

Phase I works of Express Rail Link at Choi Yuen Tsuen to commence soon

A spokesman for the Transport and Housing Bureau said today (January 18) that together with the agricultural sites resumed today, the Government has already taken possession of 85% of land in Choi Yuen Tsuen (CYT). The contractor will commence the first phase of construction works of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) at CYT very shortly.

Today's exercise involved only the resumption of land and not structures. Of the land taken over today, two pieces are farmland which are situated at locations crucial to the first phase of the construction works. The larger piece of farmland has always been Government Land. The villagers, who have been engaging in agricultural activities on this piece of Government Land for years, have collected the ex-gratia rehousing allowance; purchased Home Ownership Scheme flat with the comprehensive means test waived; and are granted over \$1 million crop ex-gratia allowances. As for the other smaller one, its ownership right has returned to the Government in accordance with the law since last year. The original landowner of this small private farmland has also collected land compensation and ex-gratia rehousing allowances, amounting over \$10 millions," the spokesman said.

The spokesman added that all the CYT villagers affected by the XRL project were granted reasonable compensations.

"Apart from granting land compensation and ex-gratia rehousing allowances to villagers, the Government has also approved all crop ex-gratia allowances and given the villagers sufficient time last year to harvest their crops for sale before handing over their farmland to the Administration."

If farmers were dissatisfied with the amount of the ex-gratia compensation, they could make further claims based on the record of crops taken by Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) last year. It was not necessary to retain the crops on the land. The AFCD had kept a complete record of the crops on the date of assessment of all the cases.

We have carried out phased land resumption in CYT since mid-October in 2010 and have so far recovered vacated land and agricultural sites and structures vacated by villagers who have moved out. The objective of phased land resumption is to take into

account the needs of both the XRL project and the villagers. Provided that the construction progress of the rail project will not be adversely affected, the Government has offered the villagers with the greatest flexibility and more time to arrange for their moving plans. So far, the villagers have been given more than three-month grace period," he stressed.

"At present, most of the villagers and business undertakings have already moved out from CYT and continued their living in the new homes. Among the remaining some 70 households, most of them opt for the collective agricultural resite plan. We will continue to implement land resumption in phases at this stage. We hope that the remaining villagers and their supporters will understand the Government's good will and complete their moving plans as soon as possible with full cooperation."

"We should understand that the construction works of XRL must be carried on and the grace period for villagers cannot be extended indefinitely. Due to the requirements of the construction works, we will erect extra hoarding on the resumed land in order to effectively protect the safety of villagers who have not yet moved out, and to minimise the impacts of the works on the environment."

The ownership right of all of the land in CYT now rested with the Government. A total of \$160 million of land compensation was granted to the CYT villagers who owned land (excluding land owners who were not residing in CYT). Most of the villagers had collected their land compensations. The crop ex-gratia allowances were extra sum of money which was unrelated to land right. The government had approved over \$13 million of crop ex-gratia allowances to CYT villagers. Most of the farmers had already collected their allowances.

The construction works at CYT is a key part of the XRL project and involves the diversion of the rivercourse, and hence the works has to be completed in the dry season. The schedule is very tight, therefore the government has to carry out the remaining land resumption as soon as possible, to ensure the construction progress of the XRL project will not be affected.

Ends/Tuesday, January 18, 2011

Issued at HKT 21:51