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Legislative Council

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Panel on Transport

**Minutes of special meeting held on
Friday, 15 October 2004
(immediately after the visit to East Tsim Sha Tsui Station
scheduled for the same day at 9:30 am)
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Hon LAU Kong-wah, JP (Chairman)
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip (Deputy Chairman)
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, S.B.St.J., JP
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP
Hon Miriam LAU Kin-ye, GBS, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Hon LEE Wing-tat
Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, SBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
- Member attending** : Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
- Members absent** : Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon CHEUNG Hok-ming, SBS, JP
Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP

Public Officers attending : Mr Arthur HO
Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works

Mr William SHIU
Principal Assistant Secretary for the Environment,
Transport and Works

Mr K H LO
Chief Inspecting Officer (Railways)
Hong Kong Railway Inspectorate
Environment, Transport and Works Bureau

Mr Albert YUEN
Assistant Commissioner/Bus & Railway
Transport Department

Attendance by invitation : **Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation**

Mr Michael TIEN
Chairman

Mr Samuel LAI
Acting Chief Executive Officer

Mr K K LEE
Senior Director, Capital Projects

Mr Y T LI
Senior Director, Transport

Mr Michael LAI
General Manager, Marketing

Mrs Grace LAM
General Manager, Corporate Affairs

Clerk in attendance : Mr Andy LAU
Chief Council Secretary (1)2

Staff in attendance : Ms Anita SIT
Senior Council Secretary (1)9

Miss Winnie CHENG
Legislative Assistant (1)5

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I An update on the Tsim Sha Tsui Extension project and its fares

Mr Abraham SHEK declared interest that he was a member of the Managing Board of Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC).

2. The Chairman welcomed the representatives of the Administration and KCRC to the meeting.

Presentation by KCRC

3. Mr Michael TIEN, the Chairman of KCRC, advised that the physical works of all structures and facilities essential to the operation of Tsim Sha Tsui (TST) Extension had been completed. Trial operation of East Rail trains extending to the East Tsim Sha Tsui (ETS) Station had also been successfully completed. The TST Extension would be officially opened for passenger services on 24 October 2004. Before the official opening, KCRC would open the Extension for trial rides by the public on 17 October 2004.

4. With regard to the fares for the TST Extension, the Chairman of KCRC made the following points with the aid of PowerPoint –

- (a) The fare-setting approach adopted on this occasion basically followed that used for setting West Rail (WR) fares. The primary considerations were market competition and public acceptability. The objective was to ensure that the new fares were not only comparable with those of alternative modes of transport but also offer better value-for-money services.
- (b) According to the latest passenger survey conducted by KCRC, “traveling time” and “accessibility of stations” were considered by residents of North East New Territories (NENT) as the most important criteria for modal choice of public transport. Results of the survey indicated that the value of time (VOT) for potential passengers in NENT was 16 cents per minute. This meant that the NENT residents were willing to pay 16 cents more for every one minute saved in the journey.
- (c) Adopting the VOT fare-setting approach, KCRC had compiled a set of derived VOT-based fares with reference to the fares of alternative modes of transport, the journey time saved by using TST Extension, and the perceived VOT for NENT residents. For example, an East Rail (ER) direct journey from Sha Tin to TST would take only 20 minutes, as against 44 minutes by bus and 31 minutes by changing from ER to MTR at Kowloon Tong. The VOT-based fares which passengers would be willing to pay were \$10.8 (i.e.

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$\$7.0 + (\$0.16 \times (44 \text{ minutes} - 20 \text{ minutes}))$) as compared to bus fare of \$7.0, and \$12.5 (i.e. $\$10.7 + (\$0.16 \times (31 \text{ minutes} - 20 \text{ minutes}))$) as compared to ER/MTR (via Kowloon Tong) fare of \$10.7. The TST Extension fare would be $\$7.6^{\text{note}}$, which was significantly lower than the VOT-based fares.

- (e) MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) had agreed to offer an interchange discount of \$1.5 for passengers interchanging at the ETS Station.

5. The Chairman of KCRC also remarked that the construction cost of TST Extension amounted to some \$4.1 billion. Based on the TST Extension fares and its estimated patronage, the fare revenue generated from the Extension would only be marginally adequate to recover the operating costs of the Extension; it would be far from adequate to also recover the depreciation of the relevant capital assets.

6. Also with the aid of PowerPoint, Mr Samuel LAI, the Acting Chief Executive Officer (Acting CEO) of KCRC, briefed the Panel on how the VOT-based fares for ER journeys using TST Extension were derived, and how the actual TST Extension fares compared with the VOT-based fares. He also advised that passengers would enjoy a \$1 discount for interchanging between ER and green minibus routes 77M (MTR Kowloon Station – TST East) and 78 (Island Harbourview – Hankow Road), and that with effect from 7 November 2004, the free shuttle bus K16 would run between ETS Station and Nam Cheong Station.

(Post-meeting note: The presentation materials of KCRC were tabled at the meeting and subsequently issued vide LC Paper No. CB(1)54/04-05 dated 18 October 2004.)

The VOT fare-setting approach

7. Ir Dr Raymond HO said that it was important for KCRC to elaborate on how the VOT for NENT residents, i.e. 16 cents per minute, had been arrived at, as the VOT formed the basis of the TST Extension fares. Based on the information provided by KCRC, the VOT only took into account traveling time; other relevant factors such as the accessibility of stations and the traveling environment had not been taken into account. He also commented that people from different income groups and districts should have different VOT, and the relationship between VOT and the amount of time savings should not be linear.

8. The Chairman of KCRC said that in the case of WR, a similar passenger survey had been conducted and the VOT then derived was \$0.2 per minute. The current survey for TST Extension covered NENT potential passengers. He cited that according to Transport Department's territory-wide VOT survey conducted in January 2003, the VOT covering public transport and private car users was \$0.78. If private car users were excluded, the VOT was \$0.48. He remarked that the VOT of residents in NENT and

^{note} The fares quoted in these minutes are single-ride adult Octopus fares.

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North West New Territories were lower than the territory-wide figures mainly because many choices of transport modes were available for NENT and NWNT passengers, and thus the public transport markets in these regions were highly competitive.

9. Ir Dr Raymond HO said that unless comprehensive information on how the VOT for NENT residents (\$0.16 per minute) had been derived was available, he found it difficult to make further comment on the VOT and the VOT fare-setting approach.

10. Ms LI Fung-ying also expressed concern about the lack of information on the passenger survey conducted by KCRC, in particular the calculations of the VOT for NENT residents. She commented that apart from travelling time and fare level, a quality travelling environment was also an important criterion for people's choice of transport mode.

11. In reply to Mr LAM Kin-fung, the Chairman of KCRC advised that the fares for TST Extension were set based on the VOT principle, which in turn took into account public acceptability and market competition. The existing patronage of different ER journeys had not been a major factor in the fare-setting process.

12. In view of members' concerns, the Chairman requested and the Chairman of KCRC agreed to provide detailed information on how the VOT for NENT residents was derived at.

Fares for the TST Extension

13. In reply to Mr LAU Chin-shek's enquiry, the Acting CEO of KCRC advised that currently, a uniform fare was charged for ER journeys from any particular station in the New Territories to Kowloon Tong, Mong Kok or Hung Hom. For example, for ER journeys from Sha Tin to Kowloon Tong/Mong Kok/Hung Hom, the same fare of \$5.1 was charged.

14. Noting that the fare of an ER direct journey from Sha Tin to TST would be \$7.6, Mr LAU Chin-shek queried whether the TST Extension fares departed from the prevailing fare structure of ER, as passengers would have to pay \$2.5 more for extending their ride to TST whilst at present, there was no incremental fare difference among the three ER stations in the urban area.

15. The Chairman of KCRC advised that ER had a zone-based fare system with four different fare zones. As Kowloon Tong Station, Mong Kok Station and Hung Hom Station fell within the same zone, the same fare was charged for ER journeys between a particular station in the New Territories and any of the three urban stations. KCRC considered it appropriate to treat ETS Station as a separate zone for fare-setting purposes.

16. The Chairman of KCRC further explained that the geographical distribution of railway stations had all along been one major factor in KCRC's fare setting. In the case

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of WR, some stations in the New Territories were grouped under the same zone on account of their proximity to one another, whereas each of the stations in the urban area were treated as separate zones as they were fairly distanced from one another. He remarked that there was no fundamental contradiction between the fare structure of ER and that of WR.

17. Mr Albert CHAN commented that the fare-setting approach for TST Extension was problematic. One important shortcoming was that the VOT-based fares had ignored the fact that the commuting public was currently paying unreasonably high fares for trips to TST and Central due to the poor design of the territory's railway networks. Mr CHAN considered the TST Extension fares as presently set by KCRC too high, in particular for the low-income groups, the elderly and students. He emphasized the need to set the fares at affordable levels for the low-income groups and urged KCRC to devise measures with the specific purpose of alleviating the burden of transport cost on the low-income groups. In this regard, he enquired whether KCRC would offer the monthly pass option for ER passengers, which were currently available for WR passengers.

18. Mrs Selina CHOW also enquired if KCRC would offer the monthly pass option for ER passengers using TST Extension. She added that residents in North West New Territories had revealed to her that the availability of fare concessions were an important consideration for their choice of WR or otherwise.

19. In response, the Chairman of KCRC said that as required by the law, KCRC should conduct its business according to prudent commercial principles. On the other hand, being a corporation wholly owned by the Government, KCRC always gave due consideration to factors relating to people's livelihood. He said that the fare revenue from TST Extension would need to be \$5 - \$6 per passenger journey if a reasonable rate of return were to be attained. Now the fares for the Extension were set at levels significantly lower than the VOT-based fares and the incremental fare was only \$2.5 to \$3.5. Hence, whilst KCRC's primary consideration was to set competitive fares in the market that it operated, due consideration had also been given to the financial impact on the commuting public in the fare-setting process. He remarked that under the existing transport policy, NENT residents were offered many choices of transport modes charging different fares.

20. As regards the suggestion of offering the monthly pass option for ER passengers using TST Extension, the Chairman of KCRC said that the monthly pass scheme for WR passengers was introduced only some time after the commissioning of WR. In the case of TST Extension, there was no plan to introduce a similar arrangement at this stage, but KCRC would closely monitor the patronage situation and take appropriate measures where necessary.

21. Mr LEE Wing-tat commented that the fare setting for WR had proved to be a failure and this reflected the inability of the VOT approach to accurately reflect market conditions. Disguised by the VOT-based fares, it appeared that KCRC was charging

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low fares for TST Extension. However, it should be noted that the VOT-based fares were calculated on the basis of the fares of existing transport modes, which were in fact charging unreasonably high fares. He highlighted that currently, the incremental fare between consecutive stations of ER was on average below \$1.0, but KCRC had set the incremental fare for TST Extension at between \$2.5 to \$3.5. In particular, he found the TST Extension fare of \$3.9 for a single trip between Hung Hum and TST too high.

22. The Chairman of KCRC said that results of the passenger surveys conducted for WR indicated that the availability of feeder services rather than the fare level was the main concern of passengers. As such, instead of reducing fares, KCRC had made substantial improvements in feeder services at various WR stations over the past months to create additional value for WR services. The growth in patronage from 100 000 passenger visits in early 2004 to 170 000 at present proved that the fares initially set for WR were reasonable. Hence, KCRC considered it appropriate to adopt the WR fare-setting approach to set the fares for TST Extension and was confident that the TST Extension fares were very competitive.

23. The Chairman of KCRC further said that the VOT-based fares might have under-estimated what passengers were willing to pay as the interchange factor had not been factored in. In fact, many respondents in the passenger survey for TST Extension indicated that they were willing to pay fares higher than the VOT-based fares. He remarked that the market competition environment in respect of the existing ER was very different from that of TST Extension, and thus the incremental fare structure in respect of the existing stations of ER should not be directly applied to the ETS Station. As regards the fare of \$3.9 for a ER Hung Hum to TST trip, he understood that the most common alternative was green minibus which was charging \$2.9 and the travelling time was about 10 minutes. Taking into account the time savings and convenience due to passengers, KCRC considered that \$3.9 for a ER Hung Hom to TST trip was a very competitive fare. Acting CEO of KCRC advised that at present, the lowest fare for a one-station ER journey was \$3.2.

24. Mr LEE Wing-tat considered that the substantial increase in the patronage of WR in recent months was a result of both the offer of the monthly pass option and better feeder services, and the VOT approach had ignored these factors in the first place. He maintained the view that sticking to the same fare-setting approach for TST Extension and other new railway lines in future might render further failures in attaining the target patronage.

25. The Chairman of KCRC said that the various passenger surveys for WR had consistently revealed that fare level was not the most important criterion for people's choice of transport mode. The patronage of WR experienced an increase of 30 000 to 40 000 in July/August 2004. At that time, the monthly pass had been introduced for two months. It was found that the patronage growth mainly occurred at Nam Cheong, Tsuen Wan and Tin Shui Wai. There was no significant growth at Mei Foo, where an WR/MTR interchange discount had been offered with effect from 1 May 2004. If fare level had been a pivotal consideration, patronage at Mei Foo should have seen

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significant growth. KCRC believed that the patronage growth was mainly attributed to improvement in feeder services at Nam Cheong, Tsuen Wan and Tin Shui Wai. From another perspective, if reduction in WR fares did not generate proportionate incremental fare revenue, KCRC's financial position would be adversely affected. Such fare reduction would be akin to social welfare. He appealed for members' understanding that it was incumbent upon KCRC to operate on prudent commercial principles.

26. Ms Miriam LAU said that based on KCRC's explanations so far, the fares and services of competing transport modes were its main considerations in setting the fares for TST Extension. She noted that the incremental fare for the ride on TST Extension was \$2.5 for trips to/from Sha Tin, \$3.0 for trips to/from Tai Po and \$3.5 for trips to/from Sheung Shui and Lo Wu. She enquired about the rationale for the differential incremental fares as well as the rationale for charging an incremental fare for journeys to/from LO Wu given that the existing fare for ER cross-boundary journeys already contained an element of subsidy for ER domestic journeys.

27. The Chairman of KCRC said that there was an incremental fare simply because additional rail service was provided to passengers when they extended their ER journeys by riding on TST Extension. As regards the differential incremental fares for Sha Tin – TST, Tai Po – TST and Sheung Shui – TST journeys, he explained that the fare pattern mainly reflected the different market conditions of these journeys. Moreover, if the journeys were subject to the same amount of incremental fare, passengers taking the shorter journeys would be paying a higher percentage of incremental fare against the fare for the entire journey and this might not be a fair treatment.

28. Ms Miriam LAU said that the differential incremental fares could hardly be justified as the additional rail service enjoyed by passengers by extending their ride on TST Extension was essentially the same, irrespective of their respective starting/ending stations. She also queried whether the present approach of charging higher incremental fare for longer journeys was contradictory to the idea expressed by the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (SETW) that where practicable, public transport fares should be rationalized to alleviate the burden of those people who currently had to spend more on transport expenses for long journeys to commute to/from their work places.

29. The Chairman of KCRC said that the fares for TST Extension were lower than the current fares for ER/MTR (via Kowloon Tong) trips, which were currently the most popular transport mode among passengers destined for TST and Central. Thus, TST Extension would offer a cheaper alternative for people living in NENT and hence to a certain extent, the objective as suggested by SETW could be attained.

30. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that in the past, railway operations in the territory had been heavily subsidized by property development. After the burst of the property market bubble, the subsidy could no longer sustain. Henceforth, KCRC turned to take advantage of the market conditions to raise its fare revenue. He considered it

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unreasonable to charge a higher incremental fare for passengers travelling from Sheung Shui and Tai Po to TST as compared to passengers travelling from Sha Tin to TST. He also considered that the fare of \$3.9 for an ER Hung Hom – TST trip was unreasonably high. The commercial considerations of KCRC in the fare-setting process was a matter of KCRC's internal management. As a Legislative Council Member, he was mainly concerned whether due consideration had been given to the affordability of the general public, and he could not see that KCRC had taken this factor into consideration in setting the TST Extension fares.

Administration's position on the TST Extension fares

31. In reply to Mr LAU Chin-shek's enquiry about the Administration's position on KCRC's planned fares for TST Extension, the Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (DS for ETW) said that due to the subsidy from cross-boundary fare revenue, the fares for ER domestic trips had all along been relatively low. It was understandable that some members and NENT residents would wish that the fares for TST Extension would follow the existing fare structure of ER domestic trips. The Administration held the view that TST Extension would create added value for ER. In setting the TST Extension fares, KCRC had carried out detailed analyses in order to ensure that the fares would be competitive and acceptable to the public. Compared with the present situation, most passengers would pay lower fares for journeys from NENT to TST and Central by taking ER. The Administration recognized the need of maintaining a healthy financial position for KCRC. Otherwise, the system maintenance and service performance of KCRC would be adversely affected. The Administration hoped that TST Extension would be well patronized, and where needed, would explore with KCRC the practicability of fare concession schemes such as monthly pass and interchange discounts after the Extension had come into operation.

Interchange discounts

32. Ir Dr Raymond HO said that currently, the commuting public held a very negative attitude towards interchanging between the two railway networks. He asked whether it was possible to offer a greater interchange discount than \$1.5 to attract more people to take ER/MTR interchange at ETS Station. In reply, the Chairman of KCRC said that given that TST Extension would attract some passengers who had used to taking MTR/ER interchange at the Kowloon Tong Station, the concession offer indeed reflected MTRCL's commitment to the commuting public. It was highly unlikely that MTRCL would be willing to increase the interchange discount. Ir Dr HO urged the two railway corporations to further co-operate to improve the interchanging arrangements, and he anticipated that the merger of the two railway corporations, if materialized, would provide further opportunities for interchange concessions.

33. In reply to the enquiries of Mrs Selina CHOW and Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung about the effect of the merger of the two railway corporations on KCR fares and KCR/MTR interchange discounts, the Chairman of KCRC advised that KCRC and MTRCL had recently submitted a joint report on the possible merger to the

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Administration. Whilst KCRC anticipated that the merger, if implemented, would allow opportunities for fare reduction, as the merger proposal was still under discussion between the Administration and the two railway corporations, it would not be appropriate for him to make further comments on the effect of the merger on railway fares.

Rate of return of TST Extension

34. Mrs Selina CHOW enquired about the estimated non-fare revenue that could be brought about by TST Extension and the rate of return of the new Extension if the non-fare revenue was taken into account.

35. Mr Albert CHAN commented that the rate of return on the capital investment for a railway line, taking into account both fare revenue and non-fare revenue, was a good basis for assessing whether the relevant fares were reasonable. Based on KCRC's planned fares for TST Extension, the fare income arising from TST Extension would be about \$3 per passenger journey, and assuming that TST Extension would have a daily patronage of some 300 000 passenger journeys, the annual fare revenue brought about by TST Extension would be \$300 - \$400 million. This would represent a return rate as high as 10% on the capital cost of the Extension which was \$4.1 billion. Hence, if the daily patronage of TST Extension turned out to be close to his estimate, KCRC's planned fares for the Extension were grossly too high.

36. Mr LAU Chin-shek asked whether KCRC would revise the fares for TST Extension having regard to members' comments and concerns raised at this meeting.

37. In response, the Chairman of KCRC advised that the daily patronage of TST Extension during the initial stage of operation was estimated to be about 100 000 passenger journeys, based on the following assumptions –

- (a) out of the 70 000 daily passenger journeys using ER to/from Hung Hom and destining for/starting at TST, 50 000 would use TST Extension;
- (b) out of the 30 000 to 40 000 daily passenger journeys to/from TST using ER/MTR via Kowloon Tong, about 20 000 passenger journeys would switch to TST Extension; and
- (c) out of the 40 000 daily passenger journeys to/from Hong Kong Island using ER/MTR via Kowloon Tong, 20 000 would switch to TST Extension.

38. Based on the estimated daily patronage of 100 000 passenger journeys using TST Extension, the rate of return of the Extension would be 3% - 4%, whereas the desired rate of return for a railway line was 7% - 8%, i.e. the average cost of capital plus 1%. During the initial operation period, the operating cost of the Extension was \$2.5 per passenger journey. The fare revenue from TST Extension would be marginally sufficient to recover the operating costs of the Extension. The non-fare revenue from

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retail shops, advertisements etc. would only be able to recover a small portion of the depreciation of capital assets. If full recovery of the depreciation cost were to be attained, it would be necessary to recoup \$5 to \$6 per passenger journey from TST Extension. To conclude, there was no question of KCRC seeking to obtain unreasonably high profits through TST Extension. KCRC had carefully considered all relevant factors and indeed had given due consideration to public acceptability and affordability in setting the fares for TST Extension. KCRC would very closely monitor the patronage of the Extension and if needed, would examine measures to improve patronage.

39. The Chairman of KCRC further said that in the short-term, TST Extension could hardly be said to be cost-effective. However, railways were planned for 50 years and thus their cost-effectiveness should be viewed from the longer term. From the long-term perspective, the cost-effectiveness of TST Extension should be considered in conjunction with the Kowloon Southern Link, which upon completion would connect WR to ER, and TST Extension paved the way for this future connection. Currently, the rate of return of WR was also very low. It was expected that with the completion of the Kowloon Southern Link, the patronage of WR would significantly improve.

40. Taking note of the explanations of the Chairman of KCRC, Mr LAU Chin-shek highlighted that the existing high fares of other transport modes was due to the fact that commuters had to pay a boarding charge for interchanging between ER and MTR. The incremental fare of \$2.5 to \$3.5 for the extended ride on TST Extension would represent a substantial percentage of the fares for the entire ER journeys, and this apparently departed from the existing fare structure of ER. The result was the commuting public having to pay high fares for using the Extension.

41. Mr Albert CHAN considered that KCRC had grossly under-estimated the patronage of TST Extension. To facilitate future review of the TST Extension fares, he asked KCRC to set aside the fare revenue in excess of the estimated 100 000 daily passenger journeys in its future financial reports.

42. In response to members' further comments, the Chairman of KCRC said that there were solid bases for the estimated patronage as delineated earlier on. An outturn patronage substantially higher than 100 000 daily passenger journeys would prove that passengers found the new service value for money, and greater fare revenue would be beneficial to KCRC's financial position. If the patronage turned out to be low, KCRC certainly would not seek to increase fares. Instead, it would improve feeder services and take other measures to boost patronage. He stressed that KCRC was a corporation tasked to serve Hong Kong people; it had never sought to make unreasonably high profits. On this occasion, KCRC's fare plan would bring about a very low return rate in the short term. Setting the fares at even lower levels would be detrimental to the corporation's financial position and would cause the corporation's interest cost to increase.

Art work and signage

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43. Mr Albert CHAN said that the community had all along called on transport operators to incorporate art work into the design of new transport facilities and make good use of available space to exhibit art work for public appreciation. The current design of ETS Station, however, did not appear to have taken good care of this aspect. As ETS Station would be heavily patronized by local people as well as tourists, he called on KCRC to make improvements in this respect. He suggested that KCRC might seek private sponsorships for art work pieces should cost be an important concern. Mr CHAN also urged KCRC to improve the signage of the station. He in particular highlighted the need for clear and adequate directional signs to facilitate passengers' interchange with other transport modes.

44. Mrs Selina CHOW commented that the architectural design of ETS Station was very basic and functional, lacking in aesthetical appeal. Such an important urban spot should deserve a better architectural design. She suggested that for special occasions or festivals, more thoughts be given to the decorations of the station. She also commented that there was a general lack of facilities for effective dissemination of information in particular fare information to passengers. For example, due to the absence of information panels on fares, passengers would only be able to ascertain the fares at the ticket vending machines, and this would probably slow down the ticket purchase process and generate queues at the vending machines. She urged KCRC to make improvements.

45. The Chairman of KCRC thanked members' for their suggestions and comments given during the site visit held on the same day before this special meeting, and assured members that KCRC would follow up on the comments and suggestions. With regard to the signage inside ETS Station, he said that this was a challenge to KCRC given the size and numerous exits of the station. KCRC had given much thought on the signage aspects and would seek to make improvements.

Facilities and arrangements to handle emergencies

46. Ms LI Fung-ying called on KCRC to ensure that TST Extension would provide a quality travelling environment for passengers. She noticed during the aforementioned site visit that most of the exits in ETS Station were provided with one escalator only and some corridors were rather narrow. She thus enquired about the complementary administrative measures to ensure smooth passenger flows inside the station. Highlighting the complexity of the physical layout of the ETS Station and the anticipated heavy pedestrian traffic inside the station, Ms LI also expressed concern on whether there were adequate facilities and administrative arrangements for crowd control and evacuation in the case of emergencies to safeguard people's safety.

47. The Chairman of KCRC advised that due to space and cost-effectiveness considerations, it was common place that exits inside railway stations were each provided with one escalator only. The direction of the escalators would be adjusted according to the tidal flow of passengers at different times of the day. He also advised

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that due to space constraints, only one-way travellers could be provided at the Mody Road section of the pedestrian subway network. Similarly, the direction of the travellers would be adjusted according to the tidal flow of pedestrians. As regards the travelling environment, he advised that upon commissioning of TST Extension, the trains running the ER would consist of 12 coaches. Compared with the MTR trains of 8 coaches, the capacity of the ER trains would be significantly greater.

48. Mr K K LEE, Senior Director (Capital Projects) of KCRC, advised that the design of ETS Station must comply with the relevant requirements to safeguard passengers' safety in emergency situations. The station platform, which was 15 metres wide, and the escalators/staircases would have sufficient capacity to accommodate the passenger outflow from a full train with concurrent passenger inflow from the concourse to fill an empty train. The commuting facilities within the station were sufficient to enable evacuation of passengers within a specified period of time in the case of emergencies.

49. The Acting CEO of KCRC supplemented that the safety facilities in ETS Station had been carefully designed after substantial discussions with the relevant Government departments. There were built-in devices which would be activated for crowd control and evacuation at times of emergencies.

50. Taking note of KCRC's explanations, Ms LI Fung-ying said that on past occasions of railway incidents, there were often disparities between the pledged response time and the actual response time of the contingency mechanisms. She highlighted that adequate facilities and procedures for handling emergencies was of paramount importance given the scale and the anticipated heavy patronage of ETS Station. She sought a very clear assurance in this respect.

51. DS for ETW expressed concurrence with Ms LI about the importance of adequate facilities and procedures to handle emergency incidents. He advised that Hong Kong Railway Inspectorate, Fire Services Department and other relevant departments had worked in collaboration with KCRC in the testing and drilling of the relevant systems, equipment and procedures, and had carefully reviewed their adequacy and reliability to ensure full compliance with the relevant requirements. He assured members that the Administration would continue to closely monitor these aspects upon commissioning of TST Extension.

52. The Chairman thanked the members and representatives of the Administration and KCRC.

II Any other business

53. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 11:00 am.

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