(d) When developing cycle tracks, the TD will give due consideration to the track design including alignment, curvature, gradient, width and visibility. Sufficient ancillary facilities including lighting, traffic signs, road markings and guard rails will also be provided along the tracks to protect the safety of cyclists and other road users. Furthermore, the Civil Engineering and Development Department is constructing a trunk cycle network and ancillary facilities linking various new towns between Ma On Shan and Tuen Mun in phases.

Since 2009, the TD has been examining with the Highways Department the feasibility of using plastic speed reducing bollards on cycle tracks. Compared with metal speed reducing bollards, plastic speed reducing bollards are made of more flexible and elastic materials, and hence are effective in alleviating the problem of cyclists getting injured by hitting the bollards accidentally. Plastic speed reducing bollards have been put on trial on some cycle tracks in Shatin and Ma On Shan and the trial was successful. The TD plans to extend this measure to other cycle tracks in phases.

Separately, the TD has commissioned a consultancy study on further improvements to cycle tracks and interconnection of cycle track networks in new towns. The TD will conduct district consultation on a series of improvement measures proposed by the consultant, and will then select a suitable district to carry out a pilot scheme to test the effectiveness of various proposed measures. Depending on the results of the pilot scheme and taking into account the physical environment of individual areas and the views of local communities, the TD will study and set out the

arrangements to further promote the various improvement measures.

(e) The Administration has always encouraged cyclists to use personal protective gear including safety helmets, protective pads and, for nighttime cycling, reflective clothing. The TD's promotional pamphlets and leaflets on cycling safety also describe the details of such equipment.

According to a research conducted by the TD, mandatory wearing of safety helmets by cyclists is not a commonly adopted international practice. Most overseas places, e.g. the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark, South Korea and Singapore, do not mandate the wearing of safety helmets by cyclists. A few places, such as Australia, New Zealand and (some provinces of) Canada, have laws requiring all cyclists to wear safety helmets. Separately, some overseas studies reveal that such a legislative requirement may discourage cycling activities. The requirement may not be acceptable to the public and may be difficult to enforce. Given the mainstream practice in overseas countries of enhancing cycling safety via education and publicity and considering the impact of enforcement and prosecution actions to the community as well as public acceptability, we are of the view that it is, at the present stage, a more practical approach to promote cycling safety (including the use of personal safety gear) by means of education and publicity, coupled with continual improvement to the infrastructural facilities that could improve cycling safety.

We are also collecting views and related information on cycling from the public through the Travel Characteristics Survey. We will keep a close watch on the approaches adopted by other places, and review this issue when appropriate.

(f) The Government has all along attached great importance to cycling safety. Given the increasing popularity of cycling as a sport, the TD, Police and Road Safety Council (RSC) are enhancing public awareness on cycling safety via such means and measures as publicity, education and enforcement. On publicity and education, the Police, TD and RSC will organise activities on cycling education and safety to promote the use of safety gear as well as the rules of cycling and the proper use of bicycles. They will distribute promotional leaflets and display banners and posters to advise cyclists to follow traffic rules on one hand, and advise motorists to pay attention to bicycles on the road on the other. The RSC will broadcast brand new promotional messages on cycling safety on TV and radio in the later half of the year. Also, the TD plans to launch the internet based Cycling Information Centre to provide

the public with convenient access to cycling-related legislation and information. The TD is also planning to produce a short ten-minute video to educate the public the proper ways to ride bicycles and relevant traffic rules.

On enforcement, the Police launches regular enforcement exercises against cycling offences, and instill awareness of cycling safety in the community at the same time.

The Government will continue to adopt the multi-prong approach of making use of means such as publicity, education and enforcement to strengthen the awareness of cycling safety among the public.

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