

立法會
Legislative Council

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Legislative Council
Panel on Transport

**Subcommittee on matters relating to the
implementation of railway development projects**

**Minutes of meeting on
Thursday, 27 June 2002, at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Hon Miriam LAU Kin-yee, JP (Chairman)
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP
Hon CHAN Kwok-keung
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
- Members absent** : Hon LAU Kong-wah
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP
Hon LAU Ping-cheung
- Non-Subcommittee members attending** : Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
Hon CHAN Kam-lam
Dr Hon TANG Siu-tong, JP

**Public officers
attending**

: Agenda item II

Transport Bureau

Mr Paul TANG
Acting Secretary for Transport

Mr WAN Man-lung
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport

Finance Bureau

Mr M M GLASS
Deputy Secretary for the Treasury

Highways Department

Mr John CHAI
Principal Government Engineer/Railway Development

Agenda item III

Transport Bureau

Mr Paul TANG
Acting Secretary for Transport

Mr WAN Man-lung
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport

Highways Department

Mr John CHAI
Principal Government Engineer/Railway Development

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)2082/01-02 - Minutes of meeting held on 28 February 2002)

The minutes of the meeting on 28 February 2002 were confirmed.

II Shatin to Central Link

(TBCR 10/1016/99 - Legislative Council Brief on Operator of Shatin to Central Link provided by the Administration)

Briefing the Legislative Council (LegCo) on important announcements

2. The Chairman recapitulated that she had written to Mr Nicholas NG, the former Secretary for Transport, on 6 December 2001 requesting that the Administration should brief the Subcommittee on the assessment of the Shatin to Central Link (SCL) before a decision was reached on which railway corporation should be granted the development right for the project. In his reply to the Subcommittee on 20 June 2002, the Secretary for Transport undertook to brief the Subcommittee once a decision was made on the award of the development right for the SCL project. It turned out that the Administration held a press conference to announce the award of the development right for SCL on 25 June 2002, but made no arrangement to brief the Transport Panel or the Subcommittee on the matter. Whilst the item was included in the agenda, she pointed out that it was the Subcommittee, and not the Administration, which had taken the initiative to discuss the award of the development right for SCL at the meeting.

3. Members were generally concerned about recent incidents where the Administration had failed to brief Members on important announcements and matters prior to briefing the media. These included the release of the Report of the Investigation Team for the 2002 Avian Influenza Incident and the announcement on the lifting of the moratorium of Home Ownership Scheme flats.

4. Mr Albert CHAN said that the Administration's decision to brief the media but not the Subcommittee was a blatant disrespect to LegCo and was a sign of executive hegemony. Mr CHAN considered that a strong message should be conveyed to the Administration that Members were strongly dissatisfied with the Administration's failure to brief Members on important matters and announcements before briefing the media. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that such approach taken by the Administration was not conducive to improving its relationship with LegCo. Mr LAU Chin-shek added that the Chairman of the Subcommittee should be notified at the earliest opportunity so that she could make arrangement to enable the Administration to brief members on important announcement, prior to briefing the media.

5. The Acting Secretary for Transport (S for T (Ag)) explained that the granting of development right for SCL was commercially-sensitive information, and the Administration had to make the announcement after market close. Further, in

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accordance with the Project Brief, Government should maintain the confidentiality of information provided to it by the railway corporations in their proposals. As such, it was not appropriate for the Administration to disclose any assessment details prior to the approval of the Executive Council. He further said that shortly after a decision was made on the award of the development right for the SCL on 25 June 2002, he had tried to contact the Chairman to inform her of the Administration's intent to brief members on the latest situation of the SCL. As the Chairman was having another meeting, she could not return his call. Subsequently, he noticed that the Chairman had already decided to include the SCL project in the agenda for the meeting and he therefore did not pursue the matter further with the Chairman.

6. Mr CHENG Kar-foo and Mr LAU Chin-shek indicated that they could not accept the Administration's explanation. They pointed out that the Administration had not followed the agreed arrangement of briefing LegCo on important announcements prior to briefing the media. If the Administration considered that a briefing to the media would not affect the share price of the MTR Corporation Limited, there was no reason to say that a briefing to LegCo Members prior to briefing the media would do so. They stressed that the Subcommittee had all along asked the Administration to brief members on the outcome of the SCL project prior to a decision was made on the operator award. A close meeting could also be arranged if necessary. Mr CHENG Kar-foo and Mr Albert CHAN also felt dissatisfied that the Administration had not asked the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC) to the meeting to brief members on the latest situation of the SCL. In the absence of KCRC, they considered the meeting fruitless as all essential information was already available in the public domain. To express their grave dissatisfaction, Mr CHENG and Mr CHAN, on behalf of the Democratic Party, walked out of the meeting.

7. S for T (Ag) said that as the Subcommittee would continue to follow up on the SCL project, the Administration would arrange representatives of KCRC to appear before the Subcommittee to brief members on details of the project.

8. The Chairman concluded that the Administration's decision to brief the media but not the Subcommittee was a blatant disrespect to LegCo. She hoped the Administration would review the matter to improve the working relationship between the legislature and the executive. To reflect members' dissatisfaction, she would relay members' concern to the House Committee for follow up. She also remarked that in the absence of KCRC, the Administration might not be able to answer members' questions relating to the detailed design of the project. She hoped the Administration would make the necessary arrangements in future.

SCL

9. The Chairman remarked that members were generally concerned about the implementation programme and the feasibility of providing additional stations at Hin Keng, Tsz Wan Shan and Whampoa.

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10. Mr LAU Chin-shek called on the Administration to speed up the delivery of the project and to actively discuss with KCRC with a view to providing rail services to Whampoa, Tsz Wan Shan and Hin Keng areas. Mr TAM Yiu-chung expressed similar views as Mr LAU. Miss CHAN Yuen-han highlighted the transport problems faced by residents in Tsz wan Shan. She hoped an additional station could be provided there to relieve the dire transport needs of the residents.

11. Mr TAM Yiu-chung remarked that the Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong was very concerned about the time gap between the completion of the Ma On Shan Rail Link (MOS Rail) in 2004 and the SCL in 2008, which would cause serious traffic and safety problems at the Tai Wai interchange.

12. Regarding the Fourth Rail Harbour Crossing, Mr TAM Yiu-chung opined that the alignment should be revised with stations at Causeway Bay, Wan Chai South and Hong Kong Park before terminating at Central.

13. S for T (Ag) replied that the Administration had requested KCRC to examine the case for possible stations at Hin Keng, Tsz Wan Shan and Whampoa, taking into account the feasibility and viability of the proposals. The Administration would invite KCRC to brief members further on the proposals.

14. S for T (Ag) also appreciated members' concern about the early implementation of SCL. However, having regard to the time required for detailed design and completion of statutory processes, it was unlikely for SCL to complete before 2008. He informed members that initially, KCRC proposed to open the SCL in two phases, the section between Tai Wai and Diamond Hill in March 2008 and the rest in October 2008. However due to a delay in the announcement of the operator award, the Administration would need to discuss with KCRC to see if the original implementation timetable could be adhered to. He expected that a more concrete answer could be provided in two to three months' time.

15. Regarding the congestion problem at Tai Wai Interchange upon the commissioning of the MOS Rail in 2004, the Principal Government Engineer/Railway Development (PGE/RD) advised that whilst the early commissioning of SCL might further enhance the movement of passengers, the Administration would ensure that the design of the Tai Wai Interchange would have adequate capacity to cope with the demand.

Admin 16. Ir Dr Raymond HO requested the Administration to provide information on the existing/forecast peak hour flow at Tai Wai Station/Interchange before and after the commissioning of the MOS Rail/SCL together with the design capacities of the existing Tai Wai Station/Interchange.

17. Mr CHAN Kam-lam was concerned about the traffic disruption and impact on other facilities during the construction stage.

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18. PGE/RD advised that a short section of the SCL would run overhead, on viaducts, near Tai Wai. Apart from this, the railway would essentially run in tunnel. At-grade works would be required at both ends of the tunnel to facilitate the placement of tunnel boring machine. The Administration would require KCRC to carefully examine the locations of the tunnel entrances to minimize disturbance to the traffic and the environment during the construction stage. S for T (Ag) added that by making use of the facilities and space at the existing Tai Wai and Hung Hom Stations, KCRC could minimize traffic disruption during the construction of the SCL stations and approaches there.

19. Ir Dr Raymond HO was concerned about the provision of supporting facilities to enable the disabled and visually impaired to make use of the new railway services. He also enquired whether toilets would be provided inside SCL stations. Facilities of this kind should form part of the essential components in implementing new railway systems.

20. PGE/RD advised that interchanges' convenience and stations' accessibility were two criteria in assessing the performance of the Conforming Proposals put forward by the railway corporations. Regarding the use of tactile guide path and the provision of electronic audible signal and lifts as suggested by Ir Dr HO, the Administration would further discuss the matter with KCRC to see whether these could be provided.

21. Mr CHAN Kam-lam opined that platform screen doors and noise barriers along the viaduct section of the SCL should be provided. S for T (Ag) took note of the member's suggestion.

22. The Chairman informed members that Wong Tai Sin District Council would like to appear before the Panel to give views on the SCL.

23. In view of members' concern about the design of alignment, possibility of additional stations, station design, and environmental mitigation measures, the Chairman suggested and members agreed to convene another meeting to follow up on the matter. The Administration should invite representatives of KCRC to brief members on the latest design of the SCL. Members also agreed to invite Kowloon City District Council, Sha Tin District Council and Wong Tai Sin District Council to give view on the SCL. S for T (Ag) said that the Administration expected to complete the assessment of the enhancement features with a view to finalizing the SCL around the end of 2002 for the detailed planning and design to proceed.

(Post-meeting note: With the concurrence of the Chairman, the meeting was scheduled for 27 September 2002 at 10:45 am.)

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III Northern Link

(LC Paper No. CB(1)2083/01-02(01) - Information paper provided by the Administration)

24. Members pointed out that the Northern Link (NOL) was a strategic link joining up West Rail and East Rail at northern New Territories. NOL could also serve to provide the western part of Hong Kong with more direct train services to the boundary by linking West Rail to Lok Ma Chau. In view of the growing population in North West New Territories (NWNT) with increasing demand for cross-boundary traffic, there was no reason to defer the implementation of NOL to 2011. Their deliberation was summarized below.

25. The Chairman remarked that NOL formed an essential part of the railway network in Hong Kong. A broken link would be resulted at the northern part of the New Territories if the NOL was not constructed.

26. Mr WONG Sing-chi said that with the increasing integration and cross-boundary economic activities with the Mainland, additional transport infrastructure should be provided to facilitate the efficient and comfortable movement of people. As such, there was no reason to defer the implementation of NOL to 2011. He was also worried about the congestion problem at Sheung Shui KCR Station after the commissioning of the Spur Line, and asked if the Administration had ever estimated the amount of cross-boundary passenger traffic generated from NWNT.

27. Mr TAM Yiu-chung remarked that the early implementation of NOL would provide an additional rail boundary crossing to satisfy the dire transport needs of passengers in NWNT and to relieve the additional demand generated by the Spur Line on East Rail. Referring to paragraph 10 of the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(1)2083/01-02(01)) which stated that the existing population within the NOL's catchment was about 15 000, Mr TAM also said that the Administration should not use this as an excuse to reject the claim for advancing the implementation of NOL. Given the strategic importance of NOL and taking into account the fact that land use development would follow once a railway line was in place, the Administration should seriously reconsider the implementation programme.

28. Dr TANG Siu-tong shared the view of Mr TAM and remarked that NOL should be taken ahead of the Spur Line as NOL could not only relieve the congestion at Lo Wu but also provide a more direct rail link for residents in the western part of the territory to the boundary. In this connection, he asked about the forecast traffic diversion among different rail lines.

29. In response, the Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport (PAS for T) stated that the Administration was also mindful of the need to take forward the NOL project so as to provide a strategic link between East Rail and West Rail at the northern part of the New Territories. However, in order to relieve the serious congestion witnessed at the Lo Wu boundary control point and cope with the increasing volume of cross-

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boundary passenger flow, the Government decided that the Spur Line should be taken forward ahead of NOL with a view to providing a second rail boundary crossing at Lok Ma Chau. The Spur Line was originally planned for completion in 2004. However, as amendments to the railway scheme were subsequently required, the Spur Line was now scheduled for completion in 2007.

30. On the forecast traffic diversion among different rail lines, PGE/RD informed members that less than one-third of the cross-boundary passenger traffic would make use of NOL.

31. Given the population size in NWNT, Dr TANG Siu-tong however was not convinced that only one-third of the cross-boundary passenger traffic would make use of NOL to the boundary. As the construction cost of the Spur Line already amounted to some \$10 billion, Dr TANG queried the cost effectiveness of the project. In his view, if the Administration could accord priority to the implementation of NOL, it would bring significant benefits to residents in NWNT whilst relieving the congestion at Lo Wu at a lower cost.

32. Ir Dr Raymond HO also opined that Government should, on its own, plan the railway network and invite the railway corporations to bid for the projects rather than leaving the railway corporations to come up with proposals for Government's consideration. He was not convinced that the existing population within NOL's catchment was insufficient to justify the implementation of NOL. He opined that railway development could generate travel demand in the end. As NOL provided a cheaper alternative for a second rail boundary crossing, he cast doubt on the Administration's decision to go ahead with the Spur Line.

33. In reply, S for T(Ag) called on members' understanding that given the congestion at Lo Wu, there was an urgency to build an additional rail boundary crossing at Lok Ma Chau. While affirming the need for NOL, he said that the issue at stake was the timing of implementation. In view of the lead time required for undertaking the detailed design and environmental impact assessment study, it was impossible to complete NOL before 2007.

34. S for T (Ag) further said that as NOL would also serve to provide domestic train services to developments at Au Tau, Ngau Tam Mei and San Tin, the planning of NOL would need to take into account the land use development along the areas. He however assured members that the Administration would not wait until population intake or upon the full development of the areas before commencement of NOL. But for planning purpose, there was a need to ascertain the conceptual design of the land use development including the planned population size before finalizing the alignment of the route. Further, as KCRC was already undertaking a number of projects in the next few years, there was a need to prioritize the remaining projects, taking into account the resource implications.

35. PAS for T supplemented that to facilitate the future implementation of NOL,

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action had been taken to complete the necessary preliminary planning and other preparatory works. The Administration had completed the route protection and would continue to administer the protection work in co-ordination with the land use development along the rail alignment. Once the land use plan and development programme of Au Tau, Ngau Tam Mei and San Tin were finalized, the Administration would firm up NOL's planning and implementation timetable.

36. In this respect, PGE/RD reiterated that NOL was included in the recommended railway network under the Railway Development Strategy 2000. The likely completion window was 2011 to 2016. The Administration would aim at advancing the implementation of NOL to the earlier part of the completion window, pending the finalization of the land-use development plan at Au Tau, Ngau Tam Mei and San Tin. Provision had also been made to enable NOL to link with the Spur Line at Kwu Tung. NOL would also link to the new rail boundary crossing at Lok Ma Chau.

37. Ir Dr Raymond HO remarked that upon the announcement of the proposal on the Western Corridor in 1994 which comprised the Port Rail Line, the Cross Border Passenger Service and the Sub-regional Passenger Service, various suggestions had been made to the Administration. Over the years, there were substantial changes to the planning environment. The West Rail would now be open in 2003. As such, the Administration should review the implementation programme of both the Spur Line and NOL, taking into account the latest developments.

38. Dr TANG Siu-tong also criticized the inflexibility of the Administration in taking forward railway development project. Given the growing population in NWNT, there was no reason for the Administration to use past data in the planning for new railway projects. He did not accept that the existing population within the NOL's catchment areas was only 15 000. He said that apart from residents living in the vicinity of the railway stations, the provision of feeder services could also enlarge the catchment areas of NOL.

39. PAS for T replied that in 1999, in light of the heavy transport demand at Lo Wu, the extension of East Rail to form a second boundary crossing for rail passengers at Lok Ma Chau was approved by Government for implementation with a target completion by 2004. This option was the best option available at that time to relieve the heavy transport demand at Lo Wu. He also clarified that the conceptual design of the Spur Line was already included in the first Railway Development Study completed in 1993.

40. S for T (Ag) reiterated that the Spur Line and NOL were considered essential components of the railway network in Hong Kong. The Executive Council had already approved the implementation of the Spur Line. Works would commence shortly for completion in 2007. As for NOL, action had been taken to complete the necessary preliminary planning and other preparatory works. In response to the Chairman, he said that the Planning Department would complete a land-use planning study at Au Tau, Ngau Tam Mei and San Tin in late 2004. The Transport

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Bureau/Railway Development Office would obtain the necessary planning data with a view to firming up the NOL's planning and implementation timetable.

41. Regarding the details of the cross-boundary passenger traffic from NWNT, Admin PAS for T undertook to provide further information after the meeting.

42. The Chairman concluded that NOL was an essential link in the whole railway network. She urged the Administration to review the implementation programme and come up with a new timetable for members' consideration in due course.

VI Any other business

43. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:15 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat
19 September 2002