

Retrofitting of barrier-free access facilities for grade-separated walkways

The Audit Commission ("Audit") conducted a review to examine retrofitting of lifts or ramps for footbridges, elevated walkways and subways (hereinafter referred to as grade-separated walkways - "GS walkways") through the implementation of the 2001 Retrofitting Initiative managed by the Highways Department ("HyD") and the 2012 Expanded Programme carried out by the Civil Engineering and Development Department ("CEDD").

2. Under the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 487) effective from 1996, it is unlawful for a person to discriminate against another person with a disability ("PWD") by refusing to allow that person access to, or the use of, any premises or facilities that the public is entitled, except where any alteration to the premises to provide such access or provision of such facilities would impose unjustifiable hardship on the provider of such access or facilities. In September 2000, the then Transport Bureau (now the Transport and Housing Bureau) stipulated in a circular entitled "Provision of covers or ramps and escalators to grade separated pedestrian facilities" that access for PWDs had to be provided for all GS walkways either by the provision of ramps or lifts. In December 2001, the then Transport Bureau informed the Legislative Council ("LegCo") that the Administration would retrofit ramps or lifts for existing public footbridges according to an order of priorities (2001 Retrofitting Initiative). In 2011, the Administration informed LegCo that a total of 295 GS walkways in the territory were not provided with lifts, ramps or alternative at-grade crossings (hereinafter referred to as barrier-free access facilities) and that the retrofitting works for these GS walkways would be completed by 2017-2018. In the same year, HyD commenced a programme for carrying out investigation and retrofitting works for the remaining 201 GS walkways¹ not being provided with barrier-free access facilities (hereinafter referred to as 2011 Retrofitting Programme, which formed part of the 2001 Retrofitting Initiative).

3. In August 2012, in order to bring further convenience to the elderly, PWDs and the general public in using GS walkways, the Administration promulgated a new policy on "universal accessibility", stating that, as long as site conditions permitted, it would consider installing lifts for GS walkways even when standard ramps had already been installed (2012 Expanded Programme). Subsequently, in response to the Administration's invitation, members of the public submitted proposals for 253 GS walkways for lift retrofitting works. Each of the 18 District Councils ("DCs") were invited to select three GS walkways from the list of public proposed walkways for priority lift retrofitting works, which were to be carried out by CEDD.

¹ HyD had taken actions from 2001 to 2010 on investigation and retrofitting works for 94 walkways.

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4. The Committee noted the following findings from the Director of Audit's Report:

- in April 2011, the Administration informed LegCo that 295 GS walkways were not provided with barrier-free access facilities. However, according to HyD's records, in fact 328 GS walkways were not provided with barrier-free access facilities. The number of walkways not provided with barrier-free access facilities were understated by 33;
- the Administration informed LegCo that the retrofitting works for barrier-free access facilities for GS walkways under the 2011 Retrofitting Programme were scheduled for completion by 2017-2018. However, as of December 2015, of the 184 GS walkways found to be feasible for retrofitting works -
 - (a) only 60 (33%) had been completed;
 - (b) 94 (51%) were in progress;
 - (c) 17 (9%) were under detailed design and public consultation; and
 - (d) 13 (7%) had not commenced;
- audit examination revealed that there was significant time and cost overrun in implementing retrofitting works for many walkways, in some cases due to utility diversion problems found after the award of works contracts;
- from 2001 to 2013, HyD's feasibility studies under the 2001 Retrofitting Initiative found that 95 walkways were not feasible for carrying out lift/ramp retrofitting works mainly due to site constraints or existence of underground utilities. However, CEDD's feasibility studies under the 2012 Expanded Programme found that it was technically feasible to carry out retrofitting works by adopting alternative solutions. Audit noted that HyD had not issued guidelines on determining whether a walkway is feasible for carrying out lift/ramp retrofitting works;
- while the 18 DCs were each invited to nominate three GS walkways from a list of public proposed walkways for lift retrofitting works under the 2012 Expanded Programme, the list provided to four DCs

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presented few choices. In addition, Audit noted that the peak-hour pedestrian flow of some nominated walkways were relatively low; and

- HyD's information system could not generate management reports on the locations and availability of ramps or lifts of walkways. Also, there were 11 GS walkways constructed from 1999 to 2005 after the effective date of the Disability Discrimination Ordinance in 1996 were not provided with barrier-free access facilities at the time of the walkway construction.

5. The Committee did not hold any public hearing on this subject. Instead, it asked for written responses regarding the occurrence of significant time and cost overrun in implementing retrofitting works items, cases of works delay due to interfacing problems with other works projects in the same location or utility diversion problem, reasons for low pedestrian flow for some of the walkways nominated by DCs and details regarding some retrofitting works originally found to be infeasible by HyD but later found to be feasible by CEDD. The consolidated replies from HyD and CEDD are in *Appendix 12*.

6. The Committee wishes to be kept informed of the progress made in implementing the various recommendations made by Audit.