

立法會
Legislative Council

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Legislative Council
Panel on Transport

Minutes of Meeting held on
Wednesday, 18 October 2000, at 9:00 am
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

Briefing on the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2000

- Members present** : Hon Mrs Miriam LAU Kin-ye, JP (Chairman)
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon David CHU Yu-lin
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP
Hon CHAN Kwok-keung
Hon LAU Kong-wah
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Dr Hon TANG Siu-tong, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon LAU Ping-cheung
- Members absent** : Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, JP
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi

Public officers attending : Transport Bureau

Mr Nicholas NG Wing-fui
Secretary for Transport

Mr Kevin HO
Deputy Secretary for Transport (1)

Ms Linda LAI
Deputy Secretary for Transport (2)

Miss Margaret FONG
Deputy Secretary for Transport (3)

Transport Department

Mr Robert FOOTMAN
Commissioner for Transport

Highways Department

Mr Y C LO
Director of Highways

Clerk in attendance : Mr Andy LAU
Chief Assistant Secretary (1)2

Staff in attendance : Ms Pauline NG
Assistant Secretary General 1

Ms Alice AU
Senior Assistant Secretary (1)5

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I Briefing by the Secretary for Transport on the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2000

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Secretary for Transport (S for T) presented a short film entitled "Hong Kong Moving Ahead - Transport Strategy for the Future" which gave members an overview of the long term transport strategy drawn up by the Government to address the future challenges of a growing population, the ever increasing passenger and freight at the boundary, and the growing public concern over environment. The strategy focused on the following five objectives:

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- (a) Better integration of transport and land use planning;
- (b) Better use of railway;
- (c) Better public transport services and facilities;
- (d) Better use of new technologies; and
- (e) Better environmental protection.

Sheung Shui to Lok Ma Chau Spur Line

2. In view of the public concern about the development of the Sheung Shui to Lok Ma Chau Spur Line (Spur Line) alignment in the Long Valley marsh area, S for T stated that while it would not be appropriate to discuss specifics of the case pending the statutory appeal procedures, a valuable lesson had been learnt and the Transport Bureau (TB) would seek to improve the existing mechanism for consulting other bureaux and departments in the planning and implementation of major railway projects in future. Greater and timely co-ordinating efforts would be made so that a balance could be achieved among various policy objectives such as environmental conservation, economic development and transport infrastructure development. The matter would be taken up with the Environment and Food Bureau (EFB).

3. On the implementation of the Spur Line, Ma On Shan Rail and East Rail Tsim Sha Tsui Extension, S for T informed members that when the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC) was invited to develop those projects, KCRC had accepted the offer on the clear understanding that the target completion date for all three rail extensions was by the end of 2004. Accordingly, KCRC would make appropriate arrangements to ensure that all projects were taken forward on that basis. He stressed that while no notification had so far been received from KCRC that any change in programme was necessary, the Administration also saw no reason why these three rail extensions could not be delivered on the target completion date.

4. Mr LAU Kong-wah queried whether the Spur Line project could be completed according to schedule as the Chairman of KCRC had publicly indicated otherwise earlier on. S for T replied that although construction work could not proceed without the environmental permit, KCRC had not indicated to the Administration that delay might arise as a result. Obviously, much would depend on the outcome of the statutory appeal procedures. But from the Administration's point of view, the other two East Rail extensions should not be affected.

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5. Concerning about the alleviation of overcrowding at Lo Wu station, Dr TANG Siu-tong asked whether West Rail (Phase II) would be fast-tracked so as to obviate the need for the Spur Line which passed through Long Valley. In response, S for T pointed out that having considered the upsurge in cross-boundary passenger demand, the Spur Line which was originally included as part of West Rail (Phase II) had been taken ahead to provide additional rail passenger boundary-crossing facilities between Hong Kong and Shenzhen to relieve the congestion at Lo Wu. While the Northern Link (NOL) between the West Rail (Phase I) corridor and the East Rail was a project committed under the next stage of railway development, the functions it served and the relief provided were quite different from the Spur Line. The Administration would monitor the situation closely and make necessary arrangements as to the timing and priority of its implementation. However, if the Spur Line project was to be abandoned, the Administration would need to further assess the overcrowding problem at Lo Wu.

6. Echoing Dr TANG's concern, Mr LAU Kong-wah urged the Administration to propose concrete measures to relieve the overcrowding at Lo Wu in case KCRC's appeal was unsuccessful and he asked whether consideration would be given to strengthening cross boundary shuttle bus services or allowing public light buses (PLBs) to use the road crossing at Sha Ling.

7. In reply, S for T said that the Administration was equally concerned about the congestion problem at Lo Wu. However, due to geographical constraints, there was no room for implementing large scale improvement programme. The congestion at Lo Wu station would therefore persist even with the provision of the Spur Line. To address the problem, certain stop-gap measures such as the tidal-flow management scheme and the quota system had been put in place to manage congestion and facilitate crowd control during peak and festive periods. At the same time, the Secretary for Security was also looking into ways in which immigration control procedures could be simplified. Hence, the Administration was taking active steps to tackle the problem so that the situation might be contained sufficiently before a new boundary crossing could be provided.

8. Mr LAU remarked that the tidal-flow scheme was not operating effectively because of the lack of co-ordination between the immigration departments of Hong Kong and the Mainland. He urged for enhanced co-operation and communication both within the Administration and with relevant Mainland authorities. While acknowledging the need for better co-ordination in view of the increasingly close links between Hong Kong and the Mainland, S for T said that the police, customs and immigration departments of the two sides had been maintaining close contacts on a daily basis under the cross boundary liaison system. Discussions would also be held to discuss and resolve various matters of mutual concern.

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9. As for suggestions on alternative road crossing services and facilities, S for T explained that as the access roads to Lok Ma Chau were already heavily congested, there was little scope of operating more frequent shuttle bus services. Moreover, unlike railway, vehicles did not have the capacity to carry a large number of passengers at a time. However, the Chairman opined that if there was any delay to the Spur Line project, these measures should also be considered.

TB's role in overseeing the provision of transport infrastructure

10. Citing the recent spate of incidents arousing much attention and outcry from the public such as the flooding in Yuen Long and the resumption of Wah Kai Industrial Centre relating to the West Rail project, as well as the environmental concerns caused by the Spur Line project, Mr Albert CHAN pointed out that the Administration had clearly disregarded the livelihood of those affected by the projects as well as their adverse impacts on the environment in taking these projects forward. With these administrative blunders, he raised serious doubts about the ability of TB to undertake and oversee the planning and implementation of the new rail projects in the years ahead.

11. In response, S for T stressed that TB was committed to providing Hong Kong with a safe, reliable and efficient transport system that could meet the economic, social and recreational needs of the community and railways would form the backbone of that system. Railway projects of such magnitude and coverage would undoubtedly create many technical as well as environmental and social problems. However, the Administration would make the best efforts to tackle each and every problem so that disturbances could be kept to a minimum and both TB and the Highways Department would step up efforts to oversee the construction of railways by the two railway companies. He hoped that members could support TB in realizing this objective and any suggestions from members would be most welcome.

12. Notwithstanding S for T's avowed commitment, Mr Albert CHAN was unconvinced that TB was indeed capable of delivering the planned railways in a socially and environmentally acceptable way. Given the public comments made by the Chairman of KCRC that delay was inevitable for the Spur Line project, Mr CHAN queried whether effective communication was maintained between TB and the railway companies. Stating disagreement with the member's viewpoint, S for T emphasized that a proven track record in implementing major railway projects such as the Airport Express Line (AEL) and Tseung Kwan O MTR Extension was convincing testimony of TB's ability to plan, implement and monitor the 12 on-going and planned railways to be commissioned within the next 15 years. Although there might be hitches in individual projects, he was confident that all those projects could be delivered on schedule.

13. Mr CHENG Kar-foo however was worried that TB might be too ambitious in pushing forward for the timely completion of its railway plans that it

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had failed to strike a balance among various conflicting policy objectives of different Government bureaux and departments. As illustrated in the Spur Line project, there was a complete lack of co-ordination between TB and the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) and S for T had even been alleged by some as exerting political pressures to give the project the green light. Mr CHENG opined that the divided stand taken by TB and EPD might be exploited by public transport operators to their own interests. Hence, he requested that concrete measures be taken, such as the establishment of a standing committee, to improve co-ordination with other Government bureaux and departments so that cases like this would not recur.

14. Denying that TB was too ambitious in its efforts, S for T said that all the railway projects were planned and implemented for the sustainable and future development of Hong Kong in response to the aspirations of the public and TB would continue to work towards that direction. He also disagreed that political pressures were ever put on EPD because the results had clearly testified to the contrary. S for T further pointed out that having different opinions did not mean that co-ordination was lacking within the Government. TB and EFB were equally concerned that railways should be developed in an environmentally acceptable manner. Both bureaux were working within the statutory framework and according to their own policy objectives to achieve the same goal. Noting Mr CHENG's suggestion, S for T assured members that procedures would be in place to further enhance the coordination and implementation for the best interests of the society.

15. As compensation was the main cause of grievances in the resumption of Wah Kai Industrial Centre, Dr TANG Siu-tong asked whether the relevant ordinances would be reviewed to avoid the recurrence of similar incidents in future. S for T replied that although the land of Wah Kai Industrial Centre was resumed under the Railways Ordinance (Cap. 519), it had been expressly stipulated that the claims arising thereunder should be dealt with as if they were made under the Lands Resumption Ordinance (Cap. 124). Thus, the same compensation was paid as if the land was resumed by the Government. Although the matter was not under the purview of TB, he understood that the Director of Lands had agreed to conduct a comprehensive review on the procedures and compensation payable for land resumption as a result of the Wah Kai case, and another LegCo Panel was following up on that.

16. Mr Albert CHAN remarked that S for T's reply did not fully reflect TB's role in the matter because the resumption timetable which was under the sole prerogative of TB was another major area of discontent among the affected factory operators.

Development of railways vis-à-vis other public transport modes

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17. Given that rail passenger transport would take up about 45% of the market by 2016, Mr Henry WU enquired about the impact of such a predominance on the future development and fares of other public transport modes.

18. S for T explained that over the years, the total number of public transport commuters would increase with the overall growth of population in Hong Kong. Although the market share of other public transport modes would be undercut by rail transport, the number of passengers they carried would increase in real terms. As such, there would not be any major change in the roles performed by other transport modes, and one of the challenges of TB in future would be to improve co-ordination amongst these services.

19. While expressing support for the rail-based strategy, Mr LAU Ping-cheung asked whether other transport modes would be forced to increase their fares, thereby allowing rail transport to attain its market share and ensuring that the Government could recover the huge investments made on the railway projects. He was concerned about the potential adverse impacts it might have on people's livelihood.

20. S for T clearly stated that it was not and it would never be the Government's policy to force public transport operators to increase or decrease their fares. Any fare adjustment applications would come from public transport operators themselves having considered various factors such as their operational costs, public affordability and general economic situation. In vetting the applications, the Government would also take these factors into account. However, in order to co-ordinate different services and minimize wasteful competition, some adjustments to the operation of different transport modes might be required.

Transport needs in North-west New Territories

21. Mr Albert HO was dissatisfied that the residents in North West New Territories (NW NT) had to suffer as a result of the inadequate provision of external public transport services. He was particularly concerned about the situation being further aggravated by the suspension of Tuen Mun to Central ferry services, the worsening congestion at Tuen Mun Highway after the toll increase of Tai Lam Tunnel and the freeze in residents' services (RS) to Central.

22. In reply, the Commissioner for Transport (C for T) said that the Government was mindful of the need to ensure public transport arrangements for NW NT were as good as possible and the situation was closely monitored. A formal structure was in place to adjust public transport services to meet demand and particular attention was paid to this matter when forward plans of the franchised bus companies for each area in Hong Kong was discussed in the annual route development programme.

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23. On RS services, C for T clarified that the Government had no policy of freezing RS services and it would be prepared to look into applications for new feeder RS services to railway stations, for example, feeder service between Tuen Mun and the railway station in Tsing Yi where passengers could travel effectively and efficiently to Central. However, given the serious congestion in Central, it was just not possible to cater for more RS coaches and the arrangement was not aimed at any particular persons or districts. The broad approach taken by the Government was to regulate RS services so that a better control was exercised and when demand was increasing or when a particular RS route ceased, the Government would try to strengthen parallel franchised bus services. Responding to the Chairman, C for T advised that if there was demand for the service, RS routes could be considered to feed into bus-bus interchanges.

24. While acknowledging that the Tai Lam Tunnel did not operate to its capacity, S for T stressed that it had already helped to provide relief to improve the congestion at Tuen Mun Highway substantially. The toll level for Tai Lam Tunnel would be a matter for the franchisee to decide having considered its need to recover the huge amount of investments made and the operational costs etc. The Government would nevertheless tackle the congestion problem by better traffic management measures. One way to ensure a more equitable use of Tai Lam Tunnel and Tuen Mun Highway as the Member suggested could be levying a charge for using the Tuen Mun Highway. However, the Chairman stated her opposition to the suggestion. Responding to Mr Albert HO, S for T said that there was no existing policy for the Government to directly subsidize any public transport operators, including tunnels operating on build, operate and transfer franchise. However, the Government would be prepared to consider other suggestion from members.

25. In this connection, Mr Albert CHAN expressed grave dissatisfaction about the Administration's reluctance to relax the restriction on PLBs to use the Tai Lam Tunnel which could help address the transport needs of residents of NW NT. In view of the common aspiration of the residents, PLB operators and the tunnel operating franchisee, he urged the Administration to seriously reconsider its stance on the issue. C for T responded that the Government had a long-standing policy on how to manage PLBs and within that policy, PLBs were generally confined to existing areas and they were not allowed to drive on new roads. Moreover, although not an absolute decisive factor, he personally had some safety concerns about opening up this route to PLB operation because of a number of accidents involving PLB speeding in the past.

26. Mr Albert CHAN said that he was unconvinced by the Administration's explanation because the speeding problem of PLBs should be tackled through enhanced enforcement actions and it should not become the reason for imposing a total ban on their activities. The Chairman also pointed out that the policy stated by C for T had been relaxed in the past to allow PLBs to use the Island

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Eastern Corridor. In view of members' concern, S for T agreed to review the matter.

Franchised bus operation

27. On Mr David CHU's concern about the congestion in Central created by empty franchised buses, C for T advised that the matter was also a major concern of the Government and much had been done in the past 18 months to try to reduce the inefficient use of roads by franchised buses. Measures had been taken to rationalize bus stops in Central which effectively removed over 1 000 bus stopping activities in the peak hours and to remove any additional bus services outside the approved schedule which had reduced the number of buses running in Central by 10% during off-peak hours. As committed under the policy objectives, a study was being undertaken to examine additional measures to improve the situation through better traffic management and regulation of public transport. Pending the completion of the study early next year, further proposals would be put forward. However, he cautioned that any suggestions to truncate bus routes had to be considered carefully because the knock-on adverse impact on individual citizens could be quite difficult to deal with.

II Any other business

28. The Chairman reminded members that the next meeting of the Panel would be held on 27 October 2000 to discuss the following items proposed by the Administration:

- (a) Review of the basis for considering bus fare adjustments; and
- (b) Report on the progress of the review of speed limit and installation of road markings and warning signs at identified road sections.

29. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10:10 am.

Legislative Council Secretariat

21 November 2000