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Panel on Transport

Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways

**Background Brief on
certain matters raised by the Bills Committee on Rail Merger Bill**

Introduction

In discussing the rail merger proposal at meetings of the Bills Committee on Rail Merger Bill (the Bills Committee) last year, members of the Bills Committee requested the Administration and the pre-merger railway corporations to follow up on, inter alia, the following matters and report to the Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways (the Subcommittee) in six months' time after the passage of the Rail Merger Bill –

- (a) enhancing in-train dissemination of information to passengers;
- (b) improving the air flow at platforms of non-enclosed stations; and
- (c) providing public toilets at railway stations.

2. The report from MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) on the above matters was circulated to members vide Annex 2 to LC Paper No. CB(1)545/07-08(01). At the meeting held on 11 January 2008, members considered it necessary to discuss the above matters, together with the feasibility study undertaken by MTRCL on the retrofitting of automatic platform gates at at-grade and aboveground stations.

3. This paper sets out the major concerns raised by members of the Bills Committee when discussing the above matters last year.

Enhancing in-train dissemination of information to passengers

4. The Bills Committee had requested the pre-merger MTRCL to consider providing radio reception service or upgrading its information dissemination system on board its trains so as to provide passengers with the latest news and information about railway incidents.

5. The Bills Committee noted the Administration's view that the pre-merger MTRCL had already installed a special broadcasting system to enable direct communication between train drivers and passengers. The frequencies for radio broadcast were different from those used for the existing railway broadcast system, and therefore the latter could not be used for receiving radio broadcast. The pre-merger MTRCL had estimated that the investment cost for provision of radio broadcast of seven commercial radio FM channels was about \$100 million. The key cost elements were the costs for the design and installation of transmission cables throughout the railway tunnels, and for the installation of antennae and other necessary equipment inside all railway stations.

6. Notwithstanding the above, the Bills Committee considered that there was room for improvement and urged the pre-merger MTRCL to examine further measures to enhance in-train dissemination of information to passengers.

Improving the air flow at platforms of non-enclosed stations

7. The Bills Committee had called on the pre-merger railway corporations to improve the air flow at platforms of non-enclosed railway stations with reference to overseas experience. In this respect, the Bills Committee noted the corporations' advice that electric fans and spot cooling systems were already installed at the platforms of some of the stations of the East Rail and at non-enclosed MTR stations. Notwithstanding, the Bills Committee had requested the pre-merger railway corporations to seek information on the provision of cooling facilities in the rail system in Malaysia, and consider other feasible measures with a view to further improving the waiting environment at non-enclosed stations in Hong Kong.

Providing public toilets at railway stations

8. The Bills Committee had requested the Administration and the pre-merger MTRCL to consider including relevant provisions in the integrated Operating Agreement to ensure the provision of public toilets at railway stations. Some members of the Bills Committee took the view that whilst the pre-merger MTRCL had placed considerable effort in improving and developing station commercial facilities to increase its profit, the Corporation was not willing to put in resources to resolve the technical difficulties associated with the provision of toilet facilities for public use. The Bills Committee passed a motion strongly urging the Government to instruct the pre-merger MTRCL to expeditiously formulate a policy on the provision of public toilets at railway stations, and to provide public toilets within the areas of the stations for the convenience of the public, including separate toilets specially for persons with disability.

9. In July 2007, the Administration issued a paper to the Subcommittee vide LC Paper No. CB(1)2058/06-07(02), setting out the technical difficulties of retrofitting public toilets inside stations. These include the low capacity of the station sewage system, proximity of high voltage equipment, the need for a separate ventilation system, and the spatial requirement for passenger flow.

10. In the light of the technical difficulties involved, the pre-merger MTRCL considered that retrofitting toilets in underground railway stations was not feasible. Instead, the Corporation advised that it would explore the feasibility of identifying appropriate locations for building public toilets on the street level in the vicinity of the underground stations. The feasibility of retrofitting toilets in or in the vicinity of existing above ground/at-grade stations would also be examined. Meanwhile, it would include the provision of public toilet within, or adjacent to, stations in the overall design parameters for future new railway lines and extensions.

Retrofitting of platform screen doors (PSDs) and automatic platform gates (APGs)

11. The Bills Committee had considered the difficulties associated with the retrofitting of platform screen doors (PSDs) and automatic platform gates (APGs) at existing railway stations. The Bills Committee noted that the pre-merger MTRCL had undertaken to complete a feasibility study on the retrofitting of APGs at the eight at-grade or above ground pre-merger MTR stations by end of 2007. The Bills Committee was also informed that for the East Rail line, mechanical gap fillers had to be installed before retrofitting of APGs could be considered.

12. The related matters were also followed up by the Subcommittee. At its meeting held on 4 May 2007, the Subcommittee passed a motion requesting the pre-merger MTRCL and KCRC to complete the installation of PSDs and/or APGs at railway stations in 2012 and 2013 respectively. A background brief on the subject matter was circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(1)1448/06-07.