

立法會
Legislative Council

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Panel on Transport

Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways

**Minutes of meeting on
Friday, 17 November 2006, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Hon Miriam LAU Kin-ye, GBS, JP (Chairman)
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, SBS, S.B.St.J., JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, SBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Hok-ming, SBS, JP
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
- Members absent** : Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon LEE Wing-tat
- Public Officers attending** : **Agenda item IV**
Miss Cathy CHU
Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Transport and
Works

Mrs Hedy CHU
Principal Assistant Secretary for the Environment,
Transport and Works

Miss Cindy LAW
Assistant Commissioner of Transport/
New Territories

Miss Alice AU-YEUNG
Principal Transport Officer/Bus and Railway
Transport Department

Attendance by invitation : **Agenda item IV**
Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation

Mr Y T LI
Senior Director, Transport

Mr W K TSUI
General Manager – West Rail Operations

Mr Raymond WONG
Senior Corporate Affairs Manager

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)262/06-07 - Minutes of meeting held on
24 October 2006)

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2006 were confirmed.

II Information papers issued since the last meeting

2. Members noted that no information paper had been issued since the last meeting.

Action

III Items for discussion at the next meeting scheduled for 5 January 2007

- (LC Paper No. CB(1)264/06-07(01) - List of outstanding items for discussion
LC Paper No. CB(1)264/06-07(02) - List of follow-up actions)

3. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next meeting scheduled for Friday, 5 January 2007, at 10:45 am –

- (a) Shatin to Central Link (SCL) - the item was proposed by Mr WONG Kwok-hing and supported by Mr LAU Kong-wah who were both concerned about the slippage in the planning and implementation of the project. They would like to be briefed on the latest position regarding the design, funding and implementation details of the project, without having to await the outcome of the discussion by the Bills Committee on Rail Merger Bill; and
- (b) Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (ERL) and Northern Link - the item was proposed by the Chairman who was concerned that despite the Subcommittee's preference for the "Dedicated Corridor Option" over the "Shared Corridor Option" for the Hong Kong section of ERL as indicated at the Subcommittee meeting on 21 April 2006, approval had been sought from the Executive Council for the adoption of the latter which would incur a much longer journey time.

IV Provision of Light Rail Transit services by Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation

- (LC Paper No. CB(1)264/06-07(03) - Information paper provided by the Administration)

4. The Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (DSETW) explained the Light Rail Transit (LRT) services provided by the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC) and its role in the North-west New Territories (NWNT) region by highlighting the salient points of the information paper.

5. Mr Y T LI, Senior Director, Transport, KCRC (SDT/KCRC) said that since the commissioning of the West Rail (WR) in 2003, the transport network in NWNT had been much enhanced. Many residents had since switched to use WR for inter-region travel between Tuen Mun, Yuen Long and Tin Shui Wai. As a result, the demand for long distance travel by LRT had dropped significantly while the demand for short distance travel internally within Tin Shui Wai and Tuen Mun had increased. By way of illustration, the daily average patronage of LRT between Tuen Mun and Yuen Long had reduced from 40 000 to 22 000, representing a decrease of 45%, while that between Tuen Mun and Tin Shui Wai had reduced from 35 000 to 13 000, representing a decrease of 64%.

Action

6. SDT/KCRC further said that following the commissioning of WR, LRT had acted as a feeder service for WR as LRT passengers could interchange for WR at Yuen Long, Tin Shui Wai, Siu Hong and Tuen Mun Stations. As a result, the daily average patronage of LRT and feeder buses had been increased to 474 000, representing an over 23% increase as compared to the patronage before the commissioning of WR. He said that, through effective deployment of resources, KCRC would keep under review the role of LRT in NWNT and its provision of feeder services to WR, taking into account the transport needs of passengers. KCRC would take into account the views of District Councils (DCs) and passengers in its planning for the provision of an efficient transport network.

Cancellation of LRT Route 761

7. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that while KCRC had indicated that it would take into account the views of passengers and DCs in its provision of transport services, he failed to see why they had not been consulted on the cancellation of LRT Route 761, amidst strong local objection. DSETW said that from the Administration's perspective, views of DCs and passengers should also be factors amongst others that should be taken into account by KCRC in its provision and re-organization of services. That was why KCRC had to attend meetings with DCs to gauge their views. Prior to the announcement on the cancellation of LRT Route 761, KCRC had conducted a passenger survey on the patronage of different LRT routes and the travelling patterns of passengers. It was found that the resources used in servicing the under-utilized Route 761 could be put to more effective use by Routes 705 and 706 whose services were in greater demand. As it was inevitable that views would differ among passengers, KCRC had to make a decision after balancing locals' views and the optimal use of resources. The Administration reckoned that KCRC would have room for improvements in its consultation with DCs and the locals in this episode. The Administration also encouraged KCRC to consider in greater detail the local feedback given subsequently. These triggered KCRC later on to adjust LRT services by extending Route 761P in non-peak hours to serve the five affected stops and increasing feeder bus services during peak hours to facilitate traveling to Yuen Long East. This indicated that KCRC was prepared to engage in communications with DCs and the locals. In fact, KCRC would need to report its revised provisions to the DCs concerned in November 2006. SDT/KCRC added that KCRC had been holding in-depth discussions with DCs on the development of LRT routes. It was found that with the cancellation of Route 761, the resources could be more effectively redeployed for use by Routes 705 and 706. The services of Route 761P would be strengthened through reducing the waiting time from seven to four and a half minutes' time. Following the objections received on the cancellation of Route 761, a number of meetings were held with DCs between August and October 2006 to allay their concerns. As a result, an agreement was reached that the extended Route 761P would be maintained for non-peak hours to serve the five affected stations following the cancellation of Route 761. A new feeder bus route K73P would be introduced for travel between Tin Shui Wai North to Yuen Long during peak hours. Through the above measures, affected passengers could then adjust to the changes led by the cancellation of Route 761.

Action

8. Noting that the new bus route K73P was not a part of KCRC's services, Mr CHEUNG Hok-ming expressed concern that the bus service was meant as a temporary relief measure and not a long term commitment on the part of KCRC. SDT/KCRC affirmed that KCRC had been hiring buses from private transport companies in its provision of bus route K73P. At the meeting to discuss bus rationalization plans in October 2006, it had been agreed that the provision of bus services in Tin Shui Wai North would be reviewed in consultation with DCs in three months' time.

9. Mr WONG Kwok-hing enquired if there were any plans for the re-organization of LRT routes and if so, the timeframe for such and whether there would be consultation with DCs. SDT/KCRC affirmed that while there would be consultation with DCs on any proposed re-organization of LRT routes, there were at present no plans on the part of KCRC to alter its LRT routes.

10. Mr WONG Kwok-hing pointed out that had there been proper consultation on the proposed cancellation of Route 761, residents would not have to resort to protesting on the rails. He hoped the Administration and KCRC would learn from this unpleasant experience and try to respect the views of DCs.

Performance of LRT

11. Mr CHEUNG Hok-ming said that members of the Democratic Alliance for Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB) had been closely monitoring the performance of LRT. Having been in service for over 10 years, it was found that the LRT trains were quite worn out and there had been requests from passengers for the replacement of trains. Members of DAB had urged for the early replacement of the associated facilities for LRT, such as railings and platform screen doors, but such had not been acceded to. Consideration should also be given to reducing the train fares for LRT. SDT/KCRC said that LRT service was first commissioned in September 1988. Based on information provided by suppliers, LRT train could have a serviceable life of about 40 years subject to mid-term refurbishment. A mid-term refurbishment plan had since been prepared by KCRC for LRT trains and it was expected that there would be much improvement to the train compartments and associated facilities upon completion of refurbishment. As for the train fares, SDT/KCRC said that the fares for LRT service were comparable to that of franchise buses and were considered reasonable. Since the commissioning of WR, LRT had been providing free feeder services for WR passengers. This would mean that about a third of the LRT service was free.

12. Noting that the route length of LRT had been extended by 57% to cater for the development of Yuen Long, Tuen Mun and Tin Shui Wai new towns, Mr WONG Kwok-hing enquired if there were sufficient LRT trains to meet the operating demand. SDT/KCRC said that in considering the provision of LRT services, KCRC would have regard to the changes in passenger demand as well as travelling patterns. Following the commissioning of WR, the demand for long distance travel, i.e, inter-region travel

Action

between Tin Shui Wai, Yuen Long and Tuen Mun by LRT had dropped significantly while the demand for short distance travel internally within Tin Shui Wai and Tuen Mun had increased. As 50% of LRT resources had been devoted to inter-regional services but such had only accounted for less than 10% of LRT's total patronage, there was a need to optimize resources to match changing passenger demands and travelling patterns. Based on statistics on the use of LRT service, the present fleet of 119 LRT trains should be able to meet passenger demand for the next few years.

13. Mr WONG Kwok-hing enquired whether there were plans to increase the number of LRT trains given the substantial increase in patronage following the commissioning of WR in 2003. SDT/KCRC said that KCRC had procured 20 LRT train cars in 1997. To increase the capacity for carrying passengers, adjustments had been made to the seating arrangements within train compartments to allow more room for standing. This had increased the capacity for carrying passengers by 15%. Resources would be suitably deployed to meet the changing demands of long and short distance travels. It was worth to note that while the highest patronage of LRT service was from 7:15 am to 7:45 am, most of the passengers were able to get on board the first available train and if not, the next available train during the peak period, with a waiting time of a few minutes. As the existing LRT service arrangements were considered acceptable and have met with passenger demand, there might not be a need to purchase more LRT trains in the near future. However, the situation would continue to be monitored and suitable redeployment of resources would be made to ensure the adequacy of services.

14. Mr WONG Kwok-hing enquired whether the Administration, in fulfilling its monitoring role on the performance of LRT, had requested KCRC to increase the number of LRT train cars with a view to improving its services. He also enquired if the Administration had any control over the deployment of LRT resources in meeting the changing demands of long and short distance travels. DSETW said that in its deployment of LRT resources, KCRC would have regard to the increase in passenger demand, changes in travelling patterns and cost effectiveness of the deployment. She said that over the years, KCRC had purchased additional train cars for the expansion of LRT services. It would also have to optimize its resources to better serve the public, taking into account the changing demands of long and short distance travels. In considering any changes to LRT routes, KCRC would need to consult the Transport Department which would in turn conduct an assessment on the impact of such changes on passengers. Further consultation would have to be held with DCs. The changes would be fine-tuned to minimize any inconvenience caused to the public.

15. The Chairman noted that with the commissioning of WR in 2003, LRT had since assumed a role as feeder for WR to complement its services. Since she was aware that LRT had all along been operating under a deficit, she enquired about the effect of the change of role on its financial situation and whether efforts would be made to maintain LRT services despite its loss given that it was complementing WR by enhancing the transport network. SDT/KCRC said that KCRC would not be assessing the financial viability of LRT on a stand alone basis but would do so from a much broader perspective of the NWNT transport network, which was served by LRT,

Action

WR and feeder buses, all of which were operating on a complementary basis. While the annual operating deficit for LRT services (less depreciation costs) would be around \$100 million, the financial position of LRT was complicated by the fact that it was offering free feeder services to passengers interchanging with WR since its commissioning. Therefore, there should be some virement of funds from WR to LRT to take account of the free feeder services provided. In any case, it was not envisaged that the operating deficit of LRT could be removed within the near future.

16. Ir Dr Raymond HO said that he was all along of the view that LRT's role should be that of a feeder for NWNT but it could not be expected to operate at a profit given its scale. Since plans were underway for a Rail Merger, it was high time that KCRC should prepare a long term development plan for LRT with a view to expanding its services and turning it into a profitable rail system. SDT/KCRC said that since the commissioning of LRT in 1988, KCRC had invested about \$1.3 billion in its systems and had conducted a number of improvement works including the elevation of part of the railway tracks costing over \$0.5 billion. It had since purchased 50 additional train cars. In considering further investments on LRT, KCRC would need to take into account the cost effectiveness and benefits to the transport network as a whole and to work out a long term development plan.

Admin 17. Mr Ronny TONG said that members would be interested to find out if LRT resources were effectively deployed and how such would impact on train fares. He requested and SDT/KCRC agreed that a set of basic information on LRT services should be provided to enable more effective monitoring by members.

18. Mr CHEUNG Hok-ming said that he was aware that some drivers had expressed grave dissatisfaction over the right of way being accorded to LRT trains. However, based on the outcome of passenger surveys, the provision of right of way to LRT, being a mass transport provider, was well supported. Given the apparent conflict between drivers and LRT passengers, he enquired whether studies had been made by the Administration on ways to resolve the issue. DSETW said that the issue of right of way had been repeatedly raised at DC meetings. The Transport Department had conducted a study on the subject and had accepted that the right of way should more appropriately be given to the much larger LRT trains as it would be more safe and efficient to do so, particularly during peak hours. However, some flexibility in the right of way was exercised during off-peak hours. As some LRT routes were operating on elevated tracks, this would help resolve the traffic problems associated with the right of way.

Impact of the commissioning of the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Corridor (SWC) on WR and LRT services

19. Mr Jeffrey LAM said that members of the Liberal Party were all along concerned about transport developments in Yuen Long and Tin Shui Wai. With the commissioning of SWC in about seven months' time, it was envisaged that the demand for WR would boost, and hence, a greater demand for the feeder services provided by LRT. He enquired whether the existing resources could be able to cope with the

Action

increased passenger demand arising from the commissioning of SWC and whether there would be any contingency measures to deal with the situation. The Assistant Commissioner for Transport (New Territories) said that the Administration would work with KCRC on the enhanced provision of transport services to cope with the anticipated increase in demand for WR and LRT services following the commissioning of SWC. DSETW said that Tuen Mun and Yuen Long residents wishing to make cross-boundary travel through SWC would need to make use of feeder services. The Administration would be reporting to the Panel on Transport in one to two months' time on the proposed transport arrangements to cope with the increased passenger demand arising from the commissioning of SWC. In the mean time, it would need to work out with the Mainland authorities on the cross-boundary arrangements. Appropriate train service adjustments such as enhancing the train headway for WR and LRT would be made to meet with the demand. SDT/KCRC said that KCRC had yet to assess the impact of the commissioning of SWC on WR and LRT services as it would need to await Government's assessment on the passenger demand before working on the contingency measures. He pointed out that since the present utilization rate of WR was only 40%, it would have no problem in absorbing an increase in passenger demand arising from the commissioning of SWC. As for LRT, it should also be able to cope with the increase through optimizing existing resources.

V Any other business

20. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 11:50 am.