

LCQ19: MTR trains' carrying capacity and services

Following is a question by the Hon Ip Wai-ming and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (January 12):

Question:

In order to complement the development of new towns and tie in with the transport policy of using railway as the backbone in the long-run, several railway lines have been commissioned in recent years in Hong Kong to serve residents in remote areas. Yet, quite a number of residents have relayed that in respect of some railway lines, train frequency is low, the train compartments are crowded with insufficient seats and, as a result, they find it inconvenient to take a long-distance train ride. Besides, the surveys conducted by some groups have indicated that 80% of the cases of women being sexually harassed on public transport occurred inside MTR train compartments. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether it knows the respective frequency, number of cars, patronage, occupancy rate and number of seats of the trains on various railway lines at different time slots (set out in the table below);

Railway Line	East Rail Line	West Rail Line	Tung Chung Line	Ma On Shan Line	Tseung Kwan O Line	Light Rail
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Peak hour
frequency

Off-peak
frequency

Design
capacity
of the
line

Current
average
daily
patronage

Current
average
peak hour
occupancy
rate

Current
average
off-peak
occupancy
rate

Number of
cars

Number of
train
seats

(b) whether at present the authorities have a set of assessment criteria or an assessment mechanism requiring the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) to make improvement to the lines on which train compartments are crowded because of a high occupancy rate (e.g. requiring MTRCL to increase train frequencies and the number of cars), so as to alleviate such situation;

(c) given that the number of cars of the trains on the Ma On Shan Line and West Rail Line has not yet reached its maximum, whether the authorities will request MTRCL to increase the number of cars of the trains on these lines as soon as possible in order to complement the future development of the new towns along the lines and cope with the increasing population in the districts;

(d) given that there is an upward trend in the number of cases of indecent assault and sexual harassment occurring in the compartments of MTR trains, and that female

passengers are more likely to fall victim in crowded train compartments during peak hours, whether the authorities will urge MTRCL to introduce women-only compartments for rush hours as soon as possible to reduce such sex crimes; if not, of the reasons for that; and

(e) given that in recent years, MTRCL have removed some seats in the train compartments and replaced them with additional handrails and perch seats in order to create more multi-purpose space inside the compartments, whether it knows the total number of seats removed by MTRCL from the trains of various railway lines since the implementation of the scheme and the number of cars involved; whether passengers had been consulted before the conversion scheme was conducted on various railway lines, and whether MTRCL will continue to implement the scheme in the future?

Reply:

President,

For the various parts of the question, our reply is set out below:

(a) MTRCL provides a convenient and efficient mass transit railway service for its passengers. At present, the MTR operates nine railway lines within the boundary of Hong Kong, carrying an average of 3.9 million passengers every weekday (i.e. Monday to Friday). The MTR also provides the Light Rail service in the Northwest New Territories by operating 12 routes, carrying more than 400,000 passengers every weekday.

As MTR is a mass transit system, its design has to cope with the need of a large volume of passengers. Therefore, MTRCL sets its service levels based on passenger travelling patterns and patronage in different areas in order to provide a level of service that meets the need of passengers. Moreover, MTRCL closely monitors the service level of each railway line and will adjust its service where necessary to meet the overall passenger demand.

Information provided by MTRCL on train frequencies of railway lines in different periods, number of cars on each train, train carrying capacity, train loading rates and number of seats is tabulated in the annex.

(b) 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) would examine the reports submitted by MTRCL regularly on its service performance. TD would 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 track available).

(c) Currently, the average loading of the Ma On Shan and West Rail Lines are 53% and 58% respectively, even at the busiest period of the morning peak hours, which shows that service is sufficient to cater for passenger demand. As such, there is no need to increase the number of train cars at this stage. However, when the Tai Wai to Hung Hom section of the proposed Shatin to Central Link (SCL) is commissioned in 2018, SCL will be linked up with the West Rail and Ma On Shan Lines without inter-changing, forming the East-West Corridor. The entire section of the railway would allow operation of eight-car trains.

(d) Hong Kong is one of the world's safest cities. The security of passengers travelling on the MTR network is looked after by the Railway District of the Hong Kong Police Force (the Police) and MTR staff. The number of crimes that happened in the railway accounts for about 1.3% of the total number of crimes in Hong Kong in 2009, which is low taking into account that an average of about 3.9 million passengers ride on the MTR each day.

MTR staff are trained to be on the alert for crime and they provide support and cooperation to the Police. Furthermore, MTRCL and the Police regularly hold joint anti-crime campaigns to raise passenger awareness on looking after their own safety as well as taking care of their belongings. MTRCL also puts up posters at MTR stations to encourage passengers not to remain silent and report incidents of indecent assault immediately to station staff or the Police should they encounter such occurrence.

MTRCL has looked into the suggestion of introducing female-only compartments. Drawing reference to overseas experiences, MTRCL noted that female-only train compartments are not a feature in most of the world's major railways. Only a few jurisdictions in the world such as Japan, Indonesia and Dubai offer them. Even then, female-only compartments are provided only during weekdays or during rush hours.

As most MTR trains are of an open design, introducing female-only compartments would reduce the flexibility of passenger movement between train compartments and affect evacuation arrangements. Staff will also have practical difficulties in controlling passengers from passing through train compartments. Furthermore, with trains calling in at platforms every two minutes or so during peak periods, it would be difficult for staff to physically stop male passengers from entering female-only compartments. Strict enforcement would also inevitably cause delay to train service.

Introducing female-only compartments on trains is not a practicable solution in Hong Kong's MTR system, which is one of the busiest railways in the world. MTRCL has no current plans to introduce female-only compartments on its railway lines. The Corporation would continue to work closely with the Police to take all reasonable measures to prevent crime within the railway premises for the security of passengers.

(e) MTRCL has all along been studying ways to provide better service to passengers (including persons with disabilities). For the convenience of passengers in wheelchair and those with baby prams or luggage, MTRCL launched a trial in May 2008 to introduce additional multi-purpose areas on three trains on the Island Line to allow four passengers in wheelchair to travel together in the same train car. After the launch of the trial, MTRCL interviewed about 360 passengers in July 2008 to gauge their views on the extended multi-purpose areas. 90% of the respondents was satisfied with the additional multi-purpose areas while 95% was of the view that the multi-purpose areas offered more convenience to passengers in wheelchair as well as those travelling with baby prams and luggage.

MTRCL announced at the end of 2008 that it would add three more multi-purpose areas in the middle four train compartments in each of the 106 trains operating on the Island Line, Tsuen Wan Line, Kwun Tong Line and Tseung Kwan O Line. This would bring the total number of multi-purpose areas to 20 on each train. In December 2009, MTRCL introduced fare concessions for recipients aged between 12 and 64 of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance with 100% disability and Disability Allowance. The fare concessions encourage persons with disabilities to get out more and take part in outside activities, helping them to further integrate into the society. The extended multi-purpose areas bring added convenience to persons with disabilities travelling on the MTR.

MTRCL interviewed 584 passengers again in October 2010 to collect their views on the addition of multi-purpose areas in train compartments. The results showed that some 80% of the respondents were supportive of the increased multi-purpose areas and more than 80% indicated that they would like to see more multi-purpose areas installed.

MTRCL has been closely monitoring the use of the new multi-purpose areas and observed that they are able to meet the needs of passengers, with smooth passenger flow being maintained while passengers in wheelchairs have found it easier to move around inside train compartments. For the convenience of other passengers, leaning ledges and straphangers are also being retrofitted in the multi-purpose areas as part of the programme.

MTRCL will gradually introduce additional multi-purpose areas to the trains on the Tsuen Wan, Kwun Tong and Tseung Kwan O Lines. The enhancement programme is expected to be completed within 2011.

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