

**Legislative Council Panel on Transport
Sub-committee on Matters relating to Railways**

**Better Co-ordination of Public Transport Services
arising from the Commissioning of West Rail**

PURPOSE

At the Sub-committee meeting on 4 April 2003, Members were informed of the initial comments of the local community on the Government's proposal to re-organize the public service network ("preliminary PT proposals") of the Northwest New Territories ("NWNT") in connection with the opening of West Rail ("WR"). This paper informs Members of the outcome of the consultation.

BACKGROUND

2. As we explained at the Sub-committee meeting in April 2003, WR will increase the public transport capacity from NWNT to urban area by about 80%. During the initial stage of its operation, the peak frequency of WR will be at about 3 minutes and the carrying capacity will be as high as 47,000 passengers per hour on each direction. The objective of the proposed public transport re-organization plan is to provide an efficient and reliable public transport system to serve the passengers following the improvements in transport capacity provided by the new railway. The preliminary PT proposals have the following key elements :

- (a) the provision of feeder services to ensure good connectivity of WR for easy access by passengers; and
- (b) the maintenance of an efficient public transport network in NWNT by rationalizing and improving the co-ordination of public transport services to better match changing demand.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

3. Transport Department ("TD") started a consultation programme in January 2003 to solicit views of the public and the relevant members of Legislative Council on the preliminary PT proposals. The relevant District Councils ("DCs")/Traffic & Transport Committees ("TTCs") (including the five districts along WR corridor viz. Yuen Long, Tuen Mun, Tsuen Wan, Kwai Tsing and Sham Shui Po) and Rural Committees ("RCs") which may have an interest in the PT plan were consulted.

4. Apart from consultation at the DC/TTC level, Area Consultative Forums (“ACFs”) with participation from members of the relevant Area Committees, and Mutual Aid Committees/Incorporated Owners Committees, schools principals, and other local representatives were formed to facilitate wider local consultation.

5. In addition, consultation was held with 7 other DCs about the proposed changes to services operating along or terminating at the concerned districts.

6. During the past 6 months, TD attended 18 DC/TTC meetings, 14 meetings with ACFs, 6 meetings with RCs, 4 meetings with residents’ groups, and more than 50 consultation meetings with concern groups and local representatives.

7. In general, the local community accepted the need to re-organize the existing public transport services following the opening of WR. They welcomed the proposed feeder connections to West Rail stations and accepted most of the proposals to modify existing services which would be affected by the new railway. Some of them expressed concerns about the following :

- (a) reasonable choice of modes – passengers should not be forced to use WR. There should continue to be reasonable choices of road-based public transport modes after the opening of WR. It is necessary to ensure that the alternative bus services in place of some of the routes proposed to be cancelled have adequate capacity to absorb the displaced demand especially during the peak periods, and that the fare level of these services should be comparable to that of the routes proposed to be cancelled; and
- (b) gradual implementation of service changes – we should avoid implementing all service changes immediately after the opening of WR. A long observation period should be allowed for implementation of the changes.

THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT PLAN

8. Taking into account the detailed comments and views received, we have modified some of our original proposals. These modifications include retention of individual bus services to better ensure a reasonable choice to passengers, and introduction of section fares and bus-bus interchange concessions and strengthening of alternative bus services where appropriate to address the concerns on fare level and capacity of alternative bus routes.

9. At the special meetings with the Tuen Mun and the Yuen Long TTCs on 18 June 2003, most DC members considered that the PT Plan after modifications is in general acceptable. Some DC members suggested that the implementation of some individual proposals should be deferred by two to three months after WR opening so as to enable better assessment of the latest post-WR travel demand. These suggestions have been taken into account under the implementation plan (see paragraphs 13-17 below). We will further discuss with the parties concerned when finalizing the detailed arrangements.

10. At present, there are 71 external franchised bus routes and 7 external green minibus (“GMB”) routes operating from NWNT to urban areas. Upon the full implementation of the PT Plan, there would be 64 external franchised bus routes and 7 external GMB routes serving the area. The external franchised bus routes to be cancelled are mainly routes with low patronage and those which overlap with other existing bus routes or WR. Their cancellation is in line with the objective of rationalisation of services to reduce congestion in the urban area and improve air quality.

11. As for internal services, for the purpose of better co-ordination with WR, 2 new bus routes would be introduced to provide feeder services connecting WR Nam Cheong station, and 24 existing franchised bus routes and 39 existing GMB routes would be modified to provide connecting services to and from various WR stations.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN & PUBLICITY

Implementation Plan

12. Currently Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (“KCRC”)’s target is to commission WR service in autumn 2003. In one to two weeks prior to official opening of the WR service, KCRC will conduct trial ride for passengers.

Pre-WR opening

13. During the three weeks before WR opening, 2 new feeder bus routes to Nam Cheong Station will be introduced and the bus and GMB routes currently operating in the vicinity of WR stations as mentioned in para. 11 above will be diverted to call or terminate at these stations so that passengers will get familiarized with the revised routeing before WR opening.

Post-WR opening

14. A three-phase implementation plan over a period of 3 to 6 months will be adopted after WR opening.

15. Phase 1 covers the first 4 weeks after WR opening. In gist, there will be no change in external bus and GMB services in the first two weeks, except for fine-tuning of services connecting with WR based on demand and some minor re-routeing of external bus services from NWNT. TD will conduct surveys and site observations to monitor changes in passenger demand. From the third week onwards, frequency adjustment on bus routes affected by WR will be implemented in a progressive manner and it will continue into the subsequent phases on the basis of actual changes in passenger demand.

16. Major route changes such as cancellation and modification of existing routes will be implemented in Phase 2 which will start one month after WR opening.

17. There are two proposals for more substantial route changes on which some local residents have continued to express concerns. They involve two external bus routes from Tin Shui Wai and Tuen Mun respectively. The implementation of these proposals will be considered in Phase 3. TD will review the implementation of Phases 1 and 2 in November/December 2003 and will discuss with the concerned parties in determining the details of implementation for the Phase 3 items.

18. TD will closely monitor the implementation of the service changes. If necessary, refinements may be made to individual service adjustment items and/or their implementation programme in consultation with the concerned parties having regard to the actual situation on the ground.

Publicity

19. TD will work with the public transport operators and the DCs concerned in organizing a publicity campaign on the public transport service changes in NWNT before WR opening. The publicity campaign will start from August 2003 and includes distribution of service booklets, uploading updated information on website etc. Nearer the implementation time, TD will co-ordinate with the franchised bus operators on deploying customer service staff at major bus termini/bus stops, posting notices at major termini/stops and inside buses, issuing press releases, and setting up enquiry hotlines etc. to inform the public of details of the service changes.