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Mr Andy Lau
Clerk to Panel
Panel on Transport
Legislative Council Secretariat
[Fax: 2121 0420]

Dear Mr Lau,

Legislative Council Panel on Transport
Staffing proposal to enhance the overseeing of railway safety

At the meeting held on 23 November 2007 when the captioned item was discussed, a Member requested the Administration to provide information in relation to the regulation of railways and the Ngong Ping Cable Car. Our reply is set out as follows.

Railways

Inspectors of the Hong Kong Railway Inspectorate (“HKRI”) are empowered under the Mass Transit Railway Ordinance, Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation Ordinance and the Airport Authority (Automatic People Mover)(Safety) Regulation to regulate railway safety. The HKRI is currently headed by a Chief Engineer, supported by three Senior Engineers and three Engineers.

HKRI is empowered under the law to ensure railway safety. This includes approval of new railway projects or major modifications to existing railways during the design stage. Before such projects come into operation, HKRI will carry out inspection and monitor tests conducted by the railway corporation to ensure that the projects can operate safely before approving them for commencing service. If there are any incidents with safety implications, the railway corporation is required to notify HKRI in accordance with the law and the established mechanism. HKRI will investigate and follow up the incidents,

request the Corporation to provide information and to test/inspect the equipment concerned, and ensure that the Corporation adopts appropriate improvement measures to prevent recurrence.

Ngong Ping Cable Car

The safety of aerial ropeway systems (including the Ngong Ping Cable Car) is regulated by the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (“EMSD”) in accordance with the Aerial Ropeways (Safety) Ordinance. EMSD has a designated team responsible for the relevant regulatory work. The team is headed by a Senior Engineer and comprises an Engineer and an Assistant Inspector. They are responsible for the monitoring of the safe operation of the Ngong Ping Cable Car as well as the cable car system in the Ocean Park.

EMSD is empowered under the law to ensure the safety of cable car systems. This includes the approval of the design of aerial ropeways. EMSD will conduct inspections during the construction of the system to monitor the installation of safety-related devices. Before the cable car system can come into operation, the operator has to carry out a series of tests and trials to the satisfaction of EMSD in order to obtain the Department’s approval for commencement of operation. If there are any incidents with safety implications, the operator is required to notify EMSD in accordance with the law and established mechanism. EMSD will investigate the incidents and ensure that the operator has taken appropriate improvement measures to prevent recurrence.

As we have pointed out at the meeting of 23 November 2007, the monitoring of the Ngong Ping Cable Car is subject to a separate legislative framework and established mechanism. Since the Ngong Ping Cable Car is a tourist attraction and not a public transport mode, and because it is a cable car in nature, the relevant legislation as well as its design, operation and maintenance are different from those of the railways. At such, the monitoring of the two different systems of railways and the Ngong Ping Cable Car have to be undertaken by two different designated teams to ensure that these systems are regulated in the most effective manner.

Grateful if you would circulate our reply to Members for their information.

Yours sincerely,

(Mrs Hedy Chu)

for Secretary for Transport and Housing