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9.1 At the invitation of the Chairman, the Secretary for Transport (S for T), Mr Nicholas NG, briefed members on transport-related expenditures in the 2002-03 Budget and highlighted the key items of work undertaken by the Transport Bureau (TB) in the last five years from 1997 to 2002 (Appendix V-8).

Provision of transport infrastructure

9.2 Referring to the hefty sum of public expenditure committed on the provision of transport infrastructure in the coming years, Mr Albert CHAN considered that better planning and co-ordination by TB was required to ensure that all major infrastructural projects being contemplated would be implemented smoothly. In this connection, he suggested that the Administration should widely solicit views from all interested parties and address their concerns as early as possible so as to avoid any last-minute setbacks as experienced in the Spur Line Project and the Route 10 Northern Section project.

9.3 In response, S for T advised that the ambitious blueprint for transport development in Hong Kong would be taken forward by the Government as a whole. While every effort would be made by TB to make the best planning possible, the final proposal for implementation might have to be revised, having regard to the latest circumstances. He added that notwithstanding the hiccups encountered in some projects, they were still progressing on course. In fact, with members' continuous support over the past few years, the transport scene in Hong Kong had changed considerably and achievements had been made on various fronts. Taking heed of the member's advice about the need for early consultation, S for T stressed that public consultation was an integral part in the planning for major infrastructural projects. The Administration would learn from past experience and review every case with a view to making necessary improvements.

9.4 Considering that both the Northern and Southern Sections of Route 10 should be implemented in entirety, Mr Albert HO asked whether resources had been allocated for the re-submission of funding request for detailed design of Route 10 Northern Section. He was concerned that without the Northern Section, the funds earmarked for the detailed design and preliminary works of Route 10 Southern Section might be wasted.

9.5 S for T explained that while no specific provision had been made for the purpose in the 2002-03 Budget, the funding proposal for detailed design of

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Route 10 Northern Section would be re-submitted to the Finance Committee (FC) in due course as the Administration was all along convinced of the functional need of Route 10 Northern Section. Given the general concern expressed by members previously about the timing for its implementation, the Administration would continue to monitor the traffic flow and review the situation accordingly.

9.6 Mr LAU Kong-wah expressed grave concern about the Administration's decision that an announcement on the choice of operator for the Sha Tin to Central Link (SCL) would only be made after the completion of the on-going investigation into the West Rail (WR) Phase I contracts. Expressing the strong view that the two matters should not be considered together, he called for an early decision from the Administration. He also asked whether the Administration's present decision was indicative of a deviation from the original assessment criteria for SCL, i.e. a weighting of 50:50 for technical and financial aspects of the bidding proposals from the two railway corporations.

9.7 In response, S for T confirmed that the proposals were examined in accordance with the requirements set down in the tender documentation and the bid assessment for SCL was substantially completed. A recommendation would then be submitted to the Executive Council for approval. While stressing that the two matters were completely unrelated, he said that the Administration considered it more appropriate to make an announcement on SCL after the on-going investigation into the WR contracts was completed to avoid any conjecture or presumptuous comments about the decision-making process.

9.8 Mr LAU Kong-wah however did not subscribe to the Administration's reasoning. He considered that in order to convey a clear message to the public that the bidding proposals for SCL were assessed on their own merits, the Administration should make an announcement as and when the decision on the choice of operator was finalized. Otherwise, any delay in the matter would be construed as the decision being taken under the influence of the investigation into the WR contracts. While noting the member's personal opinion on the matter, S for T said that different views had been expressed within the community. Nonetheless, he emphasized that the scheduled completion of SCL in 2008-2011 would be adhered to.

Public transport services

9.9 Notwithstanding the planned commissioning of WR in 2003, Mr TAM Yiu-chung was concerned that the Administration should ensure that

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adequate public transport services were provided in the interim to service the new development area of Tin Shui Wai and new housing estates in Tuen Mun. Citing the long waiting time spent by local residents for external franchised bus services, he queried whether the Administration might deliberately limit the number of buses servicing the areas in anticipation of curtailed services after the opening of WR.

9.10 In response, the Commissioner for Transport (C for T) stressed that the Government's objective was to provide reasonable transport services to meet the needs of the people. Hence, there was certainly no policy of suppressing the quality of franchised bus services in the said areas with a view to diverting passengers to WR. Addressing the concern about the provision of adequate bus services in Tin Shui Wai and Tuen Mun, he said that the Transport Department (TD) would monitor the situation regularly and solicit the views of local District Councils. If new service requirements or specific problems were identified, such as excessive waiting time for a particular route, TD would hold discussions with the bus companies concerned.

9.11 Referring to the Administration's undertaking to consider the proposal to convert the Tuen Mun Pier to a cross-boundary passenger ferry terminal when the matter was discussed by the Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Transport, Mr LAU Chin-shek questioned about the lack of resource provision in the 2002-03 Budget for taking forward the initiative.

9.12 In response, S for T stated that technically Tuen Mun Pier could be converted for operation of cross-boundary ferry services. However, more careful consideration was required taking into account the resource implications in respect of modification works, recurrent operating costs, staffing support for operation of a new control point, etc. Apart from identifying ways to meet the additional staffing requirements through existing resources, the Administration would also consider ideas with ferry service operators on possible financing arrangements. Subject to progress of these considerations, it was hoped that a conclusion would be made in the first half of the year. Should the Administration proceed with the proposal, tenders would be invited for the operation of the new cross-boundary pier.

Management of road use

9.13 Noting that an additional provision of \$910 million in capital

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expenditure was made for major systems and equipment as well as computerization projects, Ir Dr Raymond HO asked whether the Administration had any proposed initiatives to further improve the computerized Utility Management System (UMS) for enhancing control and co-ordination of utility road opening works. He was particularly concerned about the need to maintain a comprehensive electronic database on public utilities in the territory to facilitate planning by utility undertakings (UUs).

9.14 In reply, the Director of Highways (D of Hy) advised that different projects were being undertaken to facilitate more direct exchange of information and to allow UUs and government departments better access to information in the UMS. Currently, the Highways Department (HyD) was working on providing an internet interface for the UMS (IIUMS). The enhanced functions of IIUMS would allow UUs to gain access to the UMS database through the internet, digitize their proposed road opening alignment into the IIUMS directly on-line and check other UUs' road opening proposals on digital maps.

9.15 D of Hy further advised that in order to facilitate speedy utility information transfer, an Electronic Mark Plant Circulation (EMPC) system jointly funded by eight out of the 12 UUs in Hong Kong would be implemented. With the scheduled roll-out of Stage 1 of the EMPC system in April/May 2002, an electronic alternative would replace the current method of hardcopy Mark Plant Circulation among the participants. Subject to evaluation, Stage 2 of the project would be implemented by end-2003 to link up the EMPC system with a central data processor which would serve as a data conduit for non-participants to acquire information from the participants. Addressing Ir Dr HO's concern about the involvement of other government departments, D of Hy stated that the majority of government utilities were under the purview of HyD, Water Supplies Department and Drainage Services Department which were all participants of the EMPC system.

9.16 Regarding the sharing of information with non-participants of the EMPC system, D of Hy stated that three of the remaining four UUs were involved in the Electronic Mark Plant Query System (EMPQS) launched by the Jockey Club Research and Information Centre for Landslip Prevention and Land Development of the Hong Kong University. HyD had taken a lead to liaise with the participants of the EMPC system and EMPQS on the possibility of linking up the two systems in future. It was expected a decision would be made soon.

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9.17 Mr LAU Kong-wah welcomed the Administration's plan to gradually replace the existing parking meters with new Octopus operated meters for bringing convenience to the public. In this connection, he sought information about the funding requirement and timetable of the proposed programme.

9.18 In response, C for T said that the capital cost for implementation of an Octopus only system would be \$90 million. A funding request would be made shortly to implement the replacement programme. Subject to FC's approval, the Administration's plan was to install the first batch of the new generation parking meters in the first quarter of 2003 and to complete the replacement programme by 2004/2005.

Road safety

9.19 Mr Albert HO enquired about the resource provision in 2002-03 for undertaking consultancy studies to identify measures to improve the situation at traffic accident black spots, in particular, measures to tackle serious congestion on Tuen Mun Road due to traffic accidents. In response, C for T assured members that traffic accident black spots were closely monitored. Continuous improvements had been made to Tuen Mun Road, including the proposals to reconstruct and widen various sections of the road. Each accident which took place in Tuen Mun Road was carefully examined to identify measures to prevent accidents. D of Hy supplemented that there were plans to widen the hardshoulders of Tuen Mun Road so that traffic flow could be maintained even after an accident.

Management of transport services

9.20 Relaying the grave concern expressed by members of the LegCo Panel on Transport on the adverse impact caused by the inequitable use of existing cross-harbour tunnels as a result of their toll differential, Ms Miriam LAU asked whether a relevant consultancy study commissioned by TB would aim at introducing new policy initiatives to tackle the problem at root.

9.21 In reply, S for T explained that the purpose of the on-going consultancy study was to collect data and conduct researches on ways to optimize the utilization of road harbour crossings. In this respect, reference would also be made to the experience of overseas countries. While acknowledging members'

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concern about uneven distribution of traffic among the existing cross-harbour tunnels, he said that findings of this generalized study would provide a basis for further examination into the issues involved with a view to identifying possible improvement measures in future. Any development in the matter would be reverted to the Panel in due course. In this connection, Ms Miriam LAU opined that the study should also make reference to the successful experience of Pudong, Shanghai in resolving the congestion caused by inequitable use of different roads/bridges/tunnels with different toll structures. S for T agreed to consider the member's suggestion.

9.22 Noting the resource provision for initiatives to improve the environment of public transport interchanges (PTIs), Ms Miriam LAU pointed out that improvements in respect of the air quality and physical environment of many old and dilapidated covered PTIs were urgently required. In this connection, she asked whether the Administration had any plans to extend the improvement programme to other PTIs and speed up progress.

9.23 In response, C for T advised that within the next five years, there would be some 60 covered PTIs in Hong Kong. On-going efforts were made by TD to improve the environment of covered PTIs. The ventilation systems in four PTIs would be upgraded in the coming year with a view to improving the air quality. Upgrading works for six covered PTIs had yet to be undertaken. Apart from taking various short-term measures to improve the situation, TD would examine whether additional funding would be sought next year to complete the programme. In the meantime, TD would also initiate a programme to check the air quality of all covered PTIs in future.

9.24 In reply to Ms Miriam LAU's follow-up question, C for T said that the works planned for improving the physical environment of the covered PTI at Tin Hau was a pilot scheme. Subject to evaluation of the relevant findings, the Administration would plan progressively to upgrade other PTIs.

9.25 To improve the quality of service to the public, C for T advised that the management of about 20 PTIs would be contracted out in 2002-03. After this year's exercise, the total number of PTIs contracted out would reach about 36. The Government's intention was to contract out the remaining covered PTIs by 2005.

Measures to reduce vehicle emission

9.26 Underlying the utter urgency for improving air quality in Hong Kong, Ms Emily LAU was dissatisfied with the slow progress in the installation of emission reduction devices for the franchised bus fleet. In this respect, she asked whether any deadlines had been set for the bus companies to complete the installation programme.

9.27 In reply, C for T stated that the Administration did not have a specific timetable for the installation programme. He explained that the bus companies' approach was to tackle the older and more polluting vehicles as a matter of priority. Currently, all pre-Euro buses except those due for scrapping within the year had already been retrofitted with diesel catalysts (CATs). As for buses with Euro I engines, 735 (over 50%) of them were already fitted with CATs and it was the bus companies' initial plan to retrofit CATs on another 100 buses in 2002-03.

9.28 Advising on the situation of Euro II and III buses, C for T said that another equipment using a different technology, i.e. continuous regenerating traps (CRTs), would have to be adopted. However, as the use of CRTs on Euro II and III engines had not been properly tested elsewhere, a trial would have to be conducted first to ascertain their effectiveness. Subject to the results of the trial, TD and the bus companies would work out a programme to retrofit CRTs on buses with Euro II and III engines.

9.29 Notwithstanding the explanation given, Ms Emily LAU urged the Administration to take further actions to speed up progress with the installation of CATs on the remaining 600 or so buses with Euro I engines. Acknowledging the member's concern in the matter, C for T agreed that TD would liaise with the bus companies to accord priority to retrofitting CATs on more Euro I buses. He undertook to provide members with information about the pollution level of various types of bus engines after the meeting.

Changes in project estimates of public works projects

9.30 Underlying the need for the Administration to properly account for the use of public expenditure, Ms Emily LAU referred to the list of sample

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projects for which the changes in project estimates were recorded in the Quarterly Reports on Public Works Programme (Appendix of LC Paper No. FC55/01-02) and sought explanation about the downward and then subsequent upward revision to the project estimate of item 30 (5740TH - Detailed design for Cho Ko Wan Link road in North Lantau) and item 34 (B643TH - Trunk Road T7 in Ma On Shan).

9.31 In reply, S for T explained that while the said projects were related to the provision of transport infrastructure, they were not implemented by government departments under his purview. As such, he would relay the member's question to the responsible Policy Secretary who would be in a better position to account for the revised project estimates. Notwithstanding the explanation given, Ms LAU opined that a mechanism should be put in place to keep track of the changes in project estimates for public works projects approved by FC after the award of contracts. She would pursue her suggestion in another forum.

9.32 As it was the last time S for T attended the special FC meeting before his retirement, he took the opportunity to thank members for their support in taking forward various transport policies and initiatives throughout the years.