

立法會
Legislative Council

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Panel on Transport

**Minutes of special meeting held on
Friday, 20 October 2006, at 8:30 am
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo (Chairman)
Hon CHEUNG Hok-ming, SBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, SBS, S.B.St.J., JP
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon Miriam LAU Kin-ye, GBS, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, SBS, JP
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
- Members absent** : Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon LEE Wing-tat
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
- Public Officers attending** : Dr Sarah LIAO
Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works
- Mr Joshua LAW
Permanent Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works
- Mr Philip YUNG
Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works
(Transport) 1

Miss Cathy CHU
Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works
(Transport) 2

Ms Annie CHOI
Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works
(Transport) 3

Mr Patrick HO
Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works
(Transport) 4

Mr Alan WONG
Commissioner for Transport

Mr CHEUNG Hing-wan
Director of Highways (Acting)

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

Staff in attendance : Ms Sarah YUEN
Senior Council Secretary (1)6

Mr Anthony CHU
Council Secretary (1)2

Miss Winnie CHENG
Legislative Assistant (1)5

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I Briefing by the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works on relevant policy initiatives in the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2006-07
(LC Paper No. CB(1)17/06-07(01) - Information paper provided by the Administration

- Address by the Chief Executive at the Legislative Council meeting on 11 October 2006 - "Proactive Pragmatic Always People First"; and
- The 2006-07 Policy Address - "Policy Agenda"

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At the invitation of the Chairman, the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (SETW) briefed members on the various new and on-going initiatives under the transport portfolio of the Environment, Transport and Works Bureau (ETWB).

Registration scheme for vehicle mechanics

2. Mr WONG Kwok-hing referred to the registration scheme for vehicle mechanics to be launched in early 2007, and expressed concern about the implications of the scheme on vehicle mechanics. He sought information on the number of vehicle mechanics who could not meet the registration requirements and measures taken/to be taken to safeguard the employment situation of the trade. In reply, the Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (Transport)³ (DS/T3) advised that the proposed scheme should not affect the employment situation of the trade as the scheme would only be a voluntary scheme. At present, there were about 10 000 mechanics in Hong Kong. It was expected that some 80% to 90% of vehicle mechanics would meet the registration requirements. The Administration would put in place measures to encourage registration, such as by waiving the necessary registration fees, issuing registration certificates for display and uploading the particulars of registered mechanics on the Internet to help boost the business of registered mechanics, etc. She further advised that the Administration had fully consulted the trade and the Panel on Transport on the voluntary registration scheme.

The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge

3. Ms Miriam LAU enquired about the progress of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB), particularly the relevant boundary crossing facilities (BCF) and the financing arrangements. In reply, SETW made the following points –

- (a) As HZMB would connect Hong Kong, Zhuhai and Macao, its alignment had to be agreed by the three governments concerned, or else the project could not be implemented. Since the alignment and landing points involved important interests of the three sides, in order to maintain impartiality in the decision-making process, the State Council had required that studies be conducted on 24 subjects and a detailed feasibility study in particular regarding BCF and financing arrangements be conducted before submitting the proposal to the Central Government for consideration.
- (b) On the BCF arrangement, the HZMB Advance Work Co-ordination Group (AWCG) had already agreed to adopt the mode of "separate locations of BCF" in the three places, and had commissioned the China Highway Planning and Design Institute to study the detailed arrangements for and possible locations of the BCF.

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- (c) As to the financing arrangements, they had yet to be ascertained by the relevant authorities, taking into account the finalized design of HZMB, the financial viability of the project and the Central Government's policy on financing arrangements for large-scale infrastructural projects.

4. Ms LI Fung-ying referred to the divergent views expressed by the three sides over the financing arrangements for HZMB and was concerned about the implementation programme of the project. SETW said that since the project was unprecedented and hence many unexpected problems had popped up, the timetable had to be adjusted time and again in response to new developments. However, with the establishment of AWCG by the governments of Hong Kong, Guangdong and Macao to expedite the project, the feasibility study for HZMB had already been substantially completed. After the relevant proposals had been agreed by AWCG, the study report would be finalized and submitted to the Central Government for consideration. Once approval was obtained, the design and construction work of HZMB could commence. It was hoped that a consensus view on the two remaining issues relating to BCF and financing arrangements could be reached as soon as possible by the three governments.

5. Ir Dr Raymond HO expressed concern about the delay in taking forward HZMB, and opined that planning for its connecting road links, notably the North Lantau Highway Connection, should start early. In response, SETW explained that whilst a concrete implementation timetable had yet to be drawn up, the Highways Department had already been actively making efforts to ensure that the planning and construction of HZMB's road links could start early. Such efforts would not be wasted because, in any event, there was a need to improve the road networks in North Lantau.

Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link

6. Ms Miriam LAU opined that, of the two options for the Hong Kong section of Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (ERL): building a dedicated rail track running from its West Kowloon Terminus to the boundary (the Dedicated Corridor Option), or using the existing West Rail (WR) rail track from ERL's West Kowloon Terminus up to the existing WR Kam Sheung Road Station, the rail track of the Northern Link (NOL) and a new rail track to make connection with the Mainland section of ERL (the Shared Corridor Option), the Dedicated Corridor Option should be pursued in consideration that ERL would form part of the national high-speed rail network. Noting that Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation was presently conducting the engineering/business study of NOL and ERL, she sought to ascertain if it was studying the Dedicated Corridor Option. In response, SETW pointed out that the travelling time saved for adopting the Dedicated Corridor Option was only 12 to 15 minutes. Indeed, both options had their own merits and demerits. If the Shared Corridor Option was adopted, construction of the Hong Kong section of ERL could be expedited.

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7. Mr CHEUNG Hok-ming and Ir Dr Raymond HO pointed out that the delivery of the Hong Kong section of ERL seemed to be lagging behind that of the Mainland section. In reply to them on the timetable of the Hong Kong section of ERL and measures to ensure smooth connection between the two sections, SETW assured members that every effort would be made to ensure smooth connection. She also explained that the Mainland side had started the construction work of the Shibi-Longhua section of ERL early mainly because train service from Guangzhou to Shenzhen had already reached saturation. As for the Hong Kong section, the Administration was giving further thoughts to the Shared and Dedicated Corridor Options. As the development of railways in the country was co-ordinated by the Ministry of Railways, the connection between the two sections had to be tallied with the national railway development strategy, having regard to the estimated passenger flow and technological development of the Mainland in high-speed rail network.

8. Ir Dr Raymond HO considered the Shared Corridor Option undesirable from a transport perspective. He also remarked that it was inappropriate to reject the Dedicated Corridor Option based on the ground that it was unsafe to provide a long railway tunnel. In response, SETW said that the Shared Corridor Option was a viable alternative, at least before direct through train services between Hong Kong and Mainland cities picked up significantly, as spare capacity was still available from the West Rail corridor to accommodate the ERL trains. She also confirmed that the Shared Corridor Option would not unduly affect the service of WR. It could also satisfy the need to provide express train service between Hong Kong and Guangzhou within an hour.

South Island Line and Shatin to Central Link

9. Mrs Selina CHOW enquired about the status of the South Island Line (SIL), highlighting local residents' long call for it and its importance to the development of tourism in the district. In response, the Permanent Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (Transport) PS/ETW(T) advised that the Administration was conducting a study on the impact of the proposed SIL on other public transport modes. There was also a need to ascertain the need and cost-effectiveness of the SIL project. The study was scheduled for completion by early 2007. The Chairman, however, pointed out that the need for the project, as he understood, had already been established. The remaining issue was how a viable financing arrangement could be worked out with the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL).

10. In this regard, Ir Dr Raymond HO opined that implementation of railway projects, particularly Shatin to Central Link, should not be delayed by the on-going discussion over the merger deal. He also questioned why there was still a need to conduct various studies. SETW said that as railway projects involved the use of public funds, there was a need to establish the feasibility and benefits of the projects, having regard to all relevant factors before a final decision on the alignment and financing could be made.

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The Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Corridor

Progress

11. Ms Miriam LAU expressed concern about the delay in finalizing the arrangements for the relevant BCF to prepare for the commissioning of the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Corridor (HK-SWC) in mid 2007, in particular the progress of the Hong Kong Port Areas Bill (the Co-location Bill) to apply the laws of Hong Kong to Hong Kong Port Areas in the Mainland and provide for related purposes, so as to implement the arrangement whereby Hong Kong could co-locate the customs and immigration facilities of the Mainland and Hong Kong in the Mainland (co-location arrangements). She enquired about actions Hong Kong could take to expedite the construction and financing of the remaining works of the Shenzhen section of HK-SWC as well as the relevant legislative process so as to effect early commissioning of HK-SWC. In response, SETW explained that cross-boundary projects were complex. While the Administration could ensure the timely provision of the hardware of the Hong Kong section of the project, there were many other technical and legal issues yet to be resolved, given the fact that this was the first time the co-location arrangement was proposed for implementation which involved introduction of new legislation on both sides. Although the relevant policy in respect of co-location had been agreed upon in 2000, new considerations arose during the process of its implementation and required discussion and approval by both governments as well as the Central Government. This explained why the co-location proposal could not be passed at the meeting of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in August 2006. It was expected that the co-location proposal would be discussed again at the coming meeting of the Standing Committee to be held in late October 2006. Once a decision in this regard had been made by the Standing Committee, the Co-location Bill would be submitted to the Legislative Council (LegCo).

Regulatory arrangements

12. While expressing confidence in the progress of HK-SWC, Mr Jeffrey LAM called for early decisions regarding the types of vehicles that were permitted to use the corridor, having regard to the objective of maximizing the utilization of HK-SWC for the benefits of road users. To ensure smooth implementation of the regulatory arrangements for cross-boundary vehicles, he also saw a need for the Administration to brief LegCo and the public on the proposed arrangements. In response, SETW explained that since the remaining works of the Shenzhen section had yet to be completed, the Administration could not finalize the arrangements yet. The Administration would make detailed announcements upon reaching an agreement with the Mainland authorities on the arrangements. Noting the progress, Mr LAM stressed the need to make earlier announcements so as to allow parties concerned to make the necessary preparation for applying quotas for use of HK-SWC.

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Traffic impacts

13. Mr CHEUNG Hok-ming expressed concern about the traffic impact of the commissioning of HK-SWC on the traffic flow in Northwest New Territories. In his view, apart from the short-term measures involving the widening of Yuen Long Highway and Tuen Mun Road (TMR), other longer-term measures should be mapped out to mitigate the traffic impact associated with the commissioning of SWC. In this regard, the construction of the Tuen Mun Western Bypass and the Tuen Mun-Chek Lap Kok Link might be feasible options. In reply to him on the progress of the relevant studies, PS/ETW(T) elaborated that four packages of highway projects had been proposed under the Northwest New Territories Traffic and Infrastructure Review (the Review) to meet the increasing traffic arising from the commissioning of HK-SWC. The Review concluded that the existing major infrastructure in Northwest New Territories, together with the road improvement measures implemented or planned, should be able to cope with the traffic demand in the region up to 2016, including the traffic so generated upon the commissioning of HK-SWC. Notwithstanding, the Administration had already allocated resources for the preparatory work for the possible highway packages such as site investigation work and further studies. The Administration would also keep the situation under close monitoring. Should there be a need to take forward any of the packages in future, the above preparatory work would enable the Administration to provide the supporting transport infrastructure to meet the development needs in a more efficient and timely manner. The Panel was assured that it would be consulted on the proposed package(s) therefore, and that the Tuen Mun Western Bypass would be one of the options examined.

14. Also concerned about the traffic impact of the commissioning of HK-SWC on Tuen Mun residents, Mrs Selina CHOW enquired about the timetable of the Administration's planned works to divert the traffic generated by HK-SWC away from the town centre section of TMR. In response, PS/ETW(T) reported that Tuen Mun District Council (TMDC) would be consulted in November 2006 on the planned works to upgrade the expressway section of TMR to the prevailing expressway standard as far as practicable and implement short to medium term measures to improve the traffic conditions of TMR, including widening of the section of TMR at Tsing Tin Interchange from dual 2-lane to dual 3-lane. Should approval of the projects be given early, the related works could be completed in five years' time.

15. Addressing Mrs Selina CHOW's concern that the above works could not be completed in time to tie in with the commissioning of HK-SWC, PS/ETW(T) assured members that TMR would not reach saturation until 2016. According to the present estimate, the expected number of additional vehicles that would use TMR after the commissioning of HK-SWC would be around 6 000. TMR however had a design capacity of 125 000 vehicles while at present its average daily traffic was only 100 000 vehicles. Notwithstanding the assurance, Mrs CHOW urged the Administration to note TMDC and Tuen Mun residents' claim that there was already congestion at the town centre session of TMR. She considered it unacceptable that solution to relieve the

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congestion would not be available until five years later.

Road safety

16. The Chairman expressed dissatisfaction about the lack of measures in the Policy Address to address the following problems to enhance road safety –

- (a) The traffic congestion problem, particularly at the Cross Harbour Tunnel, had adversely affected the resting time of bus drivers in-between each trip. Drivers without sufficient rest would be more prone to traffic accidents which would have serious safety implications on road users;
- (b) The need to enhance the safety of reversing vehicles by requiring drivers to take driving improvement courses or by requiring the installation of additional devices to assist reversing of vehicles; and
- (c) The need to require professional drivers to receive annual medical checks.

17. In response, SETW pointed out that both ETWB and the Transport Department had been making efforts to relieve the congestion problem and enhance road safety. For example, they were examining with the Road Safety Council measures to promote safe driving, such as organizing refresher training and skill upgrading courses, keeping in view technological developments that could assist reversing of vehicles, etc. As to measures to tackle the uneven distribution of traffic among various harbour crossings, the Administration was negotiating with the two tunnel operators concerned on possible traffic diversion plans to improve the situation within the context of the relevant franchises.

Measures to regulate traffic

Measures to relieve congestion

18. Mr WONG Kwok-hing queried the effectiveness of using fiscal means to reduce congestion along major transport corridors, pointing out that such measures had proved unsatisfactory in the case of Tai Lam Tunnel. In his view, measures other than road charging such as construction of new roads and widening works, restriction of use by date, by vehicle type and their registration numbers, etc. should be taken instead. In response, SETW explained that traffic regulation measures would be considered as a whole and all possible measures instead of only road charging would be explored. In fact, equitable and effective road charging schemes could only be implemented when alternative routes with adequate capacity for motorists to bypass the charging zone were available.

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19. The Chairman remarked that notwithstanding the repeated calls from members to address the uneven distribution of traffic among various road harbour crossings, there had been no progress on the matter, and hence, the community continued to pay a high price for that. In response, PS/ETW(T) explained that the operations and toll adjustment mechanisms for Build-Operate-Transfer tunnels were stipulated in the respective franchises and ordinances. As such, the Administration could not unilaterally amend the terms with a view to evening out the distribution of traffic among various tunnels. Notwithstanding, the Administration was presently exploring various options with the tunnel operators concerned, including a combination of franchise extension and toll reduction. In this regard, the Administration was also carrying out a number of sensitivity tests on various charging scenarios in the hope of working out a solution which would be acceptable to all relevant parties. While there was progress, a conclusion had yet to be arrived at.

20. Mrs Selina CHOW pointed out that solution to the congestion problem at the Cross Harbour Tunnel was long overdue, and urged the Administration to expedite the progress instead of conducting further tests. In response, SETW stressed the need to conduct professional assessments to identify whether financial or administrative means should be deployed to effectively divert the traffic flow at Cross Harbour Tunnel to the other two harbour crossings. Thereafter, there was a need to seek the two tunnel operators' agreement to the identified measures, in particular to the revenue calculation methods.

Bus route rationalization plans

21. Ms LI Fung-ying was concerned that the proposals the Administration had been working out with the franchised bus companies to re-structure and rationalize bus routes through route cancellation, amalgamation, truncation and frequency adjustment might affect the job security of bus drivers. In response to her request for details of the rationalization plans, the Commissioner for Transport made the following points –

- (a) The plans were implemented on an ongoing basis in response to changes in population distribution, travelling pattern and economic activities. There was also a need to reduce the number of bus trips on busy corridors so as to reduce roadside air pollution and traffic congestion. In this regard, bus-bus interchange schemes would be introduced.
- (b) The Administration recognized the needs of various local communities for point-to-point bus service, and would closely liaise with the relevant District Councils (DCs) to explain to them the need for the rationalization plans from a macro perspective taking into consideration the overall transport planning objective. Indeed, most of the rationalization plans only involved frequency adjustment or route amalgamation but not route cancellation.

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- (c) There were at present more than 5 800 buses on the road operated by over 10 000 bus drivers. The rationalization plans would involve only about 100 buses. It was believed that the plans would not adversely affect the job security of drivers. In case a particular route was cancelled, arrangements would be made to re-deploy the affected drivers to other routes which were introduced to cater for new services.

II Any other business

- 22. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 9:30 am.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
13 December 2006