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LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs
LegCo Panel on Transport and
LegCo Panel on Planning, Lands and Works

Minutes of joint meeting
held on Tuesday, 15 January 2002 at 11:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Members of the LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs

Hon CHOY So-yuk (Chairman)
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan (Deputy Chairman)
*# Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
Hon WONG Yung-kan
* Hon LAU Kong-wah
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP
* Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok

Members of the LegCo Panel on Transport

@ Hon Miriam LAU Kin-yee, JP (Chairman)
@# Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon CHAN Kwok-keung
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi

Members of the LegCo Panel on Planning, Lands and Works

- * Dr Hon TANG Siu-tong, JP (Chairman)
- @* Hon LAU Ping-cheung (Deputy Chairman)
- Hon James TO Kun-sun

Non-Panel member

Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP

Members absent : Members of the LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs

Hon Martin LEE Chu-ming, SC, JP
Hon SIN Chung-kai
Hon Henry WU King-cheong, BBS
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP

Members of the LegCo Panel on Transport

Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, JP

Members of the LegCo Panel on Planning, Lands and Works

Hon LAU Wong-fat, GBS, JP
Hon Timothy FOK Tsun-ting, SBS, JP
Hon IP Kwok-him, JP

- (@ Also members of the LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs
- * Also members of the LegCo Panel on Transport
- # Also members of the LegCo Panel on Planning, Lands and Works)

Public officers attending : Environment and Food Bureau

Mr Thomas CHOW
Deputy Secretary

Mr Howard CHAN
Principal Assistant Secretary

Planning and Lands Bureau

Mr Daniel CHENG
Principal Assistant Secretary

Transport Bureau

Mrs Sharon YIP
Principal Assistant Secretary

Environmental Protection Department

Mr Elvis AU
Assistant Director (Environmental Assessment and Noise)

Mr K S CHAN
Principal Environmental Protection Officer

Transport Department

Mr S M LI
Assistant Commissioner for Transport (Urban)

Highways Department

Mr Thomas WONG
Assistant Director (Headquarters)

Mr Felix LEUNG
Senior Engineer (Capital Works)

Planning Department

Mr Raymond WONG
Chief Town Planner (Sub-Regional)

Clerk in attendance : Miss Becky YU
Chief Assistant Secretary (1)1

Staff in attendance : Mr Andy LAU
Chief Assistant Secretary (1)2

Mrs Mary TANG
Senior Assistant Secretary (1)2

I Election of Chairman

In the absence of a quorum for a joint meeting at the beginning, members agreed that the meeting be proceeded as a meeting of the Transport Panel, and that Ms Miriam LAU should take the chair. A quorum for the joint meeting was subsequently reached at 11:50 am.

II Measures to address noise impact of existing roads

(LC Paper No. CB(2) 482/00-01(01) — Information paper provided by the Administration (issued for the meeting on 15 December 2000)

LC Paper No. CB(1) 518/00-01(08) — Information paper provided by the Administration (issued for the meeting on 7 February 2001)

LC Paper No. CB(1) 1664/00-01(01) — Information paper provided by the Administration (issued for the meeting on 4 July 2001)

LC Paper No. CB(1) 770/01-02(01) — Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat

LC Paper No. CB(1) 770/01-02(02) — Information paper provided by the Administration)

2. The Deputy Secretary for the Environment and Food (DSEF) briefed members on the progress of measures to address noise impact of existing roads by highlighting the salient points in the information paper (LC Paper No. CB(1) 770/01-02(02)).

Existing traffic noise standard for planning

3. Mr Andrew CHENG said that the problem of noise impact of existing roads was a common concern of Panels and the Public Works Subcommittee. He did not agree that the traffic noise standard of 70B(A) L10 (1 hour) in Hong Kong was comparable to those in overseas countries given that Hong Kong was more densely populated and had more space constraints for development. He opined that instead of applying the existing noise standard across the board, consideration should be given to adopting a more stringent standard in noise sensitive areas. Factors such as the location of noise emitters and the distance separation between the noise receivers and the vehicles should be taken into account in setting the noise standard. He also urged the Administration to improve land use planning to minimize the noise impact. Noting from Annex C to the information paper that 115 of 387 general traffic noise complaints were against noise between 66 to 70 dB(A), Dr LO Wing-lok opined that this level of noise was intolerable, and that the Administration should tighten the existing noise standard. Expressing similar concern, the Chairman asked whether the Administration had ever reviewed the noise standard.

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4. Miss CHAN Yuen-han also queried the propriety of adopting a noise standard comparable to overseas countries. She was disappointed that the Government had turned a blind eye to the problem of traffic noise in developed areas such as Kwun Tong and Ngau Tau Kok where noise levels had exceeded 80dB(A) and continued to allow new residential developments to be built in these noisy districts. It was much regretted that Government departments had been trying to evade responsibilities in dealing with the noise problem. She enquired about the way forward in resolving the problem. Ms Emily LAU concurred with Ms CHAN that the Administration should also look into the problems of excessive traffic noise at Wong Tai Sin Lower Estate, Choi Yee Gardens at Prince Edward Road, Police Staff Quarters at Tseung Kwan O, Lee On Estate and Kam Lung Court at Ma On Shan.

5. Referring to Appendix II to LC Paper No. CB(1)770/01-02(01) summarizing the deliberations on the problem of traffic noise in Kwun Tong district at the meeting between Legislative Council Members and Kwun Tong District Council (KTDC) members on 13 December 2001, Mr Fred LI echoed that the noise generated by the Mass Transit Railway (MTR) trains at the aerial sections from Kowloon Bay to Kwun Tong had caused serious nuisance to the residents nearby. While mitigation measures such as installation of double-glazed windows and air-conditioning had been implemented in some residential blocks, the problem of noise would resurface in winter when air-conditioning was no longer required and windows were opened. Besides, the reliance on air-conditioning was not environmentally friendly as it would give rise to high energy consumption. Given the close proximity of the trains to the residential blocks, the use of noise insulation was not an effective solution. He failed to see why new residential developments were still allowed in these noisy districts.

6. DSEF responded that the noise limit of 70dB(A) was an objective standard since research findings indicated that noise exceeding 70dB(A) would cause irritation to receivers. However, as thresholds for noise tolerance differed from people, some might find noise below 70dB(A) intolerable. The noise standard was used to provide guidance on road development projects and land use planning. Mitigating measures would be adopted to ensure that the traffic noise would stay below the noise standard. In planning for new roads in developed districts, care would be taken to ensure that there would be sufficient distance separation between the noise receiver and the vehicles. Noise insulation measures would be implemented as a last resort when no other alternatives were feasible. The same noise standard of 70dB(A) was also adopted in the United Kingdom and the United States. The Principal Assistant Secretary for Planning and Lands (PAS/PL) added that if it was envisaged that traffic noise would exceed the noise standard, various measures such as adjusting the road alignment and erecting barriers or enclosures would be considered to reduce the noise impact.

7. Mr Fred LI considered the long completion time ranging from four to six years for the proposed implementation programme for retrofitting noise barriers at existing roads as set out at Annex A to the paper not acceptable. He said that KTDC was particularly dissatisfied that the retrofitting of noise barriers at Tseung Kwan O Road and

Tseung Kwan O Flyover would take six and a half years to complete. Mr Albert CHAN also expressed concern that the retrofitting programme was only applicable to a limited number of existing roads.

8. DSEF advised that as the construction of noise barriers would require the implementation of traffic management measures such as road closures, expedition of the construction process could not be possible without causing greater inconvenience as well as noise nuisance to the public. The Assistant Director of Highways (Headquarters) (AD of Hy (H)) supplemented that the retrofitting project at Tseung Kwan O Road and Tseung Kwan O Flyover would involve the construction of over 890 metres of road decking. Having regard to the heavy traffic at Tseung Kwan O Road, most of the retrofitting work could only take place between 12 midnight and 6:00 am. The environmental legislation on noise control coupled with the need to implement traffic management measures for the project had led to a longer construction time. Nevertheless, the completion date could be advanced if the project had the support of the residents and the period for resolving objections after road gazetting could therefore be shortened. He added that as the project was still at its design stage, a review of the completion date would be made before tendering of works.

9. Ms Cyd HO said that she was more concerned about the impact of traffic noise at night time. She pointed out that although in most cases the average noise level was within 70dB(A), there were intermittent noise levels which were high enough to wake residents from their sleep. To this end, a more stringent noise standard not based on an average level should be adopted at night time. She also considered it necessary for the Administration to use good quality surfacing materials for roads and to ensure proper maintenance of these roads so that unwanted noises resulting from uneven road surface could be minimized. DSEF said that measures such as the implementation of night-time traffic management measures, including banning of goods vehicles over 5.5 tonnes from entering certain districts, were being considered to reduce traffic noise at night time. Efforts would also be made to reduce the number of road joints and to improve road maintenance in order to reduce the impact of traffic noise.

10. Ms HO asked if the Administration would consider suspending the operation of traffic lights in residential areas during night time since the noise generated by braking and accelerating of vehicles was much greater than that by running vehicles. The Chairman added that speeding of cars at night time was also a source of noise complaints by residents. The Assistant Commissioner for Transport (Urban) said that the operation of traffic lights would depend on their function. Those used for controlling vehicular traffic at cross roads had to operate round the clock while those for simply facilitating pedestrian crossing would stay on green for vehicles unless activated by pedestrians.

Planning of land use

11. Ms Emily LAU concurred with the Chairman that investment on noise mitigation measures was worth pursuing as this would bring much relief to residents concerned. Apart from acoustic insulation and the unsightly noise barriers, she enquired

about the feasibility of imposing a statutory distance separation between the road and receiver in the planning of land use and the resultant financial gain and loss. PAS/PL said that the proposed provision of a mandatory distance separation might not be possible in particular in developed districts because of space constraint. While there was no mandatory standard for buffer distance between the road and receiver, the impact of traffic noise on sensitive receivers was governed by the Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance (Cap. 499) and measures would be taken to reduce traffic noise to an acceptable level. Although shielding at source such as road barriers and enclosures could reduce noise, this was not a preferred option. Careful layout design and building alignment might help reduce the exposure of the development to traffic noise.

12. While agreeing that planning was a difficult process in a congested city like Hong Kong, Ir Dr Raymond HO opined that in planning for new towns, consideration should be given to aligning the trunk roads at the outskirts of the towns to obviate the need for vehicles to travel through town centres. This could save the need for flyovers and roads adjacent to residential buildings. Some flexibility for expansion should also be allowed to cater for possible increase in traffic flow. He hoped that the Administration would take these factors into account when planning for new roads. PAS/PL took note of Ir Dr HO's view and affirmed that in planning for new development areas, the trunk roads would be aligned at the outer boundaries and would not pass through the town centre as far as possible. If this was not possible, the roads would either be partly or fully submerged as in the case of the South East Kowloon Development (SEKD). Efforts would be made to maintain a buffer distance between residential buildings and roads. Pedestrian walkways would be provided for the convenience of residents to encourage walking so as to reduce traffic flow in town centre. Measures would also be taken to minimize the traffic flow within the town centre. By way of illustration, those who wished to travel from east end to west end in SEKD could only use the trunk roads. Ir Dr HO did not agree to the arrangement of diverting traffic to trunk roads by limiting the accessibility to inner roads. He was concerned that this arrangement would lower the efficiency of roads and cause unnecessary inconvenience to the public. The problem should be resolved through better planning in road network.

Implementation of engineering solutions

13. Since noise barriers were not only expensive to build but were also eyesores to the landscape, Ir Dr HO said that these should be avoided as far as possible. The planting of trees was a better alternative to noise barriers. In the event that noise barriers were unavoidable, they should be built of materials which were noise absorbent. To reduce the noise impact of roads, consideration should be given to using asphalt instead of cement in paving roads as asphalt was more noise absorbent. He also pointed out that the use of in situ construction was more preferable than pre-cast components in constructing highways as the former could reduce the number of expansion joints, thereby lowering the noise impact. Expressing similar concern, Mr TAM Yiu-chung pointed out that the noise barrier near the Lung Mun Oasis at Tuen Mun was an eyesore to the public. To prevent the barriers from being unduly obtrusive, he suggested that a more aesthetic design which took into account the visual impact should be adopted.

14. AD of Hy (H) said that the Highways Department was formulating guidelines on the aesthetics and choice of materials for constructing noise barriers. The choice of materials would depend on the location and surrounding environment as some of the noise barriers were meant to reflect noise while others to absorb noise. He agreed that noise barriers made of concrete might have a visual impact on the surrounding area but it was commonly used because of its noise absorbing property. To this end, transparent materials had lately been adopted in the construction of new noise barriers. As for the choice of surfacing materials for roads, AD of Hy (H) advised that studies on the applicability of more durable low noise surfacing materials to reduce noise on low speed roads were underway.

15. Dr LO Wing-lok enquired if the implementation of engineering solutions could reduce the traffic noise to a more tolerable level of say 66 dB(A) and if noise barriers and resurfacing of roads could be implemented in parallel to achieve better results. DSEF said that as the noise impact on existing buildings would differ according to their height, facing and location, the reduction in noise through installation of noise barriers would differ among receivers. Where technically feasible, the Administration would consider retrofitting noise barriers as well as resurfacing roads to abate the problem of traffic noise.

16. Mr Fred LI expressed concern about the loud noise caused by vehicles passing over covered manholes, which was a nuisance to the public. AD(H)H explained that since roads surfaced with asphalt usually had a settlement problem, the subsided surface would form an uneven joint with the covered manholes, giving rise to loud bangs as vehicles passed over. Maintenance works to retain a smooth road surface were performed by the Highways Department or the Drainage Services Department as appropriate.

17. Miss CHOY So-yuk suggested that noise insulation measures such as installation of air conditioning and double-glazed windows be included as part of green features of environmentally friendly buildings so that incentives such as relaxation of plot ratio could be considered to encourage implementation of these measures. DSEF said that the provision of noise insulation measures was mandatory in some developments if there were no other alternative measures to help reduce the traffic noise impact. PAS/PL added that the provision of distance separation between the road and buildings by setting back the buildings for passageway could at present apply for bonus plot ratio. The Chairman concurred that the Administration should further look into Miss CHOY's proposal.

Implementation of non-engineering solutions

18. Mr Albert CHAN expressed dissatisfaction that the Administration had been slow in implementing abatement measures to address the serious noise problem in Hong Kong. He was not convinced of the Administration's response as set out in LC Paper No. CB(1) 770/01-02(02) that the implementation of traffic management solutions such as

the tightening of the noise standard would not provide much relief to residents in view of the lack of clear separation among residential, commercial and industrial areas in Hong Kong. He pointed out that while many overseas countries had been adopting traffic management solutions to tackle the problem of traffic noise, the Administration had failed to take account of the unique situation in Hong Kong in addressing the noise problem. He urged that consideration should be given to imposing full-time or night-time restriction against entry of heavy goods vehicles to certain residential areas which would provide much relief to affected residents. The Administration should also review the current policy in addressing the problem of traffic noise.

19. Given the considerable operational and enforcement problems involved, DSEF advised that it would not be practicable to implement non-engineering solutions such as traffic management measures at all existing noisy roads. Nevertheless, the Administration would continue to explore the practicability of these solutions on a selective basis. Meanwhile, the Transport Department and the Environment Protection Department had completed traffic surveys on five locations which were preliminarily identified for trial to assess the potential environmental benefits of night-time traffic management measures. Where practicable, the trial would be extended to other locations. He added that before implementing any traffic management measures, the Administration would need to consult the public to assess the acceptability of such measures and to ensure a balance of interests of all affected parties. At members' request, the Administration undertook to revert back to the Panels the outcome of the consultation and/or deliberations on the trial schemes for implementing night-time traffic management measures at the five locations referred to by March/April 2002.

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20. Mr Albert CHAN noted that according to recent consultancy study findings, there were over a hundred existing roads that had exceeded the noise standard. While DCs concerned had identified some of these roads which were not frequented by heavy goods vehicles, particularly during the night, to be suitable for implementing traffic management measures, the Administration was reluctant to implement such measures lest these would arouse opposition from the trade. He urged the Administration to re-assess the feasibility of adopting traffic management measures in different road sections and to implement suitable measures as soon as practicable. The Chairman however pointed out that the findings of a trial on the use of traffic management measures in West Kowloon had revealed that traffic management measures were not feasible as these would cause congestion in other road sections. DSEF said that the Administration had been maintaining continuous dialogue with DCs on the implementation of trial schemes. While some DCs were in support of the trial schemes within their districts, others had strong reservations. Notwithstanding, the Administration would continue to explore the feasibility of implementing these measures in road sections which were acceptable by DCs.

III Any other business

21. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:00 pm.

Action

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Legislative Council Secretariat
11 March 2002