

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)783/05-06
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref: CB1/PS/1/04/1

Panel on Transport

Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways

**Minutes of meeting on
Monday, 12 December 2005, at 4:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Hon Miriam LAU Kin-yee, GBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon LAU Kong-wah, JP
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon LEE Wing-tat
Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, SBS, JP
- Member attending** : Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
- Members absent** : Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, S.B.St.J., JP
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
- Public Officers attending** : **Agenda item IV**

Mr Thomas CHOW
Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works

Ms Ava CHIU
Principal Assistant Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works

Mr Henry CHAN
Principal Assistant Secretary for the Environment,
Transport and Works

Mr WAN Man-lung
Principal Government Engineer/Railway Development
Highways Department

Attendance by invitation : **Agenda item IV**

Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation

Mr Stephen CHIK
General Manager – Capital Works Planning

Mrs Grace LAM
General Manager – Corporation Affairs

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

Staff in attendance : Mrs Mary TANG
Senior Council Secretary (1)2

Miss Winnie CHENG
Legislative Assistant (1)5

Action

I Confirmation of minutes of meeting and matters arising
(LC Paper No. CB(1)229/05-06 - Minutes of meeting held on 3 October 2005)

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2005 were confirmed.

II Information papers issued since last meeting
(LC Paper No. CB(1)2137/04-05(01) - A gist of deliberations at the meeting with Shatin District Council (STDC) members on 12 May 2005 regarding their request for mitigation measures to reduce the noise impact of Ma On Shan Rail

Action

- LC Paper No. CB(1)2137/04-05(02) - Administration's response to STDC members' request
- LC Paper No. CB(1)2226/04-05 - A complaint from a member of the public against noise levels inside train compartments of Ma On Shan Rail and a reply from the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation
- LC Paper No. CB(1)2234/04-05 - An information paper on "MTR incidents involving train doors/platform screen doors not opening" provided by the Administration)

2. Members noted the information papers issued since last meeting.

III Items for discussion at the next meeting scheduled for 3 February 2006

- (LC Paper No. CB(1)380/05-06(01) - List of outstanding items for discussion
- LC Paper No. CB(1)380/05-06(02) - List of follow-up actions)

3. Members agreed that the progress of Kowloon Southern Link as proposed by the Administration would be discussed at the next meeting scheduled for 3 February 2006.

IV Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link and Northern Link

- (LC Paper No. CB(1)380/05-06(03) - Information paper provided by the Administration
- LC Paper No. CB(1)421/05-06(01) - Submission from the Chairman of San Tin Village Committee on Northern Link
- LC Paper No. CB(1)488/05-06(01) - Administration's reply to LC Paper No. CB(1)421/05-06(01))

4. With the use of PowerPoint, the Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (DSETW) briefed members on the latest development of the proposed Northern Link (NOL) and the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (ERL). This was followed by a presentation by Mr Stephen CHIK, General Manager – Capital Works Planning, Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (GMCWP/KCRC) who provided further details on the proposed NOL and ERL.

5. In gist, NOL was the remaining part of the railway loop serving the Kowloon Peninsula and the New Territories (NT). NOL would connect West Rail (WR) to East Rail (ER) via the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line under construction. NOL would run from the current Kam Sheung Road Station of WR to a point near Chau Tau where it would connect with the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line.

Action

6. Regarding the Hong Kong section of ERL, two options were being considered. Under Option A, the existing WR, the proposed NOL, the Kowloon Southern Link (KSL) under construction, and a proposed tunnel between Chau Tau and the boundary would be used to form the main part of the Hong Kong Section of ERL. A tunnel would be built under Shenzhen River to extend the section to Longhua via Huanggang. Under Option B, whilst the terminus of the Hong Kong section of ERL would remain at West Kowloon, a new dedicated rail line would be built to run between West Kowloon and the said tunnel to Longhua via Huanggang. The Mainland section of ERL would start from the boundary to Longhua in Shenzhen, run through Humen in Dongguan and then Shibi in Guangzhou. The Mainland side would start works for the section from Shibi to Longhua soon, and timing for the remaining section from Longhua to the boundary would tie in with the construction of the Hong Kong section.

(Post meeting note- Copies of the presentation materials prepared by KCRC and the Administration were circulated vide LC Paper Nos.CB(1)517/05-06 and CB(1)562/05-06(01)).

Costs and fares

7. Mr Andrew CHENG said that members of the Democratic Party would fully support the early commissioning of NOL as it would connect the WR to the ER, and boost the patronage of WR to improve its performance. Regarding the Hong Kong section of ERL, he was of the view that in terms of cost effectiveness, Option A (i.e. the Shared Corridor Option) would be more preferable than Option B (i.e. the Dedicated Corridor Option).

8. DSETW said that the major difference between the two options was that under Option A, it would make use of the KSL, the WR and the NOL before connecting to the Mainland section of ERL via a dedicated tunnel to be provided near Chau Tau. Under Option B, a dedicated rail corridor would be built to link West Kowloon and the said dedicated tunnel near Chau Tau. A new terminus would be built at West Kowloon irrespective of which option was chosen. Regarding the comparison between Option A and Option B, DSETW said that Option B would incur a higher cost, which was estimated to be 47% higher than that of Option A. The difference would be a few billion dollars. On the technical side, Option B, which would involve construction of a long tunnel, would be more difficult to implement.

9. On Mr LAU Kong-wah's enquiry about the future fares for ERL, GMCPW/KCRC said that the fares would be determined nearer the time of completion, taking into account the prevailing competitive level of fares and services of other cross-boundary transport service. As ERL would be jointly operated by Hong Kong and Mainland operators, there would be coordination in the setting of fees and further details would have to be sorted out. DSETW also remarked that the Administration had yet to decide on whether KCRC should be the operator for the Hong Kong side of ERL. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung however was not convinced of the reply. He said

Action

that the Government or KCRC would have made some assumptions on fare levels in order to work out the projected rate of return for the project. There was no reason why the Administration and KCRC could not release the projected fares at this stage. The Chairman said that the Administration should include more details about the planning and financial information of the project in future report for members' consideration.

Traveling time for the Hong Kong section of ERL

10. Noting that the Mainland section of ERL would be proceeded with shortly, Mr LAU Kong-wah remarked that the Administration had been slow in taking forward the Hong Kong section of ERL. He also noted with concern the long traveling time of 25 minutes for the Hong Kong section of ERL as compared to 33 minutes required for the Mainland section of ERL from Shibi to Longhua, despite the fact that the former comprised only 20% while the latter comprised 80% of the entire length of 140 km of rail track. It would appear that the Hong Kong section was the bottleneck for ERL as its traveling time was totally disproportionate to the distance traveled. This might be attributable to the fact that the WR had to accommodate the domestic trains. Given that Option B would provide a new dedicated rail corridor which could shorten the traveling time to some 11 minutes at an additional cost of only 47% of the cost of Option A, it might be more preferable and sustainable in the long run. His concern was shared by Mr WONG Kwok-hing.

11. DSETW said that at the present stage the Administration was open about the choice of option for the Hong Kong section of ERL and would like to listen to the views of members before arriving at a decision. Indeed, the development of the Hong Kong section of ERL could be implemented by stages taking into account passenger demand, progress of developments along WR and the cross boundary passenger transport demand. The decision to adopt Option A as a start would not preclude the adoption of Option B at a later stage because the dedicated rail corridor between West Kowloon Station and the tunnel off Chau Tau could be constructed at a later stage taking into account the actual passenger demand and growth. As the West Kowloon Terminus would be needed under both options, and the NOL would be needed for ERL, there would not be significant obsolete works in a staged implementation. On Mr LAU Kong-wah's enquiry about the timing for the decision to be made on the preferred option since the Mainland section of ERL would expect to be ready by 2010, DSETW advised that a decision on the preferred option of the Hong Kong section of ERL would be reached within the next few months. DSETW reiterated in response to Mr WONG Kwok-hing that at the present stage the Administration was open about its choice of options, which would include the stand-alone Option A or Option B, or phased implementation of Options A and B.

Train frequencies for ERL and its impact on WR services

12. Mr LAU Kong-wah enquired about the maximum frequency of ERL under Option A and the number of passengers carried per day. GMCPW/KCRC said that the trains to be used for ERL would have similar performances to the trains currently

Action

used by MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) and KCRC. It was envisaged that initially three departures could be operated in each direction per peak hour. The service could be further strengthened to five departures per peak hour upon some upgrading works.

13. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that members of the Democratic Alliance for Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong were in support of the early commissioning of NOL, otherwise WR would likely lose out despite its concessions in fares. He opined that, apart from easing passenger traffic between Hong Kong and the Mainland, NOL would also facilitate residents from NT West to travel to NT East and vice versa. While it would be more cost-effective for ERL to make use of the existing WR and the proposed NOL, he was concerned that with the use of the existing track of WR and NOL to operate the Hong Kong section of ERL, there would be a capacity constraint on increasing the frequency of ERL, if required. DSETW said that an assessment had been made on the impact of ERL on the operation of WR by 2016. Whilst the basic frequency of WR during peak periods would remain at 3-minute, arrangements would be made to enable WR trains to leave individual platforms earlier than the original schedule so as to allow the intermittent operation of ERL during peak periods. The effect of such arrangement was that the waiting time for passengers could be shortened by one minute during 75% of the time within the peak periods. However, for the remaining 25% of the time, the waiting time for passengers would be lengthened by one to two minutes as the WR service would be slightly affected by the ERL service. For non-peak periods, there would be ample time to slot in ERL trains. Therefore, impact of ERL on WR service would not be significant. Noting the Administration's reply, Mr TAM urged the Administration to review the train schedule of ERL, taking into account the demand for such cross-boundary service. At the same time, there was a need to assess in greater detail the impact of ERL on WR operation so as to minimize the inconvenience caused to WR passengers.

Provision of rail freight service

14. With a view to increasing the economic benefits of Option A, particularly after the proposed merger of MTRCL and KCRC, Mr Andrew CHENG suggested that ERL should provide for freight service in addition to passenger service. He remarked that the Mainland authority had put in place a number of initiatives to improve the accessibility of Yantian Port. As such, there was an urgent need for the Hong Kong Government to improve the competitiveness of Hong Kong port, otherwise Hong Kong would lag behind the Mainland in developing itself as a logistics hub. To this end, the proposed ERL should be extended to the Kwai Chung Container Terminal to facilitate cargo flow and logistics operations. He enquired if the Administration had given thoughts to the said provision. DSETW explained that the purpose of ERL was to provide a rail link which would ease passenger traffic between Hong Kong and the Mainland and as such, provisions for freight service had not been included. Besides, the Mainland section of ERL together with its rail links were all for passenger service. Furthermore, the proposed West Kowloon Station for ERL would not have sufficient spaces for the holding and handling of container freight. GMCPW/KCRC added that there were difficulties in providing both freight and passenger service on ERL because

Action

of the differing speed requirements. The provision of freight service would drag down the speed of passenger trains which were able to travel at a maximum speed of over 200 km per hour. The past discussions with the Mainland authorities on the provision of ERL were focused on passenger side as this was part of the national express passenger rail network. While general parcels could be delivered through ERL, the provision of freight service for containers had not been taken into consideration nor had it been discussed. At present, rail freight service could be provided via ER through LoWu. Any further development of rail freight service would have to be coordinated with the Mainland and the intended provision of rail connection between WR and the Kwai Chung Container Port had yet to materialize.

15. Mr LAU Kong-wah supported that opportunity should be taken to including freight service in ERL. Given the growth in container freight traffic and the development of rail connections at Shenzhen ports, Kwai Chung Container Port would lose its competitiveness in the absence of rail connections. He also enquired if consideration could be given to exploring the feasibility of developing ERL to provide both freight and passenger service. The Chairman also said that she was aware that when WR was in its conceptual stage in mid 1990s, there had been thoughts about using it to provide both passenger and freight service upon completion of NOL. She enquired if this original thinking had been abandoned, given the difficulties in the inclusion of freight service alongside passenger service, which would involve connective arrangements to the Kwai Chung Container Port and possible duplication of cargo handling procedures. DSETW said that although the provision of a Port Rail Line had been included in the Railway Development Strategy 2000, this was still at its planning stage and there was no implementation timetable. He further advised that the development of rail freight connections in association with the logistics trade would need to be worked out jointly with the Economic Development and Labour Bureau. GMCPW/KCRC said that KCRC was conscious of the need to improve freight services currently served by ER taking into account growth in Mainland rail traffic.

16. While expressing support for the provision of NOL, Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that the need for rail freight connection between the Mainland and Hong Kong would depend on the demand for cargo flow between the two sides. Given the importance of the logistics trade and the development of Hong Kong as a logistics centre, he said that opportunity should be taken to explore the feasibility of providing another rail freight connection using ERL to complement the freight services currently provided via Lowu and ER. As KCRC would need to be cautious about the spending of public money in the provision of rail, an assessment on passenger and freight demand on both sides, which should be made available for public scrutiny, should be made. DSETW advised that the passenger and freight demand were based on information exchange with the Mainland authorities and the economic projections by the Planning Department. The provision of a separate rail freight connection at ERL might duplicate the services provided in the region. In response to the Chairman, the Administration would provide more information on the estimates on passenger demand when the subject was next discussed by the Subcommittee.

Action

17. Mr LAU Kong-wah requested the Administration to provide more information on the latest development on NOL and ERL as this would facilitate members' scrutiny on the options to be adopted. The Chairman also said that members would have difficulties in digesting the information if they were not given enough time to go through them. Therefore, she hoped that information papers could be provided in advance of the meeting and tabling of papers should be avoided as far as possible. DSETW said that the Administration was scrutinizing the proposals made by KCRC and more information would be provided to members when a decision on the choice of options was reached.

V Any other business

18. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 5:46 pm.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
24 January 2006