

LCQ12: Construction works of the Hong Kong section of Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link

Following is a question by the Hon Cheung Hok-ming and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, in the Legislative Council today (November 30):

Question:

Since the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) commenced the tunnelling works for the Hong Kong section of Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) last year, quite a number of residents in the villages have relayed to me that MTRCL conducts tunnel blasts regardless of night or day in order to meet deadlines, and the villagers are disturbed by the noise nuisance and are unable to sleep at night. Such villagers have also pointed out that because of the vigorous blasting works, vertical cracks appear on the walls of the village houses in the vicinity of the construction sites, gaps are found between the external walls of the houses and the ground, settlement in buildings and falling groundwater tables are detected, and other serious problems also prevail. Regarding the progress and safety issues of the XRL project, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the latest progress of the XRL project;

(b) whether it has assessed and measured the intensity of shock generated by the tunnel blasting works concerned in respect of three aspects, namely the extent of damages made to the affected buildings on the ground, changes in topography and people's feelings; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and whether it will make public the findings as soon as possible after making the assessment and measurements; and

(c) whether it knows the total number of complaints received since the commencement of the works by the authorities and MTRCL about the problems caused to the buildings and the topography in the vicinity of the construction sites as a result of the impact of the XRL project, the problems concerned and the measures taken to deal with them?

Reply:

President,

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

(a) Construction works for the Hong Kong section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) commenced in January 2010 and are progressing smoothly. Foundation works for the West Kowloon Terminus are substantially completed, while various related construction works in Yau Tsim Mong, Sham Shui Po, Kwai Tsing, Tsuen Wan and Yuen Long, en-route areas of the railway alignment, have started successively. As the Hong Kong section of the XRL runs in a dedicated tunnel throughout, the tunnels are built mainly by using tunnel boring machines (TBMs) and the drill and blast method. We have briefed the relevant district councils on the construction methods of the tunnels. We also keep liaising with the relevant communities on the works arrangement in the light of progress of the drilling and blasting works.

On tunnel boring, the first TBM was activated in September 2011 and has bored through 80 metres so far. Separately, tunnel drilling and blasting works in Tsuen Wan commenced in November 2010, while those in Kwai Tsing and Yuen Long began in 2011 gradually.

It is expected that civil works (including tunnel drilling and blasting) for the main tunnel will be completed in 2013 and the Hong Kong section of the XRL will be completed in 2015 as scheduled.

(b) We will do our best to minimise the impact of the works on the public during the construction of the XRL project.

As early as the project design stage, we carried out careful and comprehensive assessments on the geological conditions and structures in the vicinity of the works areas to ensure that the construction works and the methods employed would not affect the structural safety of nearby structures. In addition, we conducted an environmental impact assessment as required under the Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance on the Hong Kong section of the XRL, in which the environmental impact during the construction and operation of the railway was carefully evaluated and corresponding mitigation measures were proposed.

In the course of the drilling and blasting works, the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) and their contractor will stringently implement various safety measures and codes of practice concerned, and will strictly observe all relevant legislation and requirements, including the mitigation measures specified in the Environmental Permit for alleviating environmental impact. Also, the MTRCL and their contractor have installed monitoring points to oversee the works by checking such relevant data as measurements on noise and vibration, with a view to monitoring the impact of the works on the adjacent environment and structures for enhancing public safety and minimising environmental impact.

Every time when blasting works are carried out, the airflow and vibration caused will be measured at both ends of the tunnel and nearby monitoring points. Up to now, the data recorded, including those on airflow and vibration, have not exceeded the corresponding statutory ceilings or jeopardised the structural safety of adjacent buildings. The noise generated during the works has not gone beyond the relevant statutory limit either.

During construction, the MTRCL and their contractor will try to minimise the impact of works on the neighbourhood, and maintain close contact and communication throughout with residents concerned by such measures as giving explanation to relevant dwellers, owners' committees / corporations, village representatives, district councillors and local communities and addressing their concerns; organising community liaison group meetings; distributing XRL Newsletters and pamphlets on tunnel drilling and blasting works; and arranging site inspections for district councillors and local personalities to inspect the works and be briefed by engineers on the works procedures and safety measures taken.

(c) We have so far received 80 reports on damage to relevant land lots and buildings suspected to have been caused by the works. Upon receipt of such reports, the MTRCL and their contractor will visit the damaged lots or buildings within one working day to conduct investigation. If the damage is proved to have been caused by the works, repairs will be carried out as soon as possible; if proved otherwise, the MTRCL will also inform the clients of the investigation results. On some occasions, the MTRCL will, at the request of the clients, refer the cases to notaries public for objective and fair arbitration to safeguard the interests of local residents.

Ends/Wednesday, November 30, 2011

Issued at HKT 12:15