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LegCo Panel on Transport

**Special meeting on 21 September 2001
to receive public views on Route 7**

Background brief

Background

The existing Route 7 is a dual two-lane carriageway starting at the Cross Harbour Tunnel in Causeway Bay and running westwards along the northern part of Hong Kong Island up to Kennedy Town. The planning intention has been to extend the route from Kennedy Town along the northern and western coastlines of Hong Kong to Aberdeen via Sandy Bay, Telegraph Bay and Wah Fu. In early 1998, funding approval was obtained from the Finance Committee to undertake an Investigation and Preliminary Design consultancy study for the section of Route 7 between Kennedy Town and Aberdeen at a cost of \$66 million. The study was completed in August 2000.

2. Under the recently introduced Strategic Highway Project Review System, the Administration conducts a thorough review on the need for individual major highway projects at critical milestones in the planning and implementation process. This is to ensure that these projects will be completed at the appropriate time to meet the traffic needs.

3. The Administration advises that, review results indicate that there is only the need at this stage for a dual two-lane link road between Kennedy Town and Pok Fu Lam Road by 2010. This would serve as an alternative link to relieve a number of critical junctions along the above two places, so as to avoid the places from becoming over-saturated and thus causing congestion to Pok Fu Lam Road. Regarding the extension from Pok Fu Lam to Aberdeen, the Administration states that there would not be a clear need to implement the project at this stage, and it would be considered only when there are further developments in the Southern District.

4. The Central and Western District Council (C&WDC) has been advised that, as a result of changes in the population and traffic forecasts in respect of the Southern District between 1998 and 2000, the latest review results indicate that a dual two-lane configuration would be able to meet the traffic needs. Moreover, many academics and green groups have submitted their views to the Government, urging it not to build the coastal route on the ground level as this would be detrimental to the environment and the beautiful landscape. After consideration, the Government proposes a tunnel alignment between Kennedy Town and Sandy Bay instead of the previous coastal alignment to minimize any impact on the coastline. Besides, it would also adopt a depressed road section at Telegraph Bay to below ground level and examine the possibility of building the section from Sandy Bay to Telegraph Bay in tunnel form.

5. Given the above changes, the Administration would need to commission a new Engineering Review and Preliminary Design (ER&PD) consultancy study for the new road link, including additional site investigation works, which is in the order of \$25 million. The \$26 million left under the previous study would be used for commissioning the new consultancy study in early 2002 for completion in early 2004. The target completion date of the proposed new road link between Kennedy Town and Pok Fu Lam is 2010. The project would be renamed as "Road Link between Kennedy Town and Pok Fu Lam".

Major views raised by Members at the Panel meeting on 13 July

6. At the Transport Panel meeting held on 13 July 2001, the Government briefed members on the latest results of the Strategic Highway Project Review on the Route 7 project. The major views raised by members are summarized in the following paragraphs.

7. Miss Emily LAU considers that transport infrastructure should be provided in a manner conducive to sustainable development of Hong Kong. A railway system should be built in accordance with the Government's avowed policy if there are proven traffic needs. While acknowledging the dire transport needs for residents of the Southern District, Miss Cyd HO opposes the construction of Route 7 on the grounds of environmental protection and calls for the building of the South Island Line (SIL).

8. Mr IP Kwok-him reiterates the repeated calls from the Southern District Council (SDC) and C&WDC for the construction of Route 7 to relieve serious traffic congestion in the areas. Hence, he can never accept the present proposal that Route 7 should be scaled down to a local road link and would not be extended to Aberdeen. Mr IP considers that there is an actual need for the SIL, but as construction takes time, it cannot address the urgent need of the local residents for an external traffic link.

9. Mr TAM Yiu-chung requests the Administration to re-consider the proposal from the interest of the community at large, and to carry out detailed and comprehensive planning. He considers that a railway system may not be suitable for the Southern District.

10. Mr CHENG Kar-foo and Mr YEUNG Sum advise that there is a dire need for Route 7 to be connected to Aberdeen. The Administration should carry out more detailed planning and consider building the road in tunnel form to address the concerns about environmental and shoreline protection. Mr YEUNG also advises that the Democratic Party requests the Government to actively pursue the option of railway development.

11. Ir Dr Raymond HO considers that Route 7 should be connected to Aberdeen, and queries the statistics on traffic flow provided by the Administration. He holds the view that if Route 7 is only built with a dual two-lane configuration, it would become saturated soon after completion, resulting in a wastage of resources.

12. At the Transport Panel meeting on 13 July 2001, the following motion proposed by Mr CHAN Kwok-keung was endorsed by a majority vote of the members present:

“本會強烈要求政府儘速興建連接堅尼地城至香港仔段以隧道為主的七號幹線。”

13. Some members also request the Administration not to commission the new ER&PD consultancy study for the new road link (between Kennedy Town to Pok Fu Lam) at this stage to avoid wastage of resources.

Public concerns raised

14. At the Panel meeting on 13 July 2001, members agreed to invite public submissions on the Route 7 project. As at 12 September 2001, the Panel has received 30 submissions, and the major concerns raised in the submissions are summarized in the following paragraphs.

15. Some organizations are concerned that Route 7 would cause serious damages to the environment, especially because the air and noise pollution from vehicles would have large impacts on local residents, hospitals and schools in the areas nearby. Moreover, they query the rationale for the construction of Route 7, and suggest that the project should be shelved and a railway built instead. They hold the view that the Administration should examine the two options for a medium capacity rail as follows:

- (a) Admiralty to Aberdeen and Ap Lei Chau with a spur line to Cyberport;
or
- (b) Sheung Wan via Cyberport, Wah Fu, Ap Lei Chau, Ocean Park in a circle and back to Wanchai or Admiralty.

According to an organization, as the railway operator will have to shoulder some of the development and maintenance costs, the financial outlay for a railway system may not necessarily be greater than that for a road. If the Government insists on building Route 7 at this stage, it would undermine the financial viability of the railway system to be provided in the future.

16. Some organizations also query that the construction of Route 7 is inconsistent with the Government's advocated policy of developing railway as the backbone of the local transport system. Some organizations consider that the Administration should re-consider the proposal of Route 7 from the perspective of overall planning of the society. This is to ensure that the long-term demand of Aberdeen/Ap Lei Chau and the Southern District for an external traffic link would be met in a manner conducive to sustainable development and compatible with the development of the area. Besides, they have also requested the Administration to release more detailed statistics in respect of traffic flow and planning variables to facilitate their assessment of the project.

17. C&WDC held discussions on Route 7 and passed the following two motions on 19 July 2001:

“The Traffic and Transport Committee of C&WDC strongly requests the Government to resume the construction of the entire Route 7 from the Western District to Aberdeen.”; and

- “(i) The Government should construct the section of Route 7 from the Western to Southern Districts in tunnel form as far as possible, so as to avoid destroying the environment.
- (ii) In studying the section of Route 7 from the Western to Southern Districts, the Government should also examine the feasibility of constructing a rail linking the Western and Southern Districts.
- (iii) It is objected that the Government only intends to build the section of Route 7 from Kennedy Town to Pok Fu Lam Road at the present stage. It is suggested that the Government should construct the Kennedy Town to Aberdeen section of Route 7 as soon as possible, so as to thoroughly improve the traffic between the Western and Southern Districts.”

18. SDC has long been very concerned about the external traffic link of the Southern District, and has expressed on various occasions its concern about the inadequacy of external transport network in the area. SDC considers the construction of Route 7 a long-term solution to the problem of traffic congestion in Aberdeen, and has repeatedly urged the Government to build the road early to relieve present traffic congestion in Aberdeen, especially at the Aberdeen Tunnel. SDC notes that the government departments concerned have completed a project review on the section of Route 7 between Kennedy Town and Aberdeen, and proposed that the original route should be shortened to connect Pok Fu Lam Road only. Members of SDC are much

concerned about the proposal and a special meeting was held to discuss the matter. After deliberation, SDC considers it necessary to build Route 7 with the original proposed alignment and that Phase I of the project be completed in 2007 and the entire route in 2010, as undertaken by the Government. In addition, SDC also welcomes the extension of a rail link to the Southern District in the future.

Legislative Council Secretariat

12 September 2001