

LCQ19: Cross-harbour tunnel for pedestrians

Following is a question by the Hon Mrs Regina Ip Lau Suk-ye and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (January 26):

Question:

In the paper entitled "Consultancy Study on Rationalising the Utilisation of Road Harbour Crossings" submitted to the Panel on Transport of this Council on November 9, 2010, the Secretary for Transport and Housing indicated that, as pointed out by the consultants, toll adjustment would be necessary to achieve a better traffic distribution among the three road harbour crossings (RHCs), and most of those better toll scenarios involved upward adjustments to the Cross Harbour Tunnel tolls and corresponding downward adjustments to the tolls of the Eastern Harbour Crossing and the Western Harbour Crossing. Yet, a member of the public has raised with me a creative option of constructing a cross harbour tunnel for pedestrians to improve the traffic of the three RHCs. According to that member of the public, the proposed cross harbour tunnel for pedestrians, which links up Central and Tsim Sha Tsui, will be of about 20 minutes' walking distance, and pedestrian conveyors may also be installed; the cross harbour tunnel for pedestrians will include a public shopping corridor, and through the offer of low rent or a profit sharing arrangement, social enterprises are encouraged to operate and young people to set up their own business there. That member of the public considers that the proposal will help ease the traffic flow of the three RHCs, enhance environmental protection and reduce emissions, as well as develop public space with special characteristics, so as to facilitate members of the public to exercise and undertake leisure activities. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council whether:

- (a) it will assess the feasibility of constructing a cross harbour tunnel for pedestrians as proposed by the aforesaid member of the public; if the assessment result is in the negative, of the specific reasons; and
- (b) the Government has ever had the idea of constructing a cross harbour tunnel for pedestrians in the past; if it has, why such idea was shelved at that time?

Reply:

President,

The proposal of a cross-harbour tunnel for pedestrians mentioned by Hon Mrs Regina Ip Lau Suk-yea in her question has in fact been brought up by the public previously.

From the works perspective, the technical and construction requirements for building the proposed cross harbour tunnel for pedestrians are basically the same as those for a vehicular tunnel. According to the Administration's preliminary assessment, a tube of about 1.5 km long would have to be built if the proposed cross harbour tunnel for pedestrians is to link up Central with Tsim Sha Tsui. Permanent or temporary reclamation of the seabed and the foreshores of the Victoria Harbour might be required, depending on the design, geographical constraints and actual construction arrangements. Given the presumption against reclamation in the harbour as set out in the Protection of the Harbour Ordinance (Cap. 531), there must be an overriding public need for the reclamation concerned to rebut the above presumption before the works may proceed. Having regard to the actual functions and the anticipated benefits of the pedestrian tunnel, it may not be possible to establish the case for overriding public need. In addition, a number of technical issues would have to be resolved in relation to the execution of the tunnel construction works on the Victoria Harbour and the foreshores on both sides, including maintaining marine traffic, avoiding the impact on underwater public utilities, accommodating changes in seabed and ground conditions, and avoiding or minimising the extent of reclamation works, etc.

From the operational perspective, as the pedestrian tunnel could be as long as 1.5 km, and it is possible that shops may be located along the proposed tunnel, detailed consideration would need to be given to ventilation, pedestrian flow management, fire safety measures as well as night-time (especially late-night) security and management during the operation.

From the traffic and transport perspectives, apart from the potential impact on road traffic on both sides of the harbour and marine traffic during construction, possibly due to the need to provide appropriate feeder public transport services at the exits of the new tunnel, the proposed pedestrian tunnel may cause more acute traffic congestion at the nearby area and its road networks.

As a pedestrian tunnel compares rather unfavourably with one for use by vehicles or other public transport (such as railways and public buses) both in terms of journey time and capacity, it is unlikely that a large number of current users of the road harbour crossings (RHCs) will be attracted to switch to use the pedestrian harbour crossing. Hence, the proposal should not have significant effects in easing the current vehicular flow at the RHCs, and is also unlikely to be cost-effective as a transport infrastructure project. Together with the concerns regarding construction, reclamation, safety and management mentioned above, the Administration has no plan to further consider the proposal of building a pedestrian tunnel for the purpose of reducing the congestion at the three RHCs.

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