

LCQ 18: MTR facilities and services

Following is a question by the Hon Wong Sing-chi and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (January 19):

Question:

Regarding the design of train compartments and other facilities of the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), as well as the project of retrofitting platform screen doors and automatic platform gates at stations, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) given that in reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on June 9, 2010, the Secretary for Transport and Housing indicated that:

(i) MTRCL has encountered the problem of additional platform dwell time and some technical difficulties in the installation of automatic Mechanical Gap Fillers (MGFs) at station platforms of East Rail Line stations, and had to continue to study the matter, whether it knows the progress of the study conducted by MTRCL in respect of the operation of MGFs at present; and

(ii) amongst the 84 stations of MTRCL, public toilets are already available in 38, and except for Ngau Tau Kok, Prince Edward and Quarry Bay Stations, public toilets are available within a 200-metre distance of stations, whether it knows if MTRCL will plan to retrofit toilets at those stations where toilets are not available at present; if MTRCL will do so, the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that; whether MTRCL still requires passengers to use public toilets available within a 200-metre distance of stations at present; if so, the reasons for that; the respective progress of projects to retrofit toilets at Ngau Tau Kok and Quarry Bay Stations, as well as the feasibility study on retrofitting toilets at Prince Edward Station currently conducted by MTRCL; the estimated completion time of the projects concerned;

(b) given that in reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on November 3, 2010, the Secretary for Transport and Housing indicated that there were in total 375 passenger-on-track cases at stations without platform screen doors in the past five years, of the stations at which such cases occurred; whether it knows if MTRCL has

set out any specific timetable to retrofit platform screen doors or automatic platform gates for the East Rail Line and Ma On Shan Line; if so, the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(c) of the number of sex crimes which occurred within the area of MTR stations in the past five years, and among such cases, the respective numbers of victims, persons being charged and persons convicted, broken down by the nature of crime;

(d) of the measures implemented by the Government and MTRCL to prevent sex crimes from occurring within the area of MTR stations in the past three years, and whether they had reviewed the effectiveness of such measures; if they had, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; whether there are plans for enhancing such measures and introducing other new measures; if there are, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(e) given that MTRCL has already removed entire rows of seats in quite a number of train compartments and replaced them with additional handrails and perch seats, whether it knows the reasons why MTRCL has conducted such conversion works, and when the aforesaid works commenced; at present, the number of trains on which such works have been completed and the percentage of such number in the total number of trains; the lines served by those trains and the percentage of the number of such trains in the total number of trains of the lines concerned (listed by the name of the lines); the number of additional passengers that each train may carry upon the completion of the aforesaid conversion works as estimated by MTRCL;

(f) given that MTRCL launched the Priority Seats trial scheme in 2009 to encourage passengers to offer seats to those people in need, whether it knows if MTRCL has reviewed the effectiveness of the aforesaid trial scheme; if MTRCL has done so, the details; if not, the reasons for that; given that many pregnant women have relayed to me that they have encountered difficulties in boarding or alighting from trains when using rail services during rush hours, of the measures of the Government and MTRCL to assist those pregnant women;

(g) whether it knows if all MTR stations (including every street-connecting entrances and exits in the stations) are equipped with stair lifts at present; if not, the reasons for that, and list by the name of the lines, the number and names of the stations which are not equipped with stair lifts; whether MTRCL will retrofit stair lifts at the entrances and exits of every stations; given that at present, users of stair lifts have to contact

MTRCL staff an hour before using the stair lifts, so as to facilitate the relevant arrangements, of the reasons for imposing such a requirement, and whether MTRCL will remove the requirement;

(h) given that it was reported that at present the maximum loading capacity of stair lifts installed along the handrail of stairs at stations is 250kg, whether it knows the arrangements to be made by MTRCL for passengers exceeding such maximum loading capacity; whether MTRCL has considered retrofitting lifts at all stations to facilitate wheelchair users; and

(i) given that it was reported that MTRCL will place 3-coloured recycling bins in its 84 MTR stations in the first quarter of this year, whether it knows the specific timetable?

Reply:

President,

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

(a)(i) MTRCL carried out a trial in three phases to test the use of Mechanical Gap Fillers (MGFs) at the Lo Wu Station. The third phase of the trial at four platforms of the Lo Wu Station tested a total of 98 MGFs and was completed at the end of 2009.

Outside Hong Kong, MGFs are only used in the indoor environment. These indoor designs had been adapted for the trial at the Lo Wu Station. However, they were found to stall and jam persistently in adverse weather, and the trial had to be suspended during typhoons.

Even looking only at the data collected during the days with better weather, the trial results were not satisfactory. The performance of the MGFs was poor in availability and reliability with a high number of failures. Regular MTR passengers would be expecting MGFs to be available and not pay heed to the platform gap. As such, when a MGF fails to function, it would be a safety hazard for passengers with an increased risk of stepping into the platform gap.

Due to the limitations of the existing East Rail Line (EAL) signalling system, the operation of MGFs at stations would also lead to longer dwell times at stations.

This would in turn mean longer journey times. MTRCL estimated that this would be equivalent to a reduction of about 2 train journeys per hour during peak periods.

It is concluded that the MGF system in its current form is not suitable for use on EAL as it would adversely affect passenger safety, train service reliability and passenger service level. MTRCL has issued a paper to the Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways under the Legislative Council Panel on Transport in January 2011 to report the results of the trial on MGFs.

(ii) Amongst the 84 stations in the MTR system, public toilets are already available in 38. MTRCL also built public toilets at the public transport interchanges at four stations along the Tseung Kwan O Line. At other stations, passengers may request to use staff toilets in the stations. MTRCL has also agreed to provide public toilets within, or adjacent to, stations of new lines and extensions in future.

As most pre-merger MTR stations were built in the 1970s and 1980s, in view of the short travelling time and the availability of public toilets in the vicinity of most commercial buildings or shopping arcades located in the urban areas, public toilets were not a built-in feature for those stations. Substantial technical difficulties have been identified by MTRCL in retrofitting public toilets at existing underground stations. These difficulties include limitation in the capacity of the sewage system, high voltage equipment nearby and limitation in providing separate ventilation system etc. As such, MTRCL would not retrofit public toilets at existing underground stations.

MTRCL has conducted a survey on the location of public toilets in the vicinity of stations within a walking distance of 200 metres (i.e. an approximately four-minute walk). It ascertained that, with the exception of Ngau Tau Kok, Prince Edward and Quarry Bay Stations, public toilets are available within a 200-metre distance of all other stations within the MTR system.

MTRCL has started to work on retrofitting toilets in the vicinity at the street level at the three above-mentioned stations. The toilets for the Ngau Tau Kok and Quarry Bay Stations would be situated at the ground level of the stations. Construction work is now in progress and it is anticipated that the toilets will come into operation in the first quarter of 2011. For the plan to provide public toilets in the vicinity of Prince Edward Station, MTRCL previously proposed two street-level locations (near entrance B1 and Mong Kok Police Station; and near entrance C2 at the

junction of Prince Edward Road West and Portland Street) and had submitted initial design proposals to the relevant government departments for consideration and consultation with the local community. However, the proposals were rejected by the relevant government department, local community and residents nearby. As the Government will implement the Area Improvement Plan for the Shopping Areas of Mong Kok, which includes a greening project for Nullah Road, MTRCL is making initial contact with the Urban Renewal Authority which is responsible for the greening project to explore the feasibility of providing a public toilet under the project.

(b) Regarding the reply on November 3, 2010 to the Legislative Council on the cases of passenger falling onto tracks at stations without platform screen doors in the past five years, the stations involved are set out in Annex 1.

MTRCL has submitted a paper to the Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways under the Legislative Council Panel on Transport in January 2011 to report the results and conclusion of technical studies conducted on the retrofitting of automatic platform gates (APGs) at EAL stations. According to MTRCL's technical studies, retrofitting APGs at EAL stations have to be considered from the perspectives of passenger safety, reliability of train operation and maintenance of service levels etc.

As MTRCL has proposed that the signalling system and trains of EAL have to be replaced to permit the operation of the North-South Line under the Shatin to Central Link (SCL) project, MTRCL is of the view that the retrofitting of APGs at EAL stations in tandem with the SCL project would achieve synergy, as well as reduction in abortive works and adverse impact on passengers.

In parallel to studying the retrofitting of APGs at EAL, MTRCL also examined the feasibility of retrofitting APGs at Ma On Shan Line.

Ma On Shan Line is currently using 4-car trains. When SCL comes into operation, Ma On Shan Line would change to allow operation of 8-car trains. Suitable platform modification would be necessary. In order to achieve synergy and minimise the inconvenience to passengers, MTRCL would consider retrofitting APGs at Ma On Shan Line stations in tandem with the East-West Line of SCL.

(c) According to the information provided by the Police, the number of indecent assault and "under skirt photo-taking" cases that occurred in railway premises (excluding Light Rail) from 2006 to 2009 and during the first ten months of 2010 is

set out in Annex 2.

The Police do not keep record of the numbers of victims, persons prosecuted and persons convicted in the cases concerned.

(d) The security in the MTR network is looked after by the Railway District of the Police and staff of MTRCL.

Over the past three years, the Police have taken targeted preventive and enforcement measures by strengthening patrols at blackspots and encouraging passengers not to remain silent but report crimes immediately to the Police or station staff should they encounter such incidents. Furthermore, the Railway District of the Police and MTRCL regularly hold joint anti-crime campaigns, maintain close liaison, as well as review and formulate measures to combat offences in the railway premises. MTRCL staff are also trained on crime prevention in order to support the Police in combating offences.

In respect of educating the public on crime prevention, the Police have produced short videos in the television Programme "Police Magazine" on crimes that happened frequently in the railway premises. In addition, the Police work with MTRCL from time to time to disseminate anti-crime messages, including the production of a series of posters titled "Don't be a Silent Victim, Report Indecent Assault". The posters are displayed in the railway premises and inside train compartments to encourage victims to report offences. They also organise "Stay alert, watch out!" anti-crime campaigns to remind the public to stay alert and avoid becoming victims of indecent assault and "under skirt photo-taking" cases.

In future, the Police would continue to work closely with MTRCL on preventing indecent assault and "under skirt photo-taking" cases from happening in the railway premises as far as possible.

(e) MTRCL is committed to enhancing the quality of service provided to passengers, including persons with disabilities. With an aim to providing more convenience to passengers in wheelchair and those travelling with baby prams and luggage, MTRCL launched a trial to introduce additional multi-purpose areas on three trains on the Island Line in May 2008. The increase in multi-purpose areas allowed 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. The results of the interviews

showed that 90% of the respondents were satisfied with the additional multi-purpose areas while 95% were 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.

MTRCL interviewed 584 passengers in October 2010 to collect passengers' views on the new facility again. The results showed that some 80% of the respondents were supportive of the increase in multi-purpose areas and more than 80% indicated that they would like to see more multi-purpose areas installed for the needy.

At present, MTRCL has already introduced additional multi-purpose areas to 29 trains on the Island Line, accounting for 27% of the total 106 trains operating on the Island Line, Tsuen Wan Line, Kwun Tong Line and Tseung Kwan O Line.

MTRCL has been closely monitoring the use of the new multi-purpose areas. It is observed that they are able to meet the needs of passengers, with smooth passenger flow being maintained while passengers in wheelchair have found it easier to move around inside train compartment. For the convenience of other passengers, leaning ledges and straphangers would also be retrofitted in the multi-purpose areas as part of the programme. With regard to the capacity of each train after the increase in number of multi-purpose areas, as the multi-purpose areas are for the convenience of passengers in wheelchair and those in need, the capacity of the train is almost the same.

MTRCL will gradually introduce the 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.

(f) MTRCL has been organising promotional campaigns to encourage passengers to offer their seats to those in need. MTRCL kicked off a "priority seats" trial scheme in October 2009 with designated priority seats on trains. The results of a survey on the "priority seats" scheme conducted in early 2010 showed that 95% of the 1,049 passengers interviewed welcomed the priority seat arrangement and believed that it

was effective in promoting the message of offering seats to those in need. At the same time, 74% of the respondents preferred the priority seats to be painted in a different colour to make them stand out.

Regarding the above-mentioned comments, starting from October 26, 2010, seats painted in red and featuring the popular Smiley®World characters on the seat back have been gradually appearing on MTR trains to encourage passengers to offer their seats to anyone in need. Three trains on the Island, Tsuen Wan, and Kwun Tong Lines are decorated as theme trains for priority seats featuring Smiley®World characters in different poses bringing out the virtue of offering seats to others and encouraging passengers to do so. The theme trains are designed to remind passengers to "offer your seat to anyone in need" - those to whom you offer your seat will be grateful for your kindness. The new priority seats are being gradually introduced to other MTR trains.

As an extension of the promotion of "priority seats", MTRCL launched "Thanks for offering me your seat" campaign to promote offering seats to the elderly in November 2010. Meanwhile, another campaign titled "Pregnant Mothers Need Your Seat" was launched in January 2011 to promote offering seats to pregnant mothers. These campaigns aim to encourage passengers to offer their seats to the needy.

(g) As a public transport operator, MTRCL has been striving to improve access and facilities for persons with disabilities and passengers with special needs. MTRCL has continuously made improvements to the railway system and devoted resources to improving and upgrading its facilities to facilitate passengers in need in using its railway service. These improvements include retrofitting lifts, stair lifts, wheelchair aids, ramps and wide gates wherever practicable. In the past decade, MTRCL has spent over \$635 million and has committed another \$200 million in the next five years (i.e. 2011 to 2015) to improve those facilities. MTRCL would continue to study and provide more facilities for passengers in need according to local development and needs.

At present, there is at least one barrier-free access at each station (*) to provide convenience to passengers in need to enter or leave the station. The access is equipped with a lift, a stair lift, a wheelchair aid or a ramp. All the barrier-free access was built after consultation with the organisations of persons with disabilities to ensure that the facilities suit their needs.

In order to shorten the waiting time of passengers, MTRCL welcomes passengers in wheelchair to contact station staff in advance such that staff can be arranged to provide immediate assistance when the passengers arrive at the station. Otherwise, when passengers in wheelchair arrive at the station, they can still make use of the station communicators at station entrances to ask for assistance. This could involve longer waiting time as station staff might be engaged with other tasks or passengers at the time.

The station-by-station system accessibility facilities (by railway line) are tabulated at Annex 3 and the latest progress of retrofitting lifts at stations is set out at Annex 4.

(h) Stair lifts adopted by MTRCL have been approved by the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, and are under the maximum loading category. If the weight of a passenger in a motor-driven wheelchair is over the limit, station staff would use an ordinary wheelchair to deliver the passenger with disabilities to the station concourse or street level and then deliver the motor-driven wheelchair back to the passenger afterwards.

Due to the geographical and structural constraints of station, it is not technically feasible to retrofit a lift connecting to street/concourse level at all MTR stations. At present, there is at least one barrier-free access at each station (*) to provide convenience to passengers in need to enter or leave the station.

(i) MTRCL conducted a trial scheme on recycling from mid-2008 to mid-2010. Three-colour bins for recycling of paper, aluminium cans and plastic were placed at the Tung Chung Line Hong Kong Station Concourse and the In-town Check-in Concourse at Hong Kong Station to encourage passengers to recycle and reduce the waste going to the landfills. The trial received enthusiastic support from passengers with about 200 kilogrammes of materials that can be recycled collected each month during the trial. As a result, MTRCL has decided to provide bins for recycling at all 84 MTR and Airport Express Stations in the first quarter of 2011.

* Excluding Racecourse Station of the East Rail Line.

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