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Panel on Environmental Affairs

Meeting on 27 May 2002

**Background brief on proposed amendments to the
Waste Disposal (Refuse Transfer Station) Regulation and
Waste Disposal (Designated Waste Disposal Facility) Regulation**

Background

A refuse transfer station (RTS) is a facility that compacts municipal solid waste for bulk transport to a landfill. There are currently seven RTSs, namely the Island East Transfer Station (IETS), Island West Transfer Station (IWTS), West Kowloon Transfer Station (WKTS), Kowloon Bay Transfer Station, Shatin Transfer Station, North Lantau Transfer Station (NLTS) and Outlying Island Transfer Facilities (OITF). The operation of RTSs has been outsourced to contractors who are paid according to the waste intake and the schedules of payment in the contracts.

2. Prior to the opening of IWTS, WKTS and NLTS, the capacities of RTSs were only sufficient to handle waste delivered by Government refuse collection vehicles. It was only after the commissioning of the three RTSs in 1997 and 1998 that the RTS network began to have capacity to handle privately collected waste. In 1998, IETS, WKTS, NLTS and OITF were opened to private waste collectors. To tie in with such development, a charging scheme has been put in place. The Waste Disposal (Refuse Transfer Station) Regulation sets out, inter alia, the rates payable for the waste handled by IETS, WKTS and NLTS. The rates are based on the additional cost for handling the waste delivered by private waste collectors. No charge is levied for the use of OITS as there is no alternative disposal option at outlying islands.

Waste Disposal (Refuse Transfer Station) (Amendment) Regulation 2001

3. The Waste Disposal (Refusal Transfer) (Amendment) Regulation was last amended in March 2001. It opened IWTS to private waste collectors and set its charge at \$40 per tonne; and reduced the charges of IETS and WKTS to \$40 per tonne and \$30 per tonne respectively. Peak hour surcharges were also removed.

4. When the subject was discussed at the Environmental Affairs Panel on 5 December 2000, members noted that one of the purposes of opening IWTS to private waste collectors was to reduce the pressure of the Southeast New Territories (SENT) Landfill, which would be the earliest to be filled up. Waste handled at IWTS were delivered to the West New Territories (WENT) Landfill. By reducing charges, it was hoped that there would be increased diversion from SENT Landfill to IETS and WKTS, the waste of which were delivered to the WENT Landfill. To the Administration, this in turn would mean cost savings to the Government. As past records showed that the higher charges at peak hours did not deter users from using the service in the morning, the peak hour and non-peak hour charge differential was also dispensed with in the Amendment Regulation in March 2001.

5. Members are concerned about the following:

- (a) The reduction of RTS charges may encourage disposal at landfills as the waste handled in RTSs will eventually be delivered to landfills. This is at variance with Government's policy of promoting waste recovery. Doubt has also been cast on the future need for RTSs in the event of decrease in waste intake as a result of improved waste recovery rate;
- (b) The removal of peak hour surcharge will also increase the use of RTSs in the morning which will not only aggravate the traffic problem but also lengthen the handling time at RTSs during peak hours;

6. According to the Administration, RTSs are to handle the waste after the processes of waste separation and collection, and hence there will still be a great demand for RTSs in the transfer of waste to landfills. Moreover, consideration is being given to using some RTSs for the recovery of materials that cannot be effectively separated at the earlier stage. As such, there is still a need for RTSs.

7. As regards the removal of peak-hour surcharge, the Administration's explanation at that time was that the number of additional waste collection vehicles going to each RTS would be very small when compared with the number of other transportation vehicles using the same roads. The situation would be kept under review.