

For Discussion on
29 June 2004

**Legislative Council Panel on Transport
Subcommittee on matters relating to railways**

Railway Development Strategy 2000

INTRODUCTION

This paper updates the Subcommittee on the implementation of the railway projects recommended in the Railway Development Strategy 2000 (RDS-2000).

BACKGROUND

2. The Government formulated the first Railway Development Strategy in 1994 to meet the increasing demand arising from population growth and rising cross-boundary economic and social interaction. Two of the three priority projects, Tseung Kwan O Extension and the West Rail were commissioned in August 2002 and December 2003 respectively. The East Rail Extension will be progressively completed from late 2004 to 2007. The Penny's Bay Rail Link (PBRL), which was not included in the first Railway Development Strategy, will be completed in mid 2005 to serve the Disney Theme Park.

3. The Government commissioned RDS-2 in 1998 to examine how best to further expand the rail network to meet the rail transport needs for the next two decades. Based on the findings of RDS-2, Government formulated the Railway Development Strategy (RDS-2000), which underlines the Government's policy on railway development and indicates the rail schemes which should be accorded priority for further development. It envisages five passenger and one freight rail lines as shown in **Annex**:

Annex

- a. Kowloon Southern Link (KSL);
- b. Shatin to Central Link (SCL);
- c. North Hong Kong Island Line (NIL);
- d. Northern Link (NOL);
- e. Regional Express Line (REL); and
- f. Port Rail Line (PRL).

4. The RDS-2000 reaffirms the policy objective that railways will form the backbone of the public transport system in Hong Kong. As off-road mass carriers, railways relieve pressure and congestion on the road network and are more environmentally friendly.

Implementation of Railway Projects in RDS-2000

5. The present position for the railway projects included under the RDS-2000 is set out below:

Kowloon Southern Link (KSL)

6. The KSL¹ will link up West Rail with East Rail and will provide the one million population in Northwest New Territories with a direct rail link to the urban areas in Kowloon. The project was gazetted under the Railways Ordinance on 26 March 2004. A total of 66 objections/enquiries to the scheme were received and will be dealt with in accordance with the procedures prescribed under the Ordinance.

7. Subject to satisfactory progress in dealing with these objections, works are programmed to start in early 2005 for target completion by 2009.

Shatin to Central Link (SCL)

8. The SCL will open up a new railway corridor for passengers travelling between Northeast New Territories to the urban areas via Southeast Kowloon. It serves to relieve the congestion in the Beacon Hill section of the East Rail and will provide rail services to new developments at Tai Hom, Southeast Kowloon and Homantin.

¹ Details of the KSL Scheme and the programme update are set out in LegCo Paper Nos. CB(1)348/03-04(03) (issued vide LC Paper No. CB(1)372/03-04 on 20 November 2003) and CB(1)2007/03-04(02) issued on 1 June 2004.

9. Having been selected in June 2002 to undertake the project, KCRC conducted a review on the SCL scheme in response to the community's request to serve more population centres along the rail line. In drawing up a revised scheme, KCRC has validated the technical feasibility and commercial viability of the project against the latest planning parameters, which include population growth, economic growth, and changes in land-use planning along the rail line.

10. KCRC proposed in February 2004 a Preferred Scheme² which allowed SCL to be better integrated with the East Rail and West Rail network to bring better service to the public. KCRC carried out a comprehensive consultation exercise on the Scheme and is now refining the Scheme to address the comments received. KCRC aims to submit the final Scheme to Government in the next few months.

11. Our current plan is to finalise the SCL scheme and to gazette the project under the Railways Ordinance around early 2005. The construction of the SCL will take about seven years to complete.

North Hong Kong Island Line (NIL)

12. The North Hong Kong Island Line (NIL) is an extension of the existing Tung Chung Line along the north shore of Hong Kong Island. Its function is to provide additional east-west rail capacity along the northern coast of Hong Kong Island to relieve the section between Tin Hau and Causeway Bay on Island Line and the Nathan Road section of the Tsuen Wan Line by redistributing the cross-harbour trips to Tung Chung Line.

13. In view of the reduced population/employment on Hong Kong Island, Government decided in January 2003 to defer the completion of the NIL to beyond 2016³. The alignment of the NIL is protected administratively.

Northern Link (NOL)

14. The NOL will provide a new boundary rail service for the New Territories and its implementation would depend on the projected demand of cross-boundary passenger traffic and the programme of the new development areas (NDA) in the New Territories. KCRC has recently conducted a preliminary study on the NOL indicating that the project would bring

² LegCo Paper No. CB(1)981/03-04(01) issued on 13 February 2004 refers.

³ LegCo Brief Ref. ETWB(T)CR 11/1016/99 issued on 21 January 2003 refers.

considerable transport benefits. To allow us to better assess the transport and economic case for the project, we have asked KCRC to do further work on the technical, environmental and financial aspects of the project.

Regional Express Line (REL)

15. The REL will provide express rail service to link up the urban area with the boundary and form the Hong Kong section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (ERL). This rail link seeks to reduce the travelling time between Guangzhou and Hong Kong from the existing 100 minutes to about an hour and is planned to connect with the railway network in the Mainland. We have set up a Joint Expert Group with the Ministry of Railways to take forward the strategic planning of the ERL. The Joint Expert Group has confirmed the strategic value of the rail link, and a study is now underway to establish the technical feasibility and commercial viability of the ERL. Once the study is completed, we will discuss with the Mainland authorities on the way forward.

Port Rail Line (PRL)

16. The proposed PRL will provide a freight rail corridor from Lo Wu to a new port rail terminal at Kwai Chung, via either East Rail or West Rail. The timing for this rail line will depend on the build-up of rail freight demand. KCRC is now studying the feasibility of this rail link.

Latest Position

17. RDS-2000 provides the planning framework for further expansion of the railway network up to 2016. Before a decision to build any individual railway projects is taken, the need for the project will be validated against the prevailing planning parameters and project assumptions and detailed engineering, environmental and financial studies will be conducted. The timing of each project will be adjusted in line with the latest data available. The deferral of NIL to beyond 2016 is a case in point.

THE MERGER NEGOTIATION

18. The Government decided on 24 February 2004 to invite the MTRCL and KCRC to start negotiations on a possible merger. The Corporations will conclude their negotiations and submit a report to Government by 31 August

2004. Against this background, the Corporations are now conducting a review on the railway projects in hand to see how the various projects could be carried forward in a manner that can best meet the transportation needs of the community.

CONCLUSION

19. Members are requested to note the latest development of RDS-2000.

Environment, Transport and Works Bureau

June 2004

[ETWB(T)CR 16/1016/97]

Priority Projects Recommended in “Railway Development Strategy 2000”

