

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)621/00-01
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by the Administration)

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Legislative Council
Panel on Transport

Minutes of Special Meeting held on
Wednesday, 20 December 2000, at 7:30 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon Mrs Miriam LAU Kin-ye, JP (Chairman)
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon David CHU Yu-lin
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP
Hon CHAN Kwok-keung
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip

Members absent : Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, JP
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Dr Hon TANG Siu-tong, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon LAU Ping-cheung

Public officers attending : **Agenda Items I & II**

Transport Bureau

Mr Kevin HO, JP
Deputy Secretary for Transport

Highways Department

Mr LO Yiu-ching, JP
Director of Highways

Mr John CHAI Sung-veng
Principal Government Engineer/Railway Development

Transport Department

Mr George LAI, JP
Deputy Commissioner for Transport/
Planning & Technical Services

Ms Zina WONG, JP
Assistant Commissioner for Transport/Bus Development

Mr Brian GROGAN
Assistant Commissioner for Transport/Planning

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

Staff in attendance : Ms Alice AU
Senior Assistant Secretary (1)5

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- I Staffing proposal for Transport Bureau to take forward the new railway projects recommended by Railway Development Strategy 2000**
(LC Paper No. CB(1)306/00-01 - Information paper provided by the Administration)

Members agreed that this item and the following item would be discussed together.

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II Staffing proposal for Highways Department and Transport Department to take forward the new railway projects recommended by Railway Development Strategy 2000

(LC Paper No. CB(1)305/00-01

- Information paper provided by the Administration)

2. Members noted that the two staffing proposals would be considered by the Establishment Subcommittee (ESC) at its meeting to be held right after the present Panel meeting at 9:30 am.

3. At the invitation of the Chairman, the Deputy Secretary for Transport (DS for T) briefed members on the two staffing proposals in relation to the Transport Bureau (TB) and to the Highways Department (HyD) and the Transport Department (TD) for taking forward the new development projects recommended by the Railway Development Strategy 2000, details of which were set out in LC Paper Nos. CB(1)306/00-01 and CB(1)305/00-01 respectively. Members' deliberation on these proposals were summarized in the following paragraphs.

4. Referring to the set-up of individual teams under the proposed re-organization of TB, Mr TAM Yiu-chung opined that in order to facilitate the implementation of railway projects, there might be a case for enhancing the technical support within the bureau with the deployment of more professional grade officers at the Assistant Secretary (AS) level. In response, DS for T explained that the suggestion would be considered in a positive light taking into account the long-term staff functions involved. While TB's work was predominantly related to policy formulation and implementation which would be more suitably undertaken by administrative grade officers, professional grade officers would be deployed to fill suitable posts where appropriate. Under TB's organization, two AS level posts were filled respectively by a Senior Engineer and a Chief Transport Officer to undertake duties which required more technical input. However, he also pointed out that there might be difficulties in identifying suitable candidates as there was a great demand for engineers within the Government.

5. Noting that only supernumerary posts were created in TB previously for the on-going railway projects, Mr Tommy CHEUNG questioned the rationale for the proposed creation of permanent posts to take forward the new railway projects. He sought clarification on the Administration's policy in this matter and asked whether there was a threshold for deciding if a post should be created on a supernumerary or permanent basis. DS for T replied that generally speaking, long-term staff functions lasting more than ten years as in the case of railway development would certainly justify the creation of a permanent post. However, the need for retaining a certain post, be it supernumerary or permanent, would be kept under constant review. If considered appropriate, unnecessary posts would be deleted.

6. Referring to the large number of permanent directorate level posts proposed under the two staffing proposals, Mr Albert CHAN queried the equity of the Administration's policy and practice of creating permanent posts at the senior

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director level while engaging junior and frontline staff on non-civil service contract terms. In response, DS for T said that policy matters relating to the civil service were under the purview of the Civil Service Bureau (CSB). However, he pointed out that newly-recruited administrative grade officers were also engaged on contract terms. Given the existing civil service structure, it would be impossible to require officers employed on permanent and pensionable terms to transfer to agreement terms upon promotion. Unconvinced by the Administration's reply, Mr Albert CHAN opined that CSB should be requested to respond to the policy issues involved when the present staffing proposals were considered by ESC.

7. While expressing support for the two staffing proposals in principle, Ir Dr Raymond HO considered that TB should ensure that railway projects were implemented to the best interest of the society as a whole throughout the process. In respect of the choice of alignments for the forthcoming railway projects, the Administration should, instead of relying on the two railway corporations, undertake careful planning on its own to ensure the optimum development of Hong Kong's railway network and a level playing field for the two railway corporations in competitive projects. Early co-ordination among various policy bureaux and government departments was also important to resolve any potential difficulties which might arise in the decision process.

8. Expressing support for the two staffing proposals, Mr Abraham SHEK also underlined the importance for the Administration to provide a proper steer in the development of railway alignments. If the matter was left to the railway corporations, their decisions might be tinted by outweighed considerations in maximizing profits from property development.

9. While acknowledging the members' concerns, DS for T said that as the actual implementation of the railway projects was entrusted to the railway corporations, they would be able to provide useful inputs. Moreover, given the associated benefits of integrating railway and property developments, such as the timely provision of an early patronage to the railway system and the optimal planning and utilization of the entire station site, the Government considered it generally necessary to make property development, where appropriate, above railway stations and depots, and on land adjacent to the railway, an integral part of the railway development. However, the Administration did recognize that public interest should always come first and thus, detailed requirements for the alignment of future projects would be worked out by the Administration, taking into account the development and planning requirements of the local areas. He assured members that the Government would ensure that both the railway projects and the related property development packages were planned and implemented for the public, and that no extra profits would be pocketed by the railway corporations from rail development.

10. Mr Abraham SHEK suggested that under the user-pay principle, the two railway corporations, especially the MTR Corporation Limited which was no longer a public corporation, should be charged for work undertaken by the Government for their railway projects. In reply, DS for T explained that as the planning and monitoring of railway

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projects were under the responsibility of TB, all expenses incurred therefrom would be borne by the Government. However, expenses for other related work, such as the resumption of land carried out by the Lands Department on behalf of the railway corporations, would be recovered from the railway corporations. In this connection, both the Chairman and Mr Albert CHAN cautioned that the burden of such charges would ultimately be borne by the passengers.

11. Ir Dr Raymond HO remarked that as heavy rail would play an increasingly dominant role in Hong Kong's transport system with its strategic development, the Administration should aim at striking a right balance between healthy competition and co-ordination among various modes of public transport. In particular, he pointed out that early planning was necessary to ensure the financial viability of the new railways which required heavy capital investment. Noting the member's views, DS for T said that it was exactly for this purpose that one permanent post of Principal Transport Officer was proposed to be created in TD to head a new Railway Division under the Bus and Railway Development Branch. One of the major task of the post-holder was to plan ahead with transport service re-organization and rationalization programme so as to maximize the benefits of the new railways and to co-ordinate the operation of the affected operators.

Admin. 12. While recognizing the need to provide appropriate staffing support to take forward the new railway projects, Mr Albert CHAN expressed strong reservation on TB's staffing proposal. Referring to major rail projects undertaken previously in Hong Kong, such as those under the Airport Core Programme (ACP), as well as the Tseung Kwan O Extension (TKO Extension) and the West Rail, he sought information on how the staffing requirements of those projects compared with TB's present establishment proposal. DS for T replied that for the ten ACP projects, a dedicated New Airport Projects Co-ordination Office was established to oversee their implementation. As far as the TKO Extension and West Rail were concerned, their planning and monitoring were placed under the purview of two Principal Assistant Secretaries led by a Deputy Secretary in TB. At Mr CHAN's request, DS for T agreed to provide more detailed information in writing after the meeting.

13. Citing the recent spate of disputes and livelihood problems caused by TB's administrative blunders in the implementation of railway projects, Mr Albert CHAN 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. As such, he was not convinced that the creation of the proposed posts in TB was justified at all. In response, DS for T stressed that TB was committed to meeting the transport needs of the people of Hong Kong and in all fairness, achievements were made in the past which had enhanced the efficiency of Hong Kong's transport system. While there was always room for improvement in TB's work, it would help to put things in perspective by pointing out that railway projects of such magnitude and coverage would bound to create many technical as well as environmental and social problems during implementation. The grievances felt by the affected citizens were also understandable. Mindful of the need to avoid undue disturbances, TB would try to achieve the best possible balance between

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the interests of private citizens and the society as a whole in the planning and construction of the railway network, while ensuring that all objections and compensation claims were handled in an open and fair manner under the statutory framework. Additional support at the directorate level was thus required to underpin these important areas of work.

14. While deploring TB's complacency and evasive attitude in denying responsibility, Mr Albert CHAN strongly urged the Administration to give serious consideration to the potential livelihood problems caused by the implementation of railway projects. Notwithstanding his stance on the issue, Mr CHAN hoped that if the proposed directorate staff was approved, TB would carefully review and learn from past mistakes to ensure that future railway projects would be delivered in a more acceptable manner. In reply, DS for T said that he did not agree with the member's views on the work of TB. However, TB would continue to make the best efforts to tackle each and every problem so that disturbances could be kept to a minimum and ensure that railway projects were implemented in a co-ordinated manner. Likewise, setbacks in the development of the Sheung Shui to Lok Ma Chau Spur Line alignment in the Long Valley marsh area and the Lantau North-South Road Link would be dealt with in the same positive spirit.

15. The Chairman invited members present to indicate their positions on TB's staffing proposal as outlined in LC Paper No. CB(1)306/00-01. Mr Abraham SHEK, Mr CHAN Kwok-keung, Mr TAM Yiu-chung and Mr Tommy CHEUNG voted for, and Mr Albert CHAN voted against the item. The Chairman advised that the staffing proposal was supported by the majority of members present.

16. The Chairman then invited members present to indicate their positions on the staffing proposal in relation to TD and HyD as outlined in LC Paper No. CB(1)305/00-01. Mr Abraham SHEK, Mr CHAN Kwok-keung, Mr TAM Yiu-chung and Mr Tommy CHEUNG voted for, and Mr Albert CHAN expressed reservation on the item. The Chairman advised that the staffing proposal was supported by the majority of members present.

III Any other business

17. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 8:40 am.