

LegCo Panel on Transport
Subcommittee on matters relating to railways

Information Note on
Alert System of Railway Incidents

Introduction

At the Panel Subcommittee meeting on 19 December 2003, Members requested the Administration to review the timing for railway operators to notify the Transport Department (TD) of railway incidents and provide a note to Members. This information note reports to Members the new arrangements after consultation with MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) and Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC).

The current Alert System

2. Under current arrangements, the source operator (i.e. the operator which experienced problem of service disruption) is required to notify Transport Department and other relevant operators/agencies on the emergency situation and assistance required. Depending on the nature and seriousness of the incident, the source operator will also inform the media. Generally, an Amber or Red Alert message will be issued in accordance with the definitions of Amber and Red Alerts at **Annex**. The requirement is for the source operator to issue the alert message as soon as it has completed its initial assessment and, in any case, no later than 20 minutes after the incident first occurred.

The Review

3. The nature of rail service disruption varies from a train breakdown to a major incident requiring passenger evacuation and /or station closure. Experience has been that majority of the incidents caused delay of less than 20 minutes.

4. In view of the high carrying capacity of trains and the severe impact on travelers even for delays less than 20 minutes, TD had reviewed current communication arrangements on emergency incidents with the railway

operators and it was generally agreed that an early notification of incidents (whether delays will be for 20 minutes or more) would help TD to assess the incident and if necessary, liaise with relevant parties (e.g. Police and other transport operators) so that they can plan for the preparatory works for any emergency/support services at the earliest available opportunities.

The new arrangement

5. To facilitate relevant operators and agencies to gear up resources to assist the affected passengers, MTRC and KCRC are required to notify TD within 8 minutes on any service disruption incident that has occurred for 8 minutes or is expected to last for 8 minutes or more, irrespective of whether it is a temporary delay or stoppage of service for section of a railway line or a serious incident that would affect one or more railway lines. Upon receiving notification, TD would liaise closely with the source operator and to provide assistance as necessary. Whether emergency services would need to be mobilized would depend on the seriousness of the incident, the length of service disruption period and the availability of parallel services.

6. Apart from notifying TD, the source operator is also required to disseminate at the same time the temporary service disruption messages to passengers on the affected train and in the stations within 8 minutes.

Conclusion

7. The new notification arrangement has been put on trial on 11 February 2004 and worked well so far. Both TD and the railway companies will continue to review the notification arrangements and alert system and to make necessary modifications from time to time to reduce inconvenience to passengers due to service disruptions.

8. Members are requested to note the content of this paper.

Transport Department
March 2004

Public Transport Emergency

Definition of “Amber Alert” and “Red Alert”

“Amber Alert”

is defined as:

An early warning in respect of an incident which could lead to a serious disruption of service. The recipient of an ‘Amber Alert’ should alert its emergency unit, prepare for possible emergency action at short notice and keep in touch with the source operator.

“Red Alert”

is defined as:

A signal to indicate that a serious disruption has continued or is expected to continue for over 20 minutes, and emergency transport support services from other operators are required. Upon being alerted, the recipients should urgently mobilize their resources to provide appropriate supporting services as quickly as possible.