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**Report of the Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways  
for submission to the Panel on Transport**

**Purpose**

This report gives an account of the work of the Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways ("the Subcommittee") during the 2013-2014 legislative session.

**The Subcommittee**

2. The Panel on Transport ("the Panel") agreed at its meeting on 10 October 2013 that the Subcommittee should continue its work in the 2013-2014 session to facilitate more focused discussion on matters relating to railways. The terms of reference and membership list of the Subcommittee are at **Appendices I and II** respectively.

3. Under the chairmanship of Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun, the Subcommittee has held eight meetings (up to late-June 2014) with the Administration and the MTR Corporation Limited ("MTRCL").

**Major work**

4. In the current session, the Subcommittee has followed up on various issues relating to the planning and implementation of new railway projects, as well as the operation of existing railways including the service performance and safety management; maintenance programme;

and train service disruptions and arrangements for emergency situations. The discussions of the Subcommittee with the Administration and MTRCL are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

#### **A. Implementation of new railway projects**

##### Hong Kong section ("HKS") of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link ("XRL")

5. The Subcommittee has been monitoring closely the implementation of HKS of XRL, which is an express rail of a total length of about 140 kilometres linking up Hong Kong with Guangzhou via Futian and Longhua in Shenzhen and Humen in Dongguan. HKS will be a 26-kilometre long underground rail corridor from the boundary at Huanggang to the West Kowloon Terminus ("WKT").

6. Following the Finance Committee's approval of the funding applications for implementation of the railway and non-railway works of HKS of XRL on 16 January 2010, the construction works commenced in end January 2010 for completion in 2015. The Administration has been providing half-yearly progress reports to the Subcommittee for information in respect of the construction progress and financial situation of XRL project.

7. At the meeting on 22 November 2013, the Subcommittee was briefed by the Administration and MTRCL about the 7<sup>th</sup> half-yearly report for the period ending 30 June 2013. Members expressed concern over the progress of the construction works of HKS of XRL, including the impact of labour shortage on works progress, testing of the signalling system, the tendering process and contract awarding system, and arrangement to co-locate immigration and customs facilities for both the Mainland and Hong Kong authorities at WKT of XRL. The Administration however advised that the construction works of HKS of XRL were expected to be completed in 2015 as scheduled. After that, it was estimated that it would take several months' time for MTRCL to conduct various tests and trial run for railway operation and seek approval from the relevant departments, such as the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department before commissioning of HKS of XRL.

8. In mid-April 2014, the Subcommittee had grave concern over the announcement by MTRCL that it would be impossible to complete the construction of HKS of XRL by the original target of 2015. The Subcommittee thus conducted a visit on 28 April 2014 to the construction site of WKT of HKS of XRL to better understand the latest progress of the works, and held two meetings on 5 May and 19 May 2014 to review the circumstances leading to the present situation.

9. At the above two meetings, the Subcommittee pressed questions on whether MTRCL and public officers had deliberately concealed the facts and provided false information to the Legislative Council, and enquired about the revised target completion date, any possible claims from contractors and increase in the approved project sum. MTRCL informed the Subcommittee that based on the latest assessment of the progress of the works, the completion date of the construction of HKS of XRL would be postponed to 2016, and with the time required for testing and trial runs to ensure safe operations, the opening of the line for service would be in 2017. MTRCL explained that the causes for the delay of XRL project included the inclement weather and difficult geological conditions. Besides, an Independent Board Committee was set up to review the managerial approach of XRL project comprehensively. The Administration also advised that an Independent Expert Panel ("IEP") would be set up to review the project management, monitoring mechanism and other matters relating to XRL project delay. IEP was expected to commence work in June 2014 for completion before the end of November 2014. The Subcommittee noted that IEP would submit the report to the Chief Executive and the report would be made public. IEP would identify any systemic and any other problems involved in XRL project implementation and supervision.

10. During the meetings, some members suggested that a select committee be formed to enquire into the causes of delay in the construction of HKS of XRL and that in the performance of its duties the committee be authorized under section 9(2) of the Legislative Council (Powers and Privileges) Ordinance (Cap. 382) to exercise the powers conferred by section 9(1) of that Ordinance. It was also suggested that the select committee to be formed should look into how the supervision of new railway projects be effectively carried out in future and how to enhance the governance of MTRCL. At the meeting of 19 May 2014,

two motions were moved to these aims. They were however negatived.

West Island Line ("WIL"), South Island Line (East) ("SIL(E)") and Kwun Tong Line Extension ("KTE")

11. WIL is a three-kilometre long railway extension of the existing Island Line from Sheung Wan Station to Kennedy Town with two intermediate underground stations at Sai Ying Pun and the University of Hong Kong. Whereas, SIL(E) is a new railway corridor from South to North of Hong Kong Island. It starts from South Horizons on Ap Lei Chau to Admiralty via Lei Tung, Wong Chuk Hang and Ocean Park. The overall length is about seven kilometres. KTE is a 2.6-kilometre long railway extension of the existing MTR Kwun Tong Line from Yau Ma Tei Station to the new Ho Man Tin Station and Whampoa Station.

12. At the meeting on 17 June 2014, the Subcommittee noted that WIL, SIL(E) and KTE were experiencing different difficulties during the construction stage. As regards WIL, MTRCL still maintained the target of opening the entire WIL in December 2014. However, as a prudent measure, and in the event that the Sai Ying Pun Station could not be opened in time, MTRCL would put in place a back-up plan to open WIL in December 2014 with trains not stopping at Sai Ying Pun Station. Under this scenario, the opening of Sai Ying Pun Station would follow in the first quarter of 2015. An announcement would be made later in 2014 to confirm the exact WIL opening date and whether the back-up plan would be necessary.

13. Apart from WIL, the Subcommittee members were also briefed that the overall works of SIL(E) and KTE projects were not as far advanced as they should have been because construction programmes had been affected by the complexity of the construction methods required, tight space constraints in the highly-developed areas and the importance of maintaining safety for nearby communities and construction staff on site. According to MTRCL, both SIL(E) and KTE projects were about six months behind schedule as of June 2014, and that the original target of opening SIL(E) and KTE in 2015 could not be achieved. Another progress update would be provided at the end of 2014 when more certainty on the timeframes for the opening arrangements of the two new railway lines should be available.

14. Like XRL project, the Subcommittee members expressed grave concern about the delay of WIL, SIL(E) and KTE as well as the possible increase in project costs. Besides, members showed worries about supervision and management of those railway projects, and questioned how the Administration monitored MTRCL in the implementation of the new railway lines and whether MTRCL overestimated their capability in managing so many projects simultaneously. Furthermore, the Subcommittee urged the Administration as the majority shareholder of MTRCL to review the mechanism for railway project supervision and to closely monitor the progress of the construction of the railway lines, regardless of whether the "ownership" approach or the "concession" approach was adopted for the respective railway project. The Administration agreed to review the supervision mechanism for the future railway projects.

#### Construction safety in railway projects

15. In January 2014, the Administration briefed the Subcommittee on construction safety in railway projects. Members noted that the Administration attached great importance to construction safety and had requested MTRCL and their contractors to promptly investigate and follow up the serious incidents to prevent recurrence of similar incidents. MTRCL advised the Subcommittee the causes of a few fatal incidents and that safety enhancement measures such as launching of "Don't Walk by" Campaign and "Hands Off" Campaign were implemented after the incidents. Besides, MTRCL had been conducting trials of the electronic devices at the rear of some large machines to enhance workers' safety.

16. In response to members' concern over the insurance coverage of workers, MTRCL advised that all workers who worked in the construction sites of railway projects for eight days or more in the previous 30 days would be covered by the Workers' Life Insurance Scheme taken out by MTRCL since 2012, regardless of the cause of death, in addition to the statutory employees compensation.

#### MTRCL's community liaison work associated with the railway projects

17. On 3 January 2014, the Administration briefed members on MTRCL's community liaison work associated with the railway projects.

Members expressed various concerns including the attendance of representatives of MTRCL at individual District Council's relevant transport committee; commuters' degree of comfort during the ride on MTR trains; decision of not to provide a barrier-free access facility connecting Tai Pak Terrace under WIL project and the complicated compensation mechanism for owners of buildings affected by the construction works of the new railway lines to follow for possible claim.

18. The Subcommittee noted that MTRCL had tried to enhance train frequency to satisfy the demand of passengers, in particular during peak hours. They would further study various means to improve passengers' comfort level on train by enhancing train service, having regard to the limit of the current signalling system.

19. As regards the residents' concern about ventilation shaft of WIL and other lines, MTRCL explained that similar concern was raised in the development of other railway projects like SIL(E) and they had addressed the community's misconception about the air quality and noise impact arising from ventilation shaft by explaining to the residents the operation of ventilation shafts and conducting site visits to other ventilation shafts of existing railway lines.

## **B. Operation of existing railways**

### Railway safety

#### *Retrofitting of automatic platform gates ("APGs") along the East Rail Line ("ERL") and Ma On Shan Line ("MOSL")*

20. The Administration and MTRCL briefed members on the latest progress of the retrofitting of APGs along ERL and MOSL and relevant financial arrangements on 22 November 2013. The Subcommittee noted that to carry out retrofitting of APGs along ERL platform, strengthening works had already taken place at the Racecourse Station during the summer break of horse racing in 2013. It was estimated that the retrofitting of APGs along all ERL stations would be completed by 2020. In addition, MTRCL also briefed members that modification works on MOSL had commenced in 2012 and were in good progress. It was expected that the works would be completed in 2017 to tie in with the

commencement of the Shatin to Central Link ("SCL") (Tai Wai to Hung Hom Section) in 2018.

21. Also, members noted that MTRCL would absorb the construction costs of retrofitting APGs along ERL through internal resources allocation. Among which the costs of stations and platforms strengthening would be approximately \$800 million, whereas the cost of retrofitting APGs on MOSL was approximately \$400 million. Half of which would be borne by the overall works of SCL, while the other half would be borne by MTRCL. According to MTRCL, passengers did not have to pay extra costs for the above retrofitting works.

22. Members at the meeting urged MTRCL to expedite retrofitting of APGs along ERL and MOSL and implement measures to enhance platform safety before the completion of APG retrofitting works of ERL in 2020. On 10 January 2014, the Subcommittee conducted a site visit to MTR Shatin Freight Yard and Racecourse Station to understand the works progress of retrofitting of APGs at ERL stations and expressed appreciation of the noise abatement measures undertaken by MTRCL in the project.

#### *Rail inspection regime of MTRCL*

23. The Subcommittee received a briefing by MTRCL on 3 January 2014 on its rail inspection. It was noted that regular inspections including ultrasonic rail testing, visual inspection and dye penetrant testing were conducted as part of the routine maintenance regime. To enhance the work efficiency of inspection and maintenance of rails in the MTR network, MTRCL commissioned an advanced Ultrasonic Testing Vehicle ("UTV") for service in January 2013. The advanced UTV provided higher sensitivity, enhanced signal analysis functions and faster testing speed to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the ultrasonic testing of rails.

24. The Subcommittee expressed concern about whether the introduction of the advanced UTV would streamline the manpower arrangement for visual inspections and hand-held ultrasonic testing. Some members were also concerned about the criteria adopted by MTRCL in determining the use of outsourced services, and that

outsourcing of the maintenance services might have adversely affected the quality of its maintenance.

### Railway incidents

25. At the meetings on 20 December 2013 and 28 February 2014, the Administration and MTRCL briefed the Subcommittee on the service suspension on the Tseung Kwan O Line and part of the Kwun Tong Line for nearly five hours on 16 December 2013. According to MTRCL, it was found that a broken fastening wire in an overhead line support bracket near Tiu Keng Leng Station caused the train service suspension. MTRCL informed members that the breakage was due to improper installation of the overhead line support bracket during construction.

26. On 28 February 2014, MTRCL also reported to the Subcommittee that ERL incidents on 9 February and 18 February 2014 as well as the Light Rail incidents on 17 December 2013 and 22 January 2014 had been caused by faulty overhead line insulators. MTRCL's investigations into the incidents concluded that there were quality issues with the insulators that caused the above service disruptions on ERL and the Light Rail. MTRCL had since replaced all insulators that arrived in the same batch as the faulty one causing the Light Rail incident on 22 January 2014. Members also noted that MTRCL would take other remedial measures, such as follow up with the manufacturer on the quality issue of the insulators in question, to ensure that the insulators for all railway lines were of quality.

27. During the discussions at the meetings on 20 December 2013 and 28 February 2014, the Subcommittee discussed MTRCL's incident handling and members were gravely concerned about the contingency measures taken during the incident. In particular, members expressed dissatisfaction with the confusion in the dissemination of information to passengers, say the train service available and emergency bus arrangements. At the meeting on 20 December 2013, members passed two motions urging MTRCL to review or cease the outsourcing arrangements so as to improve the maintenance quality and avoid recurrence of the similar incident. Besides, in view of the frequency of service disruptions, members passed a motion, urging the Administration to consider expanding the scope of penalty imposed on MTRCL by



including deductions of the remunerations and bonuses of its directors, as well as setting out the timetable for implementation of the said deductions.

### Capacity and loading of MTR trains

28. At the meeting on 28 February 2014, the Subcommittee requested the Administration and MTRCL to brief members on the capacity and loading of MTR trains. The Subcommittee in general found the current loading of most railway lines unacceptable, in particular for the Tseung Kwan O Line, ERL, West Rail Line and Tsuen Wan Line, during peak hours of the day.

29. The Subcommittee urged MTRCL to set a time frame and implement measures, say the early-bird scheme, as soon as practicable to enhance carrying capacity in view of the very crowded train compartments during rush hours. Some members expressed reservation about the removal of some seats in train compartments to increase carrying capacity as it would adversely affect the comfort and the travelling experience for passengers. In addition, realizing the problem of crowdedness in train compartments, the Subcommittee urged the Administration to review the existing transport policy of using railways as the backbone of the public transport system in Hong Kong, complemented by other public transport modes.

30. According to MTRCL, all train compartments of the existing MTR railway lines were designed based on the industry standard design adopted at the time of the construction of railway lines, and the maximum carrying capacity of train compartments was calculated based on the standard of accommodating up to six persons (standing) per square metre ("ppsm") on average. In today's railway operation, however, the actual carrying capacity was less than the original design capacity due to several factors, such as the change in passenger riding habits. For instance, there is an increasing number of passengers reading newspapers or using smart phones and thus requiring more personal space on the trains. MTRCL assured members that the service level of the four new railway lines, namely WIL, SIL(E), KTE and SCL, was pitched at four ppsm service benchmark during design stage.

31. MTRCL announced in May 2014 that the "Early Bird Discount Promotion" Trial Programme would be launched during the period from 1 September 2014 to 31 May 2015.

### **C. Planning of new railway projects**

#### Public consultation on the review and update of the Railway Development Strategy ("RDS") 2000

32. The Administration commissioned a consultant in March 2011 to conduct a study for the review and update of RDS 2000, with a view to updating the long-term railway development blueprint for Hong Kong's future. The Administration's target was to update RDS to meet the transport needs up to year 2031. The Administration conducted the Stage 1 Public Engagement Exercise from April to July 2012 which featured conceptual schemes of *three major regional railway corridors*, namely the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Express Line, Northern Link and Coastal Railway between Tuen Mun and Tsuen Wan, for public discussion. Also, the Administration conducted the Stage 2 Public Engagement Exercise from 21 February to 20 May 2013 with a view to gathering public opinion on the *seven local enhancement schemes* for existing railway lines. The seven schemes included the North Island Line, Siu Sai Wan Line, South Island Line (West), Tuen Mun South Extension, Hung Shui Kiu Station, Tung Chung West Extension and Kwu Tung Station.

33. In March 2013, the Administration advised the Subcommittee that upon completion of the Stage 2 Public Engagement Exercise in May 2013, the consultant would collate the views of public collected at both Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the exercise and that the entire RDS study would be completed in 2013. The Administration would then consider the consultant's final recommendations in the light of the progress of new development areas and explore the way forward for different railway projects, with a view to reporting the outcome of RDS study to the public in 2014.

34. The Subcommittee earlier requested to receive briefing on the new railway blueprint in the first half of 2014 and the Administration agreed to do so in May 2014. However, the Subcommittee was advised

by the Administration that they would need more time to prepare the plan and would report to the Subcommittee in the latter half of 2014.

**Recommendation**

35. The Panel is invited to note the work of the Subcommittee.

Council Business Division 1  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
25 June 2014

**Panel on Transport**

**Subcommittee on matters relating to railways**

**Terms of Reference**

To follow up various issues relating to the planning and implementation of new railway projects, and the operation of existing railways as follows:

Planning and implementation of new railway projects

- (a) planning and financing of new railway projects;
- (b) environmental impact assessment of new railway projects;
- (c) resumption of land arising from the implementation of new railway projects under the Railways Ordinance (Cap. 519);
- (d) progress update on the implementation of new railway projects;
- (e) provision of supporting public infrastructure for new railway projects; and
- (f) co-ordination of public transport services arising from the commissioning of new railway lines.

Railway operation

- (a) performance of existing railway lines including train service performance and safety management;
- (b) maintenance programme; and
- (c) train service disruptions and breakdowns, and arrangements for handling emergency situations.

Matters relating to corporate governance of the post-merger corporation and fares, including review of the fare adjustment mechanism, should be dealt with by the Panel on Transport.

**Legislative Council  
Panel on Transport**

**Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways**

**Membership list for 2013-2014 session**

<b>Chairman</b>	Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun, BBS, JP
<b>Deputy Chairman</b>	Hon CHAN Han-pan
<b>Members</b>	Hon LEE Cheuk-yan Hon James TO Kun-sun Hon CHAN Kam-lam, SBS, JP Hon WONG Kwok-hing, BBS, MH Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-yeet, GBS, JP Hon Paul TSE Wai-chun, JP Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung Hon Frankie YICK Chi-ming Hon WU Chi-wai, MH Hon Gary FAN Kwok-wai Dr Hon Elizabeth QUAT, JP Hon TANG Ka-piu Ir Dr Hon LO Wai-kwok, BBS, MH, JP Hon Christopher CHUNG Shu-kun, BBS, MH, JP Hon Tony TSE Wai-chuen

(Total: 18 members)

**Clerk** Ms Sophie LAU

**Legal Adviser** Miss Evelyn LEE