

LCQ14: Traffic safety of Light Rail

Following is a question by the Hon Cheung Hok-ming and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (June 1):

Question:

Recently, there was a serious incident in which a Light Rail train collided with a vehicle on the road and was derailed, resulting in over 20 people being injured. Regarding traffic safety of the Light Rail, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) of the number of traffic incidents involving Light Rail trains and the casualties involved in each of the past three years, as well as the respective major causes of the above accidents;
- (b) of the improvement measures to enhance traffic safety of the Light Rail, in the light of the above accidents; and
- (c) whether it will review the current Light Rail network and improve the design of traffic light signals at the relevant roads, and whether it will consider studying the alternatives of running the Light Rail on viaducts or tunnels in the future?

Reply:

President,

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

- (a) According to the statistics of the Transport Department (TD), the number of traffic accidents and the related number of deaths and injuries involving the Light Rail over the past three years are tabulated in Annex 1.

The major causes of the traffic accidents mentioned above include non-compliance with traffic signals by Light Rail captains and drivers of other vehicles, pedestrians crossing the road without paying attention to the traffic situation, and pedestrians walking onto the Light Rail tracks unintentionally.

(b) and (c) The Light Rail system is designed, built and operated according to international safety standards. After years of good operation, drivers and pedestrians in general are accustomed to the design of the traffic lights at road junctions in the Light Rail system. Safety will be ensured if drivers and pedestrians follow traffic lights, road signs and traffic regulations.

Safety facilities at road junctions in the Light Rail system include:

- * traffic lights;
- * road signs on Light Rail reserved area;
- * road signs on vehicle height restrictions;
- * yellow box marking to remind drivers not to stay within the yellow box; and
- * before entering a road junction, Light Rail vehicles will sound a "Ding Ding" bell, and when there is an emergency, the train captain will sound the horn to alert other drivers.

Safety facilities at Light Rail pedestrian crossings include:

- * signs of "Stop, Look Around" and "Attention to Light Rail";
- * words of "Look Left" and "Look Right" painted on the ground to remind pedestrians to pay attention to traffic before stepping beyond the yellow line; and
- * before entering a pedestrian crossing, Light Rail vehicles will sound a "Ding Ding" bell to alert pedestrians.

When they are first recruited, all Light Rail captains need to undergo a ten-week intensive training. Apart from the theory part of the course on the operation of the Light Rail system, defensive driving, Road Users' Code etc, they also need to undergo practical training in driving Light Rail vehicles. They are only allowed to drive Light Rail vehicles after passing the assessments by instructors.

In addition, Light Rail captains need to take refresher courses every year, which cover reviews of incidents and lessons learned from experience. They are also required to undergo re-assessments to determine whether they can continue to be deployed as captains. MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) would assess and monitor the performance of the captains continuously.

Currently, TD has installed red light cameras at a number of road junctions in the Light Rail system, with the aim to deter against red light jumping by road vehicles.

MTRCL exerts continuous efforts in the promotion of Light Rail safety messages, with different kinds of publicity and education activities being rolled out every year to raise safety awareness of road users. In 2010/11, related publicity and education activities organised by MTRCL include: the Light Rail Road Safety Campaign with the slogan "Don't cross when you hear 'Ding Ding'. Let's make it a safe journey!"; deploying safety ambassadors to Light Rail pedestrian crossings to remind pedestrians to cross the road safely and to distribute leaflets containing safety tips to pedestrians and passengers; arranging visits to elderly centres in the community where staff and volunteers can help promote passenger safety; organising Light Rail safety talks at schools in Yuen Long, Tin Shui Wai and Tuen Mun districts; and organising a safety quiz competition among secondary school students in Tuen Mun and Yuen Long districts to further raise safety awareness when using Light Rail service in the younger generation.

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