

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)1557/01-02
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB1/PL/TP/1

Legislative Council
Panel on Transport

Minutes of meeting held on
Friday, 22 February 2002, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon Miriam LAU Kin-ye, JP (Chairman)
Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, JP
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Dr Hon TANG Siu-tong, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon LAU Ping-cheung
- Members absent** : Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon CHAN Kwok-keung
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
- Public officers attending** : **Agenda Item IV**
Transport Bureau
Miss Margaret FONG
Deputy Secretary for Transport

Mrs Sharon YIP
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport (2)

Transport Department

Mr Brian GROGAN
Assistant Commissioner for Transport/Planning

Mr LEUNG Tak-fai
Chief Engineer/Road Safety and Standards

Agenda Item V

Transport Bureau

Miss Margaret FONG
Deputy Secretary for Transport

Mr Roy TANG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport (3)

Transport Department

Mr Peter LUK
Assistant Commissioner for Transport/
Management & Paratransit

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 Confirmation of minutes and matters arising**
(LC Paper No. CB(1)891/01-02 - Minutes of joint meeting held with the Environmental Affairs Panel on 13 December 2001;
LC Paper No. CB(1)1083/01-02 - Minutes of meeting held on 17 December 2001; and
LC Paper No. CB(1)1084/01-02 - Minutes of meeting held on 11 January 2002)

The minutes of joint meeting held with the Environmental Affairs Panel on 13

December 2001 and the minutes of meetings held on 17 December 2001 and 11 January 2002 were confirmed.

II Information papers issued since last meeting

- (LC Paper Nos. CB(1)1054/01-02(01) and (02) - Submissions on concessionary fares for students;
LC Paper No. CB(1)1056/01-02(01) - Monitoring and control of non-franchised bus service;
LC Paper No. CB(1)1110/01-02(01) - Progress report of speed limit review 2001; and
LC Paper No. CB(1)1126/01-02(01) - Submission on non-franchised bus service)

2. Members noted the above information papers issued since last meeting. In respect of LC Paper Nos. CB(1)1056/01-02(01) and CB(1)1126/01-02(01), the Chairman advised that the subject on “Policy on non-franchised bus services” had already been included in the Panel’s list of outstanding items for discussion.

3. Members agreed to invite MTR Corporation Limited to comment on the submissions put forward by a group of mature students on concessionary fares on MTR (LC Paper Nos. CB(1)1054/01-02(01) and (02)).

III Items for discussion at the meeting on 15 March 2002

- (LC Paper No. CB(1)1085/01-02(01) - List of outstanding items for discussion; and
LC Paper No. CB(1)1085/01-02(02) - List of follow-up actions)

4. The Chairman invited members to go through the Panel’s lists of outstanding items for discussion and follow-up actions (LC Paper Nos. CB(1)1085/01-02(01) and (02) respectively).

5. Members noted that the Administration had proposed two items for discussion at the next regular Panel meeting scheduled for 15 March 2002:

- (a) Provision of escalator link/elevator system; and
- (b) Long term replacement of parking meters.

6. After deliberation, members agreed that the Administration should be requested to provide an information paper on item (b) above. They would decide on whether it was necessary to follow up on the item at a later meeting. Apart from item (a) above, members also agreed to discuss the item on “Regulation of traffic during road openings” as suggested by Mrs Selina CHOW at the next meeting.

IV Measures to enhance safety of school transport vehicles

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1085/01-02(03) - Information paper provided by the Administration;

LC Paper No. CB(1)1130/01-02(01) - Submission from Young Children School Mini-Buses Operators Association Ltd; and

LC Paper No. CB(1)1130/01-02(02) - Submission from Private Hire Car For Young Children Association Limited)

7. The Assistant Commissioner for Transport/Planning (AC for T/P) briefly introduced the information paper provided by the Administration (LC Paper No. CB(1)1085/01-02(03)), which presented the findings of the Administration's review of measure to enhance safety of passengers on school transport vehicles.

8. AC for T/P advised that four possible measures, namely the introduction of passenger seat belts, the use of safer seats, enhanced training and education, and compulsory escort provision had been reviewed. To further enhance the service and safety of school transport vehicles, the Administration recommended that the following measures should be pursued:

- (a) similar to school buses (vehicles which had more than 16 passenger seats), provision of escorts should be made compulsory for school private light buses (which were more commonly known as "nanny vans") serving kindergarten and primary school pupils;
- (b) all new school transport vehicles should be provided with proper and well constructed seats according to the specifications to be decided by the Transport Department, with special arrangements for a few exposed seats;
- (c) TD would liaise with the trade and relevant parties to strengthen driver training and education/publicity; and
- (d) since the effectiveness and benefits versus the risks of wearing of seat belts by children on school transport vehicles were still subject to debate, there was no strong justification to require compulsory fitting and wearing of seat belts on these vehicles at the present stage.

The Administration would further consult the school transport trade and the parents/teachers associations in coming up with detailed proposals.

Compulsory escort services

9. Noting that only the views of the trade on provision of seat belts were set out in Annex B to the paper, the Chairman queried whether the school transport trade had

been properly consulted on the proposed requirement to provide escort service on nanny vans serving kindergarten and primary school pupils. In this connection, she had invited the trade to give views on this particular proposal. Submissions were received from two major trade associations, i.e. the Young Children School Mini-Buses Operators Association Ltd. and Private Hire Car For Young Children Association Limited (issued vide LC Paper Nos. CB(1)1130/01-02(01) and (02) respectively). She invited members to note the dissenting views expressed by the trade. In this respect, Mrs Selina CHOW considered that Panel consultation should not be used as a pretext to bypass consultation with the trade.

10. In response, the Deputy Secretary for Transport (DS for T) clarified that the Administration had in fact consulted the school transport trade on all the proposed measures. However, it was quite clear that the trade was at that time focussing more on the provision of seat belts than on other proposals. The views expressed by the trade were set out in Annex B to the paper for members' easy reference. Regarding other proposals, she reported that given the perceived benefits in enhancing safety and quality of service, the general view of the trade was that such proposals could be pursued further.

11. DS for T also pointed out that when considering the way forward for enhancing the safety of school transport, the Administration's approach was to look into all possible measures and then carefully consider their cost-effectiveness. In addition, the impact on the trade as well as the parents/guardians would also be assessed. Having examined all these factors, the Administration had come up with four recommendations which were set out in the paper for members' consideration. In this respect, she emphasized that the Administration had yet to make a decision on these proposals and would listen to the views from members and all interested parties, including the school transport trade. In this connection, the views expressed by the two trade associations in their written submissions would also be taken into account.

12. The Chairman remarked that in February 1997 when the requirement to provide escort service for school buses serving kindergarten and primary school pupils became mandatory, the Administration had decided not to impose the same requirement on nanny vans in view of the concerns expressed by the operators about the adverse impact on their competitiveness and survival in the business due to the probable increase in operating cost. Considering that these concerns were all the more valid under the present difficult economic conditions, she questioned whether it was the right time to extend the requirement which would invariably increase the financial burden of both the school private light bus trade and the parents/guardians.

13. While expressing support for the general direction to enhance safety of school transport, Mr David CHU opined that given the financial implications involved, the Administration would need to provide strong justifications for its proposals in connection with the installation of safer seats and provision of escort service because the accident rates of school transport vehicles were generally very low already.

14. In response, AC for T/P stressed that notwithstanding the good safety record of school transport vehicles, the Administration would continue to explore ways to reduce the rate of accident. In this respect, the Administration was convinced of the additional safety benefits that the proposed measures would bring about. Regarding the installation of safer seats, he said that although extra cost in the region of \$5,000 to \$25,000 for nanny vans and \$15,000 to \$60,000 for school buses would be incurred, the associated benefit was extremely high as overseas experience had shown that strong, well-padded and energy-absorbing seats were very effective in protecting the children from injuries in the event of a crash. Moreover, as the extra cost would be shared out among all the students served by the same school bus/nanny van, it would not translate to a very great increase per student per month in terms of the fees charged.

15. Regarding the provision of escort service, AC for T/P explained that at present, escort service was provided voluntarily on about 90% of nanny vans carrying kindergarten pupils and over 50% of those carrying primary school students. With an average monthly salary of \$2,000 for an escort, the additional operating cost per student per month would be around \$100.

16. While recognizing the safety benefits to be brought about by the installation of seat belts and safer seats, Mrs Selina CHOW opined that the provision of escort *per se* would not help enhance the safety of school transport. In the absence of any detailed study or statistics to substantiate the Administration's claim about the safety benefits of escort provision, she did not see a case for making such a requirement mandatory. Considering that it would be irresponsible for the Administration to put forward a proposal without thinking it through, she asked whether any comparison had been made by the Administration on either the safety record of school buses before and after the mandatory requirement was introduced, or the accidents rates of those nanny vans with and without escort.

17. In reply, AC for T/P explained that accidents happened for a lot of different reasons. It would be quite impossible to either isolate one factor in a continuing trend of accidents or attribute the difference in accidents rates to one particular point in time when a rule became mandatory. In respect of compulsory escort provision, the Administration had made its recommendation on a fairly common sense basis that an escort if present would be able to help control the behaviour and activities of the children.

18. Mrs Selina CHOW was not convinced by the Administration's explanation. She said that in order to enhance in-vehicle safety, the right approach was to focus on education so that students would learn to behave properly on school transport vehicles during the trip, rather than having an escort to passively control their behaviour. Sharing similar views, Mr David CHU opined that legislation was not an effective means to tackle the problem. In addition, he considered that the driver who had received the necessary training should be able to take care of the relatively small number of students travelling on the nanny vans. Hence, there was no need to make

the provision of escort mandatory for nanny vans.

19. Mr CHENG Kar-foo however held a different view. He pointed out that the generally good safety record of school transport vehicles might in part be attributed to the fact that escort provision was a mandatory requirement for school buses since 1997 and as many as 90% of the nanny vans serving kindergarten students were provided with an escort voluntarily. Without an escort, it would be quite an impossible task for the driver to drive the vehicle while at the same time monitor the behaviour of students. In view of the above, he was convinced that real safety benefits would be achieved if an escort was present and the extra protection offered was all the more necessary for the smaller nanny vans. Hence, the requirement on compulsory escort provision should be extended to nanny vans serving kindergarten and primary school students as early as possible.

20. Mr CHENG further said that in respect of safety for school transport, no allowance should be made. Hence, the Administration should not allow factors such as the prevailing economic conditions to affect its decision. Expressing support for the measures outlined in paragraph 8 above, he considered that the Administration had taken a forward-looking approach in dealing with this very importance issue. To reap early benefits from the proposals, he called on the Administration to expedite its work for their implementation.

21. The Chairman however was concerned that the Administration's present proposal on compulsory escort provision in nanny vans might not represent a proper balance between the affordability of parents/guardians and safety considerations. She was worried that a measure conceived out of good intention might backfire if the children of those parents/guardians who could not afford the extra cost were forced to switch to other means of public transport. Given that an escort was already provided voluntarily in as many as 90% of the nanny vans serving kindergarten pupils, both the Chairman and Mrs Selina CHOW considered that the matter should be left to the decision of market forces. Mr CHENG Kar-foo however maintained that the requirement for escort provision should at least be extended to the remaining 10% of nanny vans serving kindergarten pupils because the smaller children were less able to take care of themselves in case of an accident.

22. In response, AC for T/P stated that different people would have different considerations when assessing the cost-effectiveness of the proposed measures. Referring to the questionnaire survey conducted by the Administration on the views of parents/guardians on the cancellation of the "3 for 2" counting rule, provision of seat belts on school transport vehicles and compulsory escorts on nanny vans, he pointed out that some 20 - 37% of the parents/guardians surveyed had indicated that they were willing to pay more than \$100 extra each month for the enhanced services.

23. Acknowledging the views and concerns expressed by members, DS for T advised that a phased approach might be adopted in taking this proposal forward. Given that escort service was already provided in 90% of the nanny vans serving

kindergarten pupils, it might be appropriate as a first step to make the requirement mandatory for the remaining 10% nanny vans. Subject to the progress of economic recovery, the requirement could then be extended to those nanny vans serving primary school students.

24. Mr CHENG Kar-foo remarked that most of the parents/guardians he came across were willing to consider extra payment if additional safety benefits were provided. He considered that if the extra fees involved could be kept to less than \$100 per month, the proposal would be more readily accepted by the parents/guardians. Echoing similar views, Mr Andrew WONG sought elaboration on the calculation of the additional operating cost of \$100 per student per month. He further asked whether any comparison had been made on the existing fees charged by those nanny vans with and without an escort.

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25. AC for T/P reported that according to the findings of the survey, the percentage of parents/guardians of kindergarten, primary and secondary school students who were willing to pay less than \$100 per month was 77%, 80% and around 63% respectively. The majority of those parents/guardians surveyed would consider extra payment in the region of \$100 to \$150 per month for the enhanced services. He agreed to provide details of the survey to members for information after the meeting.

Admin

26. AC for T/P further explained that when assessing the extra cost involved, the Administration's focus was on the additional cost arising out of the employment of an escort. Factors such as the existing practice of the trade, the average salary of an escort, the average number of students using the same escort service had been taken into consideration. In that case, Mr Andrew WONG expressed concern that if the difference between existing fees charged by nanny vans with and without an escort was less than \$100 per student per month, it might be indicative of profiteering by some operators of nanny vans without an escort. Noting Mr WONG's view and concern, AC for T/P undertook to try and ascertain the existing level of fees charged by nanny vans with and without an escort.

Other recommendations

27. Members were generally in support of the need to enhance education and publicity. In this respect, they called on the Administration to take immediate actions in this respect and to liaise with the trade, schools and Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs) accordingly.

28. While accepting the Administration's preliminary recommendations on compulsory fitting and wearing of seat belts as well as the "3 for 2" counting rule, Mr CHENG Kar-foo considered that for the purpose of further enhancing the safety of school transport, both proposals would require further study by the Administration.

29. In response, AC for T/P explained that in the Administration's review, the "3 for 2" counting rule had been examined in the context of compulsory fitting and

wearing of seat belts on school transport vehicles. As the compulsory fitting and wearing of seat belts was not recommended at this stage, the Administration did not intend to change the “3 for 2” counting rule as it would not be necessary with any of the present proposals being put forward.

Admin 30. Summing up the discussion, the Chairman invited the Administration to fine-tune its recommendations on compulsory escort provision for nanny vans taking into account the views expressed by members at the meeting and to revert to the Panel on detail proposals in due course. Subject to the Administration’s report, the Panel would decide whether the views of interested parties including the school transport trade and PTAs would be invited.

V Policy on the provision and operation of tunnels

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1085/01-02(04) - Information paper provided by the Administration)

31. The Chairman recapitulated that when the item on “Toll differential amongst different tunnels and the resulting traffic implications” was last discussed at the meeting on 15 December 2000, the Administration was requested to conduct a study in response to the motion “本會要求政府盡快研究長遠隧道政策及提出新方案，以解決隧道擠塞及充分善用公共資源之問題。” passed by the Panel. Thereafter, members had also made the following suggestions on various occasions to improve utilization of Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) tunnels:

- (a) establishing a fund to stabilize tunnel tolls;
- (b) extending the franchise period of BOT franchises;
- (c) establishment of a Tunnels and Bridges Authority (TBA); and
- (d) redistribution of tunnel traffic by way of toll alignment.

32. At the invitation of the Chairman, DS for T briefed members on the salient points of the information paper provided by the Administration (LC Paper No. CB(1)1085/01-02(04)). She highlighted that the Government policy on the provision and operation of tunnels was guided by the following principles:

- (a) Government should, as far as practicable, encourage participation of the private sector through the BOT mode;
- (b) while BOT operators should be afforded the opportunity to make a reasonable return on their investments, they were also expected to bear the commercial risk;

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- (c) the Government did not provide any guarantee that a BOT operator would, at the end of the franchise, achieve its own target rate of return; and
- (d) the users-pay principle, i.e. the Government would not use public funds to subsidize BOT operators or motorists.

33. DS for T further said that the Administration had reviewed the suggestions made by members in the light of the above principles. Details of the assessment were set out in paragraphs 15 to 23 of the paper. She stressed that any suggestions involving the use of public funds would have to be considered carefully to ensure that such measures, if implemented, would give the best value for money. In addition, one had to bear in mind that both the Government and BOT operators were contractually bound by the terms of the franchises. Any variation of the scope of the franchises should be handled according to the laws of Hong Kong. In this connection, she invited views from members on the content of the paper.

34. Judging from the contents of the paper, the Chairman however pointed out that the Administration had more or less formed its opinion on the suggestions from members. She queried the use for members to give further views if the Administration had already made up its mind in the matter. In this connection, she asked the Administration to confirm whether any or all of the four suggestions from members would still be pursued.

35. In response, DS for T advised that paragraphs 15 to 23 of the paper were only meant to set out the Administration's thinking in respect of the suggestions made by members in the light of the four guiding principles for Government policy on the provision and operation of tunnels. Subject to members' views on these guiding principles, the Administration's stance on the suggestions made by members could be revisited.

Measures to improve utilization of BOT tunnels

36. Mr CHENG Kar-foo was gravely disappointed that nothing new had come out from the Administration's review. Once again, the Administration had ignored the legitimate concerns raised by members repeatedly about the adverse impact caused by the inequitable use of tunnels in Hong Kong. He pointed out that if the Administration still adhered to its out-dated and high-sounding principles, the problem would never be resolved, resulting in a great waste of expensive tunnel resources and precious social resources.

37. Reiterating his call for the Administration to critically examine any possible solutions that might help resolve the problem, Mr CHENG referred to the views put forward by Professor Richard WONG and others on the use of pecuniary measures to "subsidize" certain classes of vehicles so as to maximize the utilization of existing tunnel and road resources when the Route 10 project was discussed by the Panel.

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Judging from this perspective, public funds were not used to subsidize BOT operators or motorists. Instead, they were worthily spent to enhance the efficiency of road utilization and bring about overall benefits to the whole traffic network and reduce the time costs of road users. Under the circumstances, application of the “users-pay principle”, which implied that the Government would not use public funds to subsidize BOT operators or motorists, should be reviewed.

38. Mr LAU Kong-wah also considered that notwithstanding the BOT franchises entered into between the Government and tunnel operators, the construction of tunnels would invariably involve the use of precious social resources such as land. If the use of tunnels were not maximized, it was tantamount to putting all these social resources to waste.

39. Mr Albert CHAN opined that all along, the Administration did not have a set of clear policies and criteria on the use of BOT arrangement for building tunnels. In this respect, he said that building a new road in the form of a road/tunnel/bridge should be a choice made out of geographical constraints. Hence, even if a tunnel was required, it should not be taken to mean that BOT mode must be used which necessitated the charging of tolls. At present, there was clearly inconsistency in respect of the Government’s policy on charging for the use of roads/tunnels/bridges. As a result, some roads/tunnels/bridges were tolled while others were not, resulting in congestion being created unnecessarily.

40. Mr CHAN further said that given the anomalies in respect of charging for the use of roads/tunnels/bridges, he did not fully subscribe to the Administration’s argument that the Government should not use public funds to subsidize users of BOT tunnels under the “user-pay principle”. To a certain extent, the Government could be seen as subsidizing users of those toll-free tunnels or bridges built by the Government. But on the other hand, various fees, charges and duties were levied on the motorists. All these would become part of the Government’s revenue which was used not only to pay for the construction and management of these tunnels/bridges, but also to meet other Government expenditure. As such, the issue of subsidization should be examined in a broader context taking into account the interests of the motorists. Mr CHAN therefore called on the Administration to conduct an overall review on building tunnels through BOT arrangement. His views were shared by Mr Andrew WONG who considered that the guiding principles might not have been consistently applied by the Administration.

41. Ir Dr Raymond HO pointed out that in view of the current budget deficit, BOT mode might have to be increasingly used to finance the large number of infrastructural projects announced by the Government for the coming years. Under the circumstances, he considered that the Administration would need to review its policies on BOT arrangements so that the present problems arising out of BOT tunnels could be avoided in future.

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42. In response, DS for T emphasized that the building of a new tunnel would achieve two equally important objectives, i.e. to achieve traffic diversion from existing tunnels to relieve congestion and to cater for anticipated traffic demand arising out of new developments. Hence, even though a tunnel might have spare capacity at the initial stage, it did not mean that precious social resources were left to waste because such capacity was designed to meet future needs. Notwithstanding the importance of achieving traffic diversion from existing congested roads/tunnels, the Administration must also adopt a forward-looking approach in planning for new transport infrastructure to meet the increasing demand from new developments.

43. Referring to the characteristics of tunnel operation, DS for T advised that traffic volume plying through a new tunnel would take time to build up. The bulk of the traffic in the first few years of operation was diverted and induced traffic, i.e. traffic which was diverted from or suppressed by the congestion of existing tunnels or roads. As the areas served by the new tunnel developed, new traffic demand would be generated. In Hong Kong, it was observed that it normally took four to five years of operation (i.e. the seventh or eighth years of the franchise taking into account the construction period) for a tunnel franchisee to start making profit. Responding to the Chairman, DS for T said that profits were recorded for Tate's Cairn Tunnel (TCT) starting last year.

44. Taking the Western Harbour Crossing (WHC) as an example, DS for T pointed out that patronage of WHC had increased from 22 000 in 1997 to 40 000 in 2001, while the daily throughput of Cross Harbour Tunnel (CHT) had dropped from 123 000 in 1997 to 120 000 in 1998 and had since been maintained at that level despite the growth in overall cross-harbour traffic. The Administration hence believed that WHC had served to divert traffic from CHT. With population build-up at Lantau and West Kowloon, the patronage of WHC was also expected to grow steadily. On the other hand, the throughput at CHT was expected to be maintained at a relatively high level as it was the most conveniently located tunnel and provided a strategic connection between the Hong Kong Island and urban Kowloon.

45. The Chairman was unconvinced by the Administration's explanation because it was totally inappropriate for the Administration to say that traffic diversion had been successfully achieved by WHC if in fact, the throughput of CHT only experienced a minuscule reduction of 3 000 vehicles per day. In this connection, she requested the Administration to provide members with the original set of traffic forecasts used by the Administration when planning for WHC and Tai Lam Tunnel (TLT).

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46. The Chairman further stated that the primary objective of building any new roads/tunnels/bridges must be to improve the traffic condition at existing road sections rather than creating additional congestion as a result. However, this important objective was not reflected in any of the Administration's guiding principles which were in fact all business rather than transport considerations. Sharing similar views, Mr CHENG Kar-foo considered that if the Administration accepted that a change in its guiding principles was desirable, the four suggestions made by members, in particular

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the proposal to establish the TBA put forward by Members of the Democratic Party should be re-examined.

47. DS to T noted that the objective of building a tunnel was of course to relieve congestion and cater for planned traffic growth. The purpose of paragraph 2 of the paper was to set out the guiding principles in pursuing this overall transport objective. For fear of stating the obvious, this objective was not mentioned in the paper. Notwithstanding the Administration's explanation, the Chairman considered that these guiding principles were being taken to the extreme by the Administration, so much so that the primary objective of building a new tunnel to relieve congestion was defeated. In this respect, she called for a fundamental review of the Government policy on the provision and operation of tunnels.

48. Concurring with the Chairman's views, Mr LAU Kong-wah called on the Administration to give due regard to the objective of ensuring traffic diversion in its policies so that new measures could be adopted to promote a more equitable use of tunnels, such as between TCT and Lion Rock Tunnel (LRT), and among the three cross-harbour tunnels. In this connection, he considered that it would be most important for the Administration to come up with further measures that could improve the situation of those highly under-utilized tunnels such as TLT and WHC.

49. Mr Albert CHAN also remarked that the Government's policy on the provision and operation of tunnels should take into account the role to be played by the transport network in promoting Hong Kong's economic developments. In view of the current emphasis on the development of logistics industry, suitable adjustments should be made to complement with this objective. Other considerations such as the "users-pay principle" and subsidization might become secondary.

Measures to further enhance access to and utilization of tunnels

50. Mr LAU Kong-wah considered that more well-conceived traffic measures were required to further enhance access to and utilization of new tunnels and roads. Citing WHC as an example, he pointed out that problems such as congestion in Jordan and difficult connection to WHC southbound at Argyle Street, would deter motorists from choosing WHC, especially those who travelled between Hong Kong and Tsim Sha Tsui. Concurring with Mr LAU's view on WHC, Mr Albert CHAN expressed similar concerns about the problem of inadequate traffic measures to promote the use of TLT.

51. Addressing members' concerns, DS for T stated that the Administration would continue with its efforts in this respect in consultation with the tunnel operators. Apart from erecting additional and modified traffic signs and road markings to familiarize road users with the routings, adjustments to the traffic signals at critical road junctions would also be made to smoothen traffic flow in the vicinity of the tunnels. Local traffic improvement schemes had been introduced where appropriate to improve the traffic conditions of the feeder roads.

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52. While noting the Administration's reply, Mr LAU Kong-wah pointed out that toll receipts from CHT were part of the General Revenue while those from WHC went to the operator. There was competition between the two tunnels. Nevertheless, he called on the Administration to carefully examine the specific areas he raised and take further measures to promote utilization of WHC. In this connection, members requested for details about the improvement measures taken by the Administration to facilitate utilization of under-utilized tunnels including WHC. Mr LAU also requested for information about those improvement measures which were proposed by tunnel operators but subsequently rejected by the Administration.

53. On other improvement measures, DS for T informed members that one of the projects under the Intelligent Transport System, the Journey Time Indicator System (JTIS) would be in place around the end of 2002. By installing electronic display panels at strategic points on the approaches to tunnels, JTIS would provide real-time information on the time required to cross the harbour using the three different cross-harbour tunnels, thereby enabling road users to make an informed choice on the optimal routing.

54. Mr LAU Kong-wah considered that through JTIS, useful information would be provided to motorists to provide motorists on the move. In this respect, he enquired about the Administration's programme to extend JTIS to other tunnels such as LRT and TCT. In reply, DS for T explained that JTIS would be implemented in phases. Under the current phase, electronic display panels would be installed ahead of the three cross-harbour tunnels and the associated approach roads. Subject to approval for additional funding, JTIS would be extended to other tunnels.

55. In reply to Mr LAU Kong-wah's enquiry about the locations for installing the indicators, the Assistant Commissioner for Transport/Management & Paratransit reported that the tentative locations were Chatham Road, Canal Road Flyover northbound, Gloucester Road eastbound and Island Eastern Corridor westbound. He added that subject to review, the system would be extended to other tunnels and the associated approach roads.

56. Referring to the views expressed by members during previous Panel discussion about the need to install the indicators at strategic locations, Mr LAU Kong-wah was dissatisfied with the lack of overall planning on the Administration's part to achieve traffic diversion by placing the indicators well ahead of critical diversion points. Apart from the limited number of locations, he was particularly concerned that only one indicator would be installed on the Kowloon side, i.e. in Chatham Road. By the time motorists travelled to Chatham Road, it would already be too late to divert to other tunnels. In this respect, he strongly put forth that additional indicators should be installed in other parts of Kowloon such as in Princess Road so that the performance of the system could be improved. Otherwise, the system would only be of limited use if it could not serve those motorists travelling from the New Territories.

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57. In view of the concerns raised at the meeting, members agreed to include the item on “Traffic measures to facilitate utilization of tunnels” in the Panel’s list of outstanding items for discussion.

Admin 58. Summing up the discussion, the Chairman reiterated the call from members for the Administration to conduct a fundamental review of its policy on the provision and operation of tunnels. At members’ request, DS for T agreed to revert to the Panel in a few months’ time.

VI Any other business

59. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:45 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat

23 April 2002