

Legislative Council Panel on Transport

Road Access Restrictions on South Lantau Including Tung Chung Road

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the proposed traffic and transport arrangements for south Lantau, including Tung Chung Road (“TCR”), upon the completion of improvement works on TCR and invite Members to give comments.

Planning Principle for Lantau

2. South Lantau has always been designated as a conservation area. According to the Revised Concept Plan for the development of Lantau, the overall planning for the island is to focus major economic infrastructure and urban development on north Lantau to optimize the use of transport network and infrastructure, while the rest of Lantau should be preserved for recreational and visitor uses under the overall conservation objectives and the principle of environmental sustainability.

Existing Restrictions on Road Use

3. Since 1970s, roads on south Lantau are subject to a 24-hour restriction of road closure. Except those with the Lantau Closed Road Permit (“LCRP”), all motor vehicles are banned from the closed roads.

4. In view of the limited capacity of TCR with steep gradients at some sections, the TCR section between Shek Mun Kap Road and South Lantau Road is closed 24 hours a day and designated daily as a prohibited zone from 8am to 6pm. Except franchised buses, Lantau taxis and vehicles with the TCR Prohibited Zone Permit (“TCRPZP”), all motor vehicles are banned from the prohibited zone. Furthermore, goods vehicles weighing over 5.5 tonnes, except those with the TCRPZP, are banned from the above TCR section round-the-clock.

Improvement Works on Tung Chung Road

5. Improvement works on TCR commenced in mid 2004. Upon completion, TCR will be upgraded to a 7.3-metre wide two-lane road for two-way traffic with footpath alongside. The widening of the TCR section between Lung Tseng Tau and Pak Kung Au mostly along the original alignment was completed in mid March 2008. According to the Highways Department, the new TCR section between Pak Kung Au and Cheung Sha will be completed by mid 2008.

Proposed Traffic and Transport Arrangements

6. The capacity of TCR will increase upon completion of the improvement works. Relevant stakeholders including Legislative Council Members, District Council Members, green groups, residents and local groups have expressed to us their views on the traffic arrangements for south Lantau upon the works completion. Some of them indicate that the status quo should be maintained so as to protect the south Lantau conservation area; some prefer a phased relaxation of the current traffic control; and some advocate a total lift of the existing traffic control.

7. Taking into consideration various factors such as the planning principle of nature conservation and sustainable development, traffic demands, traffic conditions and parking facilities, we consider that TCR should be opened in a gradual manner. We propose the traffic and transport arrangements outlined below be implemented at the initial stage upon the completion of improvement works on TCR.

8. Upon the implementation of the new measures, we will monitor closely the impacts on road traffic and the environment as well as the change in the supply of and demand for public transport services. We will conduct a review in one year's time after the implementation of the measures.

(a) Opening TCR to Residents and Business Operators on South Lantau

9. Having regard to the planning principle of nature conservation and sustainable recreational development as well as traffic management, we consider that it is necessary to maintain the existing closed road and prohibited zone

arrangements on TCR and south Lantau at the present stage. However, to make it more convenient for the residents and business operators on south Lantau, we plan to relax the current restrictions to allow vehicles¹ of the residents and business operators² who hold the LCRP to use TCR 24 hours a day. Regarding the above arrangements, reviews will be conducted in due course in the light of actual road use and local development after the implementation of the relevant measures.

10. If vehicles of business operators are used for providing tour services, the proposed arrangements on access to south Lantau for coaches as stated in paragraph 15 should be followed.

(b) Proposed Arrangements for Taxi Services

11. The Administration will continue to encourage the public to use existing public transport services including franchised buses and Lantau taxis travelling to and from south Lantau. Special arrangements for these public transport services, such as service enhancement, will be made on public holidays as well as days of higher demand to meet passengers' needs.

12. At present, there are 50 Lantau taxis operating on the island. Some representatives of local residents and the taxi trade have suggested the opening of south Lantau to services of urban and New Territories ("NT") taxis. We propose to keep the arrangements for taxi services on Lantau unchanged at the present stage, taking into account the following:

- (i) south Lantau is a nature conservation area. Free access to south Lantau by urban and/or NT taxis may create problems in the traffic capacity and the sustainability of environmental conservation. Moreover, under the current legislation, south Lantau does not fall into the permitted operating area of NT taxis;
- (ii) apart from peak hours with more visitors, Lantau taxis generally meet

¹ The specifications of goods vehicles weighing over 5.5 tonnes and actual business needs will be assessed in considering whether a permit should be issued for access to south Lantau.

² In principle, every residential unit or business operator is issued with one Lantau Closed Road Permit only. We will consider issuing the Lantau Closed Road Permit and TCR Prohibited Zone Permit to vehicles supplying materials and offering services to residents and business operators on south Lantau according to the actual operational and business needs.

the demand of passengers efficiently; and

- (iii) the re-opening of Ngong Ping 360 and the measure of allowing 24-hour access to TCR by vehicles of holders of the LCRP can alleviate the demand of local residents for Lantau taxi services.

(c) Proposed Arrangements for Coaches

13. The traffic demand for access to south Lantau on weekdays differs substantially from that on public holidays. The Transport Department (“TD”) has approved the New Lantao Bus Company (1973) Limited (“NLB”) to operate franchised bus services by hiring coaches and provide six franchised bus routes operating in the form of group hire on public holidays and days of higher traffic demand. Such arrangements can on the one hand meet the traffic needs of passengers on public holidays and on the other hand reduce NLB’s maintenance expenses on fleets operating only on those days. Bus rental income will be entirely ploughed back to NLB’s account of franchised bus services to subsidize the operating loss of weekday services and increase the income of the overall network, so that sustainable franchised bus services can be provided for Lantau residents. Furthermore, allowing bus captains who are more familiar with the local environment to meet the traffic demands on public holidays will help manage the traffic to and from TCR and south Lantau and ensure safe and smooth road traffic.

14. Moreover, TD currently issues at its discretion a limited number of temporary permits to coaches for access to south Lantau on special occasions such as catering for the special needs of the elderly, young children, persons with disabilities and other groups.

15. To promote tourism and local economy, some resident representatives and local groups have suggested that the Government should allow access to south Lantau by more coaches. We agree to allowing an appropriate use of TCR by coaches to tie in with the development theme of tourism on south Lantau. Upon the completion of improvement works on TCR, we may consider setting a quota for coaches accessing south Lantau. In the light of the environmental consideration, road facilities, existing parking facilities and taking into account the need for sustainable development of the existing public transport services, we consider that the number of coaches allowed to access

south Lantau via TCR should be limited to 30 or below per day at the initial stage. The two options regarding coaches are as follows:

- (i) maintain the status quo (please refer to paras. 13 and 14 above); or
- (ii) restrict the number of coaches accessing south Lantau to 30 or below per day.

16. To sum up, we suggest that the following measures be implemented at the initial stage upon the completion of improvement works on TCR. We will monitor closely the impacts on road traffic and the environment as well as the change in the supply of and demand for public transport services. We will conduct a review on the measures in around one year's time:

- (i) allow 24-hour use of TCR by vehicles of south Lantau residents and business operators holding the LCRP;
- (ii) maintain the existing arrangements for public transport (including franchised buses and Lantau taxis) on south Lantau; and
- (iii) maintain the existing arrangements for coaches or restrict the number of coaches accessing south Lantau to 30 or below per day.

Consultation

17. Since early February, TD has been consulting the relevant stakeholders on the proposed arrangements, including the Islands District Council and its Traffic and Transport Committee, Hong Kong Tourism Board ("HKTB"), Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong ("TIC"), the transport trade and green groups. Their responses are summarized below.

Green groups

- Relevant green groups object to a full opening of TCR on the grounds that it might damage the environment of south Lantau.
- They generally support the round-the-clock use of TCR by vehicles of local residents and business operators but are worried that this measure may attract more people to move into south Lantau and more residents

to buy private cars for travelling. Some agricultural lands may be converted into residential lands or used for illegal parking which may obstruct emergency access.

- They agree to maintaining the existing public transport services but request for a detailed review and planning by the Administration to ensure sustainable development of these services.
- They raise no objection to the access to south Lantau by coaches but consider that the quota should be carefully set (such as limiting their number to 10 per day at the initial stage) so as to avoid affecting the operational efficiency of franchised buses.

Traffic and Transport Committee of Islands District Council

- The Committee agrees to allowing 24-hour use by vehicles of south Lantau residents and business operators holding the LCRP during the first six months after the completion of improvement works on TCR; maintain the existing public transport services; and restrict the number of coaches accessing south Lantau to 30 or below per day. The Committee has formed a task force to continue to follow up with TD on the implementation of the above three measures and the review thereafter.
- Moreover, the Committee considers that the Administration should conduct a review six months after the implementation of the new proposals and suggests a waiver³ for the fees of the LCRP as well as a relaxation of the speed limit on TCR.

Tourism Industry

- HKTB expects that the tourism industry will introduce new tour routes on south Lantau and suggests that the Administration should set up an appropriate mechanism to facilitate the application for access under the quota system and conduct a review six months after the implementation of such mechanism.

³ Except vehicles running only on Lantau.

- TIC supports restricting the number of coaches accessing south Lantau to 30 or below per day and suggests regular reviews of the quota.

Transport Industry

- NLB strongly objects to the proposal of allowing a limited number of coaches accessing south Lantau as this will adversely affect its franchised services operated in the form of group hire. This will thereby aggravate its operating loss and may add to the pressure for a fare hike or even render its business unviable.
- Lantau Taxi Association generally agrees to the proposed traffic and transport arrangements but requests that the speed limit on TCR be relaxed to 50 km/hr.

Advice Sought

18. Members are invited to comment on the above proposals.

Transport and Housing Bureau
Transport Department
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