

LEGCO PANEL ON WELFARE SERVICES

Consultancy Study for the Review of the *Design Manual: Barrier Free Access 1997*

Purpose

At the meeting on 13 November 2006, the LegCo Panel on Welfare Services passed a motion regarding the review of the *Design Manual: Barrier Free Access 1997*. The purpose of this paper is to inform Members on the Administration's responses to the motion.

Background

2. On 13 November 2006, the Administration reported to the LegCo Panel on Welfare Services the comments received during the 6-month public consultation on the final draft of the revised *Design Manual: Barrier Free Access 1997* (hereinafter called "the Design Manual") and the Administration's initial responses to the comments.

3. After discussion with the Administration, the LegCo Panel on Welfare Services passed the following motion, requesting the inclusion of 5 improvement measures in the Design Manual:

"That, with regard to the review of the *Design Manual: Barrier Free Access 1997*, this Panel requests the Government to include the following improvement measures:

- (a) the provision of tactile guide paths should not be limited to “large shopping complexes”; instead, they should be extended to all shopping complexes and such paths should also lead to escalators where audible devices are compulsorily installed;
- (b) the minimum illumination level for “corridors, accessible paths and staircases” of the buildings should be 85 lux;
- (c) the “entrance which is commonly used by the public” of the building concerned must satisfy the requirement that it is suitable for use by people with disabilities (PWD); the lift available for PWD must be a passenger lift, not a goods lift;
- (d) the clear space in toilets for PWD should be up to 1500mm x 1500mm and there should at least be one unisex toilet for PWD on each floor of the building concerned; and
- (e) automatic doors should be installed at the main entrance(s) and exit(s) of the building concerned.

The Administration is requested to take necessary action on the motion passed by the Panel.”

Administration’s Responses to the Motion

4. The Administration has carefully considered the feasibility of the proposed improvement measures, and conducted a series of consultations with the Steering Committee responsible for this review. The Committee comprises representatives from the Consultant, PWD, the building industry and relevant government departments. Our responses are as follows:

(a) Tactile guide paths and escalators in shopping complexes

- The Administration agrees to the suggestion of the Panel on Welfare Services, and will require **all** new shopping complexes to provide tactile guide paths (TGPs) leading from the main entrance to the accessible lift, the nearest accessible toilet and information counter.
- However, the Administration opines that TGPs should not lead to escalators.

The basic objective of providing TGPs is to lead visually impaired persons (VIPs) to their destinations safely; the use of escalators definitely involves a certain degree of risks. People with normal eyesight when using the escalator are required to observe safety rules.

We have also made reference to the information provided by the MTR Corporation, which shows that escalator-related accidents account for more than half of the accidents in the MTR system. From experience, it is very difficult for VIPs to react quickly to protect themselves when escalator-related accidents occur. Under such circumstances, not only the safety of the VIPs but also other users of the escalator would be jeopardized.

In fact, the provision of TGPs leading to escalators is not a mandatory requirement in the 5 overseas countries covered in this review. Therefore, for the safety of VIPs and other users, the Administration does not agree to make TGPs provision a mandatory requirement in the Design Manual.

- Concerning the proposed installation of audible devices for all escalators to help VIPs identify the location as well as the direction (i.e. “going-up” or “going-down”) of the escalators, according to the information provided by the Consultant, such installation is not a mandatory requirement in the 5 overseas countries studied.

In actual fact, there could be practical difficulties in providing audible devices for a pair (side by side) of escalators going in different directions, because it is hard for VIPs to distinguish between “going-up” and “going-down” of escalators simply with the aid of different audible signals produced simultaneously by a pair of escalators.

As Hong Kong is densely-populated with limited space, it is not uncommon to find two pairs of adjoining escalators in major shopping complexes with heavy pedestrian flow. This evidently will make it even harder for VIPs to identify the direction and location of the escalators.

Moreover, continuous audible signals produced by audible devices create nuisance to occupiers and shops near the escalators. Therefore, we propose to keep the installation of audible devices as a recommended practice in the Design Manual, so as to encourage the adoption of such devices by the industry under technically-feasible and nuisance-free circumstances in future.

(b) Minimum illumination level of 85 lux for corridors, accessible paths and staircases

- We note that the Conservancy Association wrote to the LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs expressing their concern about

the proposed upgrading of the illumination level in new housing estates to meet the demand of VIPs. While looking after the interests of VIPs, we should also protect the environment, in terms of energy conservation in this case, for the benefit of the whole community.

- The Administration agrees to the suggestion of the LegCo Panel on Welfare Services that for corridors, accessible paths and staircases, where they are reasonably expected to be used by the public or occupants of the building, an illumination level of 85 lux should be made available during the period of normal use or occupation. To strike a balance for the needs of VIPs and the need for energy conservation, either the use of automatic or manual switching devices is allowed to meet the required illumination level when necessary.

(c) Public entrance and passenger lift for PWD

- The Administration agrees to the suggestion of the LegCo Panel on Welfare Services. It has made clear in the Design Manual that the accessible entrance should be one which is commonly used by the public and PWD, and the lift available for PWD must be a passenger lift.

(d) Unisex toilet on each floor

- Under the current mandatory requirement, there should be at least one accessible toilet for PWD where toilets are provided on that floor of a non-domestic building.

To facilitate the use of toilets by PWD using bigger wheelchairs

(e.g. electric-wheelchairs), we agree to the suggestion of the LegCo Panel on Welfare Services that the clear space for accessible toilets shall not be less than 1500mm x 1500mm measured at 350mm above finished floor level.

(e) Automatic main entrance door

- Since more clear space is required for the opening of an automatic door, there are technical constraints for the installation of such a door at the main entrance of some buildings including domestic buildings.

Besides, there could be security concern if the door opens automatically in private domestic buildings. Thus, we propose that the mandatory provision of an automatic door at one of the main entrances commonly used by the public be applicable only to office buildings, shopping complexes, hospitals, hotels and stadia, as well as public recreational and cultural venues.

- For domestic buildings, it is expected that attendance or assistance will be provided by the caretakers or management staff at the main entrances. Noting the technical constraints and security concern, we consider it more appropriate to make the provision of automatic doors in these buildings a recommended practice rather than a mandatory requirement.

Briefing Session

5. To enhance the understanding of parties concerned on the new design requirements of the Design Manual, a briefing session was held on

27 February 2007 to explain the reasons for the proposed requirements set out in the draft Design Manual to the representatives of the building industry as well as PWD groups and to respond to their enquiries about the new requirements. The Chairmen and Members of both the LegCo Panel on Welfare Services and the Panel on Planning, Lands and Works were also invited to attend the briefing session.

Advice Sought

6. Members are invited to comment on the proposed improvement measures to be included in the Design Manual, which are set out in paragraph 4 of this paper.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Buildings Department

March 2007