

LCQ17: Traffic lights

Following is a question by the Hon Wong Kwok-hing and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (January 5):

Question:

It has been reported that Hong Kong's neighbouring places such as the Mainland, Taiwan and Macao have already installed countdown devices for both vehicular and pedestrian traffic lights. Yet, Hong Kong only provides flashing signal reminders for pedestrian crossing lights, making it difficult for pedestrians to know the time left for crossing the road. Moreover, it has been reported that since Hong Kong has also not installed countdown devices for reminding drivers about traffic light signal changes, it is difficult for drivers to judge the road conditions, thereby increasing the risk of accidents. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the total number of traffic accidents that happened at pedestrian crossings with light signals, as well as the percentage of such number in the total number of traffic accidents in the past three years;

(b) given that in June 2008 the Transport Department (TD), in its paper for the Panel on Transport of this Council, indicated that before dismantling the countdown devices installed on trial, it had provided detailed explanations in relation to the findings of the study on the use of countdown devices and its plan to dismantle such devices to the Traffic and Transport Committees of the relevant District Councils ("DCs"), of the DCs that TD had consulted on dismantling the countdown devices; whether those DCs had voted on this subject; if the DCs had voted, of the voting results; and

(c) given that, although TD's findings in 2006 from a study on the countdown devices installed at 15 trial locations indicated that such devices "encouraged" pedestrians to rush across the road during the flashing green signal, and TD had also pointed out that its research on overseas practice found that countdown devices were not standard equipment at signalised crossings, it has been reported that apart from the Mainland, Macao and Taiwan which have already installed such countdown devices, the United States, Germany and Japan will also introduce the "Little Green Man" animated

countdown device pioneered by Taiwan, whether the authorities will reconsider and study the installation of countdown devices so as to follow such international trend?

Reply:

President,

The design and operation of the traffic lights currently used in Hong Kong are comparable with those in advanced countries and in line with international standards to ensure road safety. All along, we have educated the public about the code on proper use of traffic lights through road safety publicity activities. A "Green man" light means that pedestrians may cross the road if it is safe to do so. A flashing "Green man" light means that pedestrians must not start to cross the road. If they have already started crossing the road, they should keep going at a steady pace and they will have adequate time to finish crossing or reach a central refuge safely. A "Red man" light means that pedestrians must not cross the road. As regards vehicular traffic lights, a green light means that drivers may move across the junction if it is safe to do so. A red light means that drivers must stop behind the stop line. An amber light means that drivers must stop unless they are so close to the junction that stopping suddenly might cause an accident. The operation of traffic lights and the code are clear, straightforward and well-established. Road users are very familiar with them.

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

(a) The numbers of traffic accidents at signalised pedestrian crossings involving pedestrian casualty and their percentage in the total number of traffic accidents over the past three years are at Annex.

(b) The Transport Department (TD), in conjunction with the City University of Hong Kong, conducted a study on Pedestrian Flashing Green Countdown Display (PFGCD) from February to October 2006 at 15 trial crossing sites in various districts. The findings showed that as pedestrians tended to have different perception of the time needed for crossing the road, the information provided by PFGCD somehow encouraged some pedestrians to chance crossing the road during the flashing green man signal, thus exposing more pedestrians to risk and causing adverse impact on road safety. In July 2007, the TD wrote to the relevant District Councils (DCs) to explain the findings of the study at the trial crossing sites and the arrangements for

terminating the trial. The DCs concerned included the Tsuen Wan, Tai Po, Central and Western, Wong Tai Sin, Kowloon City, Kwun Tong, Eastern, Sham Shui Po, Sai Kung, Kwai Tsing and Yau Tsim Mong DCs. Most of them made no comments. The TD was also invited to attend meetings of the Eastern, Sham Shui Po, Sai Kung and Tsuen Wan DCs to provide more detailed explanations and discuss the findings of the PFGCD trial. Among the DCs consulted, only the Sai Kung DC took a vote favouring the re-installation of the PFGCD at Tong Chuen Street/Po Yap Road in Tseung Kwan O.

(c) The "Little Green Man" animated countdown device is a variation of the pedestrian traffic light countdown devices. It shows numbers and animation to indicate the remaining time of the pedestrian phase, with an operation principle similar to that of other countdown devices in general.

The Administration follows closely international development in the use of pedestrian and vehicular traffic countdown devices. No conclusion has yet been reached on whether pedestrian traffic light countdown devices should be adopted. However, findings of the TD's previous trials showed that PFGCD encouraged pedestrians to chance dashing out of the pavement during the flashing green man signal, thus posing adverse impact on road safety.

As regards vehicular traffic light countdown devices, so far there has been no research data to support their effectiveness in enhancing road safety. In recent years, studies in Taiwan found that vehicular traffic light countdown devices would increase the traffic accident rate, and therefore recommended ceasing their use. Such devices have not been installed in overseas countries such as the UK and Australia. While they are used in some parts of the Mainland cities, countdown devices are not standard installation at signalised junctions. To the TD's knowledge, there are no reports confirming that such devices are effective in enhancing road safety.

The Administration will continue to follow closely the international development and research on the matter and conduct a review as appropriate in due course.

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