

## Executive Council authorises South Island Line (East) Scheme

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The Chief Executive in Council today ( November 30) authorised the South Island Line (SIL) (East) under the Railways Ordinance.

The SIL (East) is a seven-kilometre long railway that will provide domestic passenger services between Admiralty and South Horizons, with three intermediate stations near Ocean Park, and at Wong Chuk Hang and Lei Tung Estate. Passengers will be able to interchange at Admiralty for the existing MTR Island Line, Tsuen Wan Line and the future Shatin to Central Link. The SIL (East) will run in tunnels and viaducts according to topography.

"The SIL (East) will help reduce road traffic in the Southern District, particularly the Aberdeen Tunnel. With the SIL (East), passengers will be able to travel from South Horizons to Admiralty in about 10 minutes, as compared with 25 to 45 minutes by using road-based transport during rush hours," a government spokesman said.

"The SIL (East) will enhance the railway network on Hong Kong Island. It will not only save travelling time for residents of Southern District, facilitating tourism and commercial developments in the district, but also help improve connectivity of the commercial and industrial area in Wong Chuk Hang, thus revitalising and bringing along business opportunities to the area," he added.

"The Government and the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) have proactively engaged the local community, including the Southern District Council, extensively in the last few years in formulating the railway scheme of the SIL (East). It has been the common desire of the local residents for the early implementation of this project,"the spokesman said.

The SIL (East) railway scheme was first gazetted on July 24, 2009 and amendments to the scheme were gazetted on June 4, 2010. Following receipt of objections, the Government and the MTRCL carefully studied the grounds of objections, met the objectors to explain the railway scheme and addressed their concerns. Changes to the SIL (East) scheme have been made as far as practicable in response to public views and some of the objections. Hearing sessions were conducted by non-official members of Railway Objections Hearing Panel on those

objections not withdrawn. All unwithdrawn objections were submitted to the Executive Council for consideration.

"To continue effective communication with the community, the MTRCL, in the course of implementing the SIL (East), will establish community liaison groups comprising representatives of the concerned and affected parties, including owners' corporations, owners' committees, management offices, local committees and schools in the affected areas. The MTRCL will also have to comply with the conditions to be set out in the Environmental Permit by the Director of Environmental Protection to keep the disturbance to the environment to acceptable levels," he added.

The SIL is one of the major infrastructure projects the Chief Executive announced in his Policy Address in October 2007. Implementation of the SIL (East) will create 2,500 jobs during construction in the next few years and another 2,100 jobs during the operation stage.

"The SIL (East) will be implemented as an MTRCL project under the ownership approach. The cost estimate of the SIL (East) in 2006 prices was over \$7 billion and the project was not considered as financially viable. Construction prices have escalated by about 55% from 2006 to 2009 due to the surge in construction material prices. Apart from this, refinement of the project details and amendments in the detailed design in response to public views and technical needs also account for the cost increase. According to the MTRCL's recent assessment in 2009 prices, the estimated construction cost of SIL (East) ranges from \$12.3 billion to \$12.6 billion.

"The MTRCL is finalising the detailed design of the rail project, which may entail final technical fine-tuning. This may have a minor impact on the project cost. We expect the final cost to be available in the first quarter of 2011. The Administration will continue close monitoring of the project expenditure and ensure MTRCL will exercise due diligence in budget control. We have also engaged an independent consultant to conduct an assessment of the project cost estimate and the funding gap," the spokesman added.

A site at the ex-Wong Chuk Hang Estate has been reserved for rail plus property development for the SIL (East). The proposed development requires rezoning of the ex-Wong Chuk Hang Estate site to "Comprehensive Development Area", which is being processed under the Town Planning Ordinance. The spokesman said that the Administration will carefully consider and scrutinise the MTRCL's development

proposal and has engaged an independent consultant for assistance.

"We will give due consideration to ensure that the funding support is fair and reasonable, without affecting the prudent commercial principle in railway operation," the spokesman said.

Construction work for the SIL (East) is expected to commence in mid-2011 for completion in 2015.

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