

PART 2: IMPROVEMENT MEASURES ON UTILISATION OF FOOTBRIDGES AND SUBWAYS

2.1 This PART examines the measures taken to improve the utilisation of footbridges and subways since the 2007 audit review.

2007 audit review

2.2 In the 2007 audit review (see para. 1.15), Audit identified 8 footbridges (Footbridges A to H) and 3 subways (Subways X to Z) with low utilisation. Audit recommended that the TD should conduct a review to identify footbridges and subways with low utilisation and ascertain the underlying reasons, and regularly monitor their utilisation. The TD agreed with the audit recommendations and said that, in view of the fairly large number of facilities, it would conduct the review in stages. It would initially focus on the facilities with very low utilisation, and extend the work depending on resources.

Review of footbridges and subways with low utilisation

2.3 The TD commenced the first stage of the review in December 2007. In June 2008, the TD identified 22 footbridges and 17 subways with low utilisation (including the 8 footbridges and 3 subways identified in the 2007 audit review) for detailed examination. In reviewing the 22 footbridges and 17 subways, the TD:

- (a) conducted site visits and field observations;
- (b) conducted surveys of pedestrian and vehicular flows, including those at nearby at-grade crossing facilities; and
- (c) collected information on construction cost and annual recurrent costs of the footbridges and subways, accident statistics, and future development in the vicinity of the facilities.

2.4 In March 2009, the TD completed the first stage of the review and compiled a draft report for consideration by the Transport and Housing Bureau (THB). In January 2010, the TD compiled a final report (hereinafter referred to as the 2010 Review Report) which was endorsed by the THB.

2.5 According to the 2010 Review Report, pedestrians generally preferred at-grade crossings because they were more direct and convenient, without the need to go up and down stairs/ramps of footbridges and subways. The report identified the following reasons for low utilisation of the 22 footbridges and 17 subways:

- (a) the presence of at-grade crossings (with or without signal controls) nearby, though some of the at-grade crossings were provided afterwards at the requests of the local residents or organisations for the disabled;
- (b) the lack of facilities, such as ramps, lifts and escalators, to serve the aged and the disabled;
- (c) low road crossing demand on one or both ends of some facilities either due to low development density or delay in the completion of developments or population intake;
- (d) location of some facilities not along the popular or shortest routes, involving detour along the staircases or ramps;
- (e) pedestrian concerns over security or presence of street sleepers; and
- (f) exceptional height of a particular footbridge (more than 10 metres above ground due to connection to upper floors of adjoining development) requiring considerable effort to use.

Actions to deal with footbridges and subways with low utilisation

2.6 The 2010 Review Report mentioned that improvement works had been/would be implemented at four footbridges and one subway to promote pedestrian usage, including the following:

- (a) erecting directional signs to guide pedestrians to use the footbridge;
- (b) relocating railings and traffic signs to widen a footpath leading to Footbridge G (see para. 2.2) in Kowloon Tong; and
- (c) erecting railings to deter jaywalking.

2.7 In addition to the above improvement works, the following actions were proposed in the 2010 Review Report:

- (a) a subway across Tsuen King Circuit should be closed because of extremely low patronage;
- (b) 14 footbridges and 5 subways should be monitored as it was expected that there would be developments which might lead to increase in pedestrian flow in the near future;
- (c) no further action was required for the remaining 19 footbridges and subways for which there were no known developments in their vicinity; and
- (d) the HyD should inform the TD in advance of any proposed major maintenance works or upgrading works on the 22 footbridges and 17 subways in future, and review jointly on a case-by-case basis whether the proposed works should proceed (Note 3).

Audit observations and recommendations

Need to implement improvement works and follow-up actions

2.8 In March 2009, the TD completed the first stage of the review of footbridges and subways with low utilisation and compiled a draft report with proposed improvement works and follow-up actions (see paras. 2.6 and 2.7). In January 2010, the TD compiled the 2010 Review Report which was endorsed by the THB. **Audit considers that there is a need to take early action to implement the improvement works and follow-up actions proposed in the 2010 Review Report.**

Need to draw up a programme for reviewing utilisation of footbridges and subways

2.9 As at December 2009, the HyD was maintaining 717 footbridges and 435 subways. In the 2010 Review Report, the TD identified 22 footbridges and 17 subways with low utilisation based on the working knowledge of TD staff responsible for managing the facilities. **While the TD had said that it would conduct the review of footbridges and subways in stages (see para. 2.2), Audit noted that the TD had not compiled any action plans for conducting the review on a systematic basis.**

Note 3: *In February 2010, in response to Audit's enquiry, the HyD said that it had adopted the practice of informing the TD in advance of any proposed major maintenance works or upgrading works on the 22 footbridges and 17 subways, and reviewing jointly with the TD on a case-by-case basis whether the proposed works should proceed.*

2.10 With a view to identifying other footbridges and subways with low utilisation which may require detailed examination and follow-up actions, Audit carried out the following audit work:

- (a) reviewing media reports;
- (b) reviewing committee meeting minutes of District Councils;
- (c) conducting research on maps and the Internet;
- (d) examining records of the TD and the HyD; and
- (e) conducting site visits to selected footbridges and subways with indications of low utilisation.

2.11 From the above audit work, Audit found 7 footbridges and 2 subways (not covered by the TD's review) with low utilisation that might warrant detailed examination and monitoring (see Appendix A). **Audit considers that there is a need for the TD to draw up a programme with a timetable to examine the utilisation of footbridges and subways on a systematic basis, and to identify improvement measures for those with low utilisation.**

Need to identify measures for better planning of pedestrian crossing facilities

2.12 The presence of nearby at-grade crossings is the major reason affecting the utilisation of footbridges and subways. Audit noted that there was an at-grade crossing (Note 4) in the vicinity of each of the 7 footbridges and 2 subways identified by Audit (see para. 2.11) as having low utilisation. Most pedestrians crossed the road by using the at-grade crossings. Photographs 1 to 4 show four such footbridges (see Items 1 to 4 in Appendix A).

Note 4: *For Item 9 in Appendix A, the alternative at-grade crossing was located inside the adjacent Nam Cheong Station of the Mass Transit Railway West Rail Line.*

Photograph 1

Footbridge at the junction of Hoi Fan Road and Hoi Fai Road in Tai Kok Tsui



Source: Photograph taken by Audit in November 2009

Photograph 2

Footbridge across Tai Wo Hau Road near Hing Fong Road in Kwai Chung



Source: Photograph taken by Audit in December 2009

Photograph 3

Footbridge across Chung Mei Road near Sheung Ko Tan Street in Tsing Yi



Source: Photograph taken by Audit in December 2009

Photograph 4

Footbridge across Wang Chiu Road near Kai Yip Estate in Kowloon Bay



Source: Photograph taken by Audit in November 2009

2.13 In the 2010 Review Report, the TD also identified the presence of nearby at-grade crossings as one of the major reasons leading to the low utilisation of footbridges and subways (see para. 2.5(a)). The TD found that, in some cases, at-grade crossings were provided after the construction of the footbridges and subways. **However, the TD's review did not examine the underlying reasons for constructing the footbridges and subways, or for not providing the at-grade crossings in the first place. Audit considers that there is a need to examine the underlying reasons for this problem with a view to identifying measures for better planning of pedestrian crossing facilities in future.**

Audit recommendations

- 2.14 **Audit has recommended that the Commissioner for Transport should:**
- (a) **take early action to implement the improvement works and follow-up actions proposed in the 2010 Review Report (see para. 2.8);**
 - (b) **draw up a programme with a timetable to examine the utilisation of footbridges and subways on a systematic basis, and to identify improvement measures for those with low utilisation (see para. 2.11); and**
 - (c) **in the review of footbridges and subways with low utilisation in future, examine the underlying reasons for the existence of a footbridge/subway and an at-grade crossing in close proximity, with a view to identifying measures for better planning of pedestrian crossing facilities (see para. 2.13).**

Response from the Administration

2.15 The Commissioner for Transport accepts the audit recommendations. He has said that:

- (a) the TD will take early action to implement the proposed improvement works and follow-up actions. However, some proposed improvement works will require detailed discussion with the relevant departments, followed by consultation with the relevant District Council and local community before a final decision could be made;
- (b) while the TD considers that review of under-utilised facilities is an ongoing and continuing exercise, the TD will draw up a programme to examine the facilities having regard to the availability of resources; and
- (c) examination of the underlying reasons for the existence of a footbridge/subway and an at-grade crossing in close proximity, and identification of measures for the better planning of pedestrian crossing facilities, are an ongoing exercise which will continue to be conducted in future.