

For information on
27 November 2001

Legislative Council
Panel on Transport, Panel on Planning, Lands and Works,
and Panel on Environmental Affairs

Long Valley

INTRODUCTION

This paper provides the following information requested by the Legislative Council Secretariat –

- (a) conservation issues related to Long Valley;
- (b) the progress of the review of the conservation policy; and
- (c) the initial views of the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) on the tunnel option proposed by the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC) for the Spur Line project.

BACKGROUND

2. At the meeting of the Legislative Council Panel on Transport held on 26 October 2001, Members discussed the way forward on the Sheung Shui to Lok Ma Chau Spur Line. Some Members expressed concern about the long-term conservation of the wetlands in Long Valley. It was decided that another meeting involving also the Panel on Planning, Lands and Works and the Panel on Environmental Affairs should be held to discuss the protection of wetlands in Long Valley in light of the latest development of the Spur Line project.

CONSERVATION OF LONG VALLEY

3. Long Valley is basically an area of wet agricultural land. The habitats there are almost entirely man-made. Its current ecological value is mainly maintained by the agricultural practices adopted in the area over many years, in particular wet agriculture. Long Valley mainly falls within an area zoned “Agriculture” on the current Kwu Tung North Outline Zoning Plan (OZP). Most of the land is privately owned. Land uses in the area are governed by the “Agriculture” zoning under which only “agriculture use” and a few minor rural land uses (such as “on-farm domestic structure” and “shrine”) are permitted as of right. Developments in the area are subject to planning controls. Unless the Town Planning Board’s permission for changes of land uses is obtained, the area cannot be used for other “uses” (such as car parks or container storage) that are prohibited by the current OZP.

4. There has been suggestion to change the zoning of Long Valley from “Agriculture” to “Conservation Area” in order to further tighten the control over the land uses in the area. This is a possible option, but we have to consider whether there are others that are more appropriate for protecting such private land of high ecological value in the long run. This is one of the major issues that we are examining in the context of the review of the conservation policy.

REVIEW OF CONSERVATION POLICY

5. In our current review, we are examining all the relevant considerations like landowners’ rights, land use planning, how to measure and compare the ecological value of different sites, how to strike a balance between nature conservation and development needs and other related issues in conjunction with the bureaux and departments concerned. We will review areas where improvements should be made and options for improvements. We aim to consult the public on the review next year.

EPD AND AFCD’S VIEWS ON THE TUNNEL OPTION

6. Since the Environmental Impact Assessment Appeal Board

delivered its determination on the Spur Line Appeal Case on 30 July 2001, the Transport Bureau and KCRC have been liaising closely with EPD, AFCD and other relevant departments with a view to working out an option to build the Spur Line project in an environmentally friendly manner the soonest possible. The parties involved agree that the tunnel option, compared to the viaduct option, will provide more certainty regarding its environmental acceptability.

7. Environmental Study Management Group meetings involving all relevant bureaux/departments and KCRC, and ad hoc working meetings between KCRC and individual departments have been held to discuss the environmental issues associated with the proposed project and will continue. Based on the information available, there does not appear to be any insurmountable environmental issues associated with Long Valley. Issues like the possible impact of adopting the bored tunnel option on the water table level of Long Valley, and compensation of the wetland loss arising from the construction of Lok Ma Chau Station have been discussed and will be fully addressed in the EIA study currently undertaken by KCRC.