

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

Open fare system for Light Rail

Purpose

This paper informs Members about the open fare system for Light Rail.

Open Fare Design

2. The Light Rail network of the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC) is the major mode of transportation in the North-west New Territories, serving more than one million residents of the Tuen Mun, Yuen Long and Tin Shui Wai areas. The Light Rail system, composed of several routes linking community facilities, residential areas and schools, was designed to meet the needs of the development and planning of the North-west New Territories.

3. Light Rail has adopted an open fare system which is well suited to the geographical environment along the Light Rail alignment. Due to geographical constraints, most Light Rail platforms are 3 to 5 metres wide and about 40 metres long, which make it difficult to install entry / exit gates on the platforms. The open fare system can bring convenience to the boarding and alighting of passengers and facilitate passenger flow.

4. At present, the open fare system is widely adopted in developed countries, especially in Europe and America, including the United States (Los Angeles, Minneapolis), the Netherlands, the United Kingdom (London, Dockland, Sheffield, Croydon), Canada (Toronto), Australia (Melbourne), Germany (Frankfurt, Munich), Hungary, Czech Republic, Austria and Belgium etc. This demonstrates that open system design has been well-established and providing convenient and speedy services to passengers.

Ticketing System

5. Light Rail has adopted two fare-charging mechanisms - single journey tickets, which are available from the ticket vending machines located at platforms, and Octopus cards. Passengers who do not hold an Octopus card or do not use Light Rail frequently can buy a single journey ticket, the single fare of which is calculated on a zonal basis and the ticket is valid for two hours. Passengers holding a valid ticket can travel in the same direction within relevant fare zones. Most frequent travellers choose to use an Octopus card. By validating the card on the entry processor before boarding and on the exit processor after alighting from the Light Rail Vehicle, the Octopus system calculates the appropriate fares according to the number of stations travelled.

Entry and Exit Processors

6. In order to facilitate passengers to recognise and use the Octopus cards, different colours are painted on the hoods of processors with different functions. The hoods of the entry processors are orange, the hoods of the exit processors are green and the hoods of the passenger enquiry processors are blue. The processor hoods are marked with their respective functions “In”, “Out” and “Checking” in both Chinese and English.

7. The Octopus processors are located to match with the passenger flow. In general, the entry processors are installed at the platform entrance, facing the boarding passengers as they enter the platforms. The exit processors are installed on the platforms, facing alighting passengers. The passenger enquiry processors are installed in the middle of the platforms.

Ticket Inspection

8. In order to maintain a fair and just ticketing system and to prevent situations whereby paid passengers subsidize those travelling without a valid ticket, KCRC has established a ticket inspection mechanism in accordance with the power under its By-laws.

9. Light Rail Passenger Services Assistants carry out ticket inspections at Light Rail stops and inside train compartments. Passengers who cannot present a valid ticket are subject to a surcharge, which is 50 times

the highest adult single journey fare, i.e. \$290 at the current fare level. Passengers unable to produce a valid ticket are invited to go to the platform where the stipulated surcharge is to be paid. Passengers unable to pay the surcharge immediately would be asked to sign a deferred payment agreement and pay the surcharge within 14 days at any one of the Light Rail customer service centres.

10. Opened in 1988, Light Rail has been in operation over 16 years. Most residents are familiar with the operation of the open fare system, and fully aware of the travelling norm of “ticketing before boarding”. For the past three years, the average fare evasion rate remains about 0.4% each year, i.e. 4 out of every 1 000 passengers. The figure is very low as compared with overseas countries using a similar system. When commissioned in 1988, the Light Rail average daily ridership was 180 000. In 2004, while the average daily and yearly ridership of Light Rail reached 360 000 and 130 million passengers respectively, only four complaints against the open fare design of the Light Rail system were received by KCRC.

Appeal for waiving of surcharge

11. KCRC has established an appeal channel for passengers who have breached the By-laws and are subject to surcharge to explain the reasons for not being able to present a valid ticket. Each appeal case is handled independently. KCRC will examine passenger’s explanation before a final decision on the application for waiving the surcharge is made. Discretion will be exercised for some special cases.

Publicity and Education

12. KCRC believes that the cooperation and discipline of passengers is the key to the success of an open fare system. Hence, KCRC has been enhancing the educational and promotional activities on the open fare system, in order to enhance passengers’ awareness of the operation of the Light Rail ticketing system and to educate passengers of the requirement to buy a ticket or validate the Octopus card before boarding.

13. KCRC has been enhancing passengers’ awareness of the open fare system through different channels. These include posting of posters and banners at platforms, erection of signage, regular announcements at platforms

and inside train compartments, and distribution of promotional leaflets, and regular update of the KCRC Highlights Newsletter. Educational and promotional activities / briefings are also held in schools, community centres, housing estates, youth centres and elderly centres. Furthermore, KCRC regularly holds large-scale educational events, through different activities, to educate passengers of the proper way to use the Light Rail system.

Conclusion

14. KCRC will continue to step up publicity on the open fare system in order to enhance infrequent Light Rail travellers' understanding of the operation of Light Rail ticketing system.

Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation
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