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Panel on Transport

Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways Meeting on 2 June 2017

Background brief on manpower resources for railway services

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the manpower resources for railway services in Hong Kong. It also summarizes the major views and concerns expressed by the Legislative Council Members during previous discussions on the subject.

Background

Railway services

2. The Government has long adopted a public transport-oriented policy with railways as the backbone. Railways are safe, efficient, reliable, comfortable and environmentally friendly mass carriers. They account for about 41% of all passenger trips made on public transport each day.

3. Hong Kong's railways are run by the MTR Corporation Limited ("MTRCL"), a publicly listed company of which the Government is the majority shareholder. MTR is a heavily patronized railway network consisting of ten lines, namely Kwun Tong Line, Tsuen Wan Line, Island Line, Tung Chung Line, Tseung Kwan O Line, East Rail Line, West Rail Line, Ma On Shan Line, Disneyland Resort Line and South Island Line. The total route length is about 187 kilometres ("km") with 93 stations. According to the Administration, the network carries about 4.65 million passenger trips per day in 2015.

4. MTRCL also operates the Airport Express Line ("AEL") and the Light Rail. AEL, which is about 35.2 km long, connects the urban areas to Hong Kong International Airport and AsiaWorld-Expo. AEL carries about 43 100 passenger trips per day in 2015. The Light Rail network which is about 36.2 km long, is a local transportation network in the northwest New Territories with 68 stops. It carries about 482 600 passenger trips every day in 2015. In addition, MTRCL provides feeder bus services to and from many Light Rail stops in the New Territories to facilitate passenger interchange between the Light Rail and West Rail Line networks.

Manpower resources

5. Under the specific arrangements of the rail merger in December 2007, the staff and management (except the Chief Executive Officer and some administrative support staff totalling less than 10 employees) of the then Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation ("KCRC"), their professional knowledge and experience, together with KCRC's assets, were all taken over by MTRCL. According to the Administration, the railway network managed by MTRCL, as well as its professional manpower, knowledge and experience have been enhanced after the merger.

6. According to the Administration in February 2016, MTRCL employed over 17 100 staff in Hong Kong. MTRCL will, in the light of the operating need of existing railway lines and the commissioning of new railway lines, employ additional manpower from time to time. As an initiative to develop capable railway-related professionals, MTRCL has established the MTR Academy in 2016 to offer training programmes for MTRCL's staff in Hong Kong and its international business partners.

Major views and concerns of Members

7. At previous meetings of the Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways ("the Subcommittee"), members expressed concern that frequent occurrences of railway incidents might be attributable to the outsourcing of maintenance service and deployment of MTRCL staff to develop railway businesses outside Hong Kong. Council questions were also raised on relevant matters. Their major views and concerns are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Outsourcing of maintenance service

8. Members in general expressed concern that the outsourcing of maintenance service had adversely affected the standard of rail maintenance. At the Subcommittee meeting on 20 December 2013, members passed two motions urging MTRCL to review or cease the outsourcing arrangements to improve the maintenance quality and avoid recurrence of railway incidents. In view of the development of the railway network, members considered that there was a need for MTRCL to examine the demand and supply of manpower resources and train up relevant personnel required for the whole railway network.

9. MTRCL explained that contractor staff were responsible for regular visual inspections, dye penetration tests, small scale preventive maintenance work and track cleaning, whereas tasks such as replacement of rails, ultrasonic testing and rail grinding were carried out by MTRCL's in-house staff. MTRCL supplemented that the same standards and requirements applied to outsourced and in-house maintenance works. According to MTRCL, as at 2013, the number of in-house and outsourced maintenance staff deployed in the MTR network was 4 013 and 1 201 respectively. Among the outsourced maintenance staff, 57.9% were responsible for station maintenance, 29.1% for infrastructure maintenance, and 13% for rolling stock maintenance.

Manpower resources deployed for railway businesses outside Hong Kong

10. At the Council meetings of 19 March 2014 and 3 February 2016, Members raised questions on whether the operation of railways outside the territory by MTRCL had distracted its attention away from local operations, resulting in negligence over operational problems of the railways in Hong Kong. They enquired about details on the manpower resources deployed to the development of railway businesses outside Hong Kong, including the number of Hong Kong employees who were dedicated to undertaking such businesses and the number of Hong Kong employees seconded from Hong Kong on a short-term basis.

11. According to the information provided by the Administration in February 2016, of the 17 100 staff employed by MTRCL in Hong Kong, about 80 were responsible for railway businesses outside Hong Kong. Some of them worked in Hong Kong, with the major responsibilities of coordinating mainland and overseas businesses, and budgeting, evaluating risks and formulating strategies for various projects. The rest were posted to a subsidiary or joint venture company on the Mainland or overseas to provide support for the construction, daily operation and maintenance of railways there.

12. Besides, a small number of Hong Kong management or technical staff might be seconded by MTRCL to different cities on a short-term basis as necessary from time to time. Such staff were responsible for providing professional advice for the MTRCL subsidiaries or joint venture companies on such matters as the construction, daily operation and maintenance of railways in these cities. Through the secondment, they could also gain useful overseas experiences. The total number of such staff stood at about 30.

Latest development

13. The Administration plans to brief members on the staffing resources and manpower training for railway services in Hong Kong at the Subcommittee meeting to be held on 2 June 2017.

Relevant papers

14. A list of relevant papers is at **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
29 May 2017

Panel on Transport
Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways

List of relevant papers on manpower resources for railway services

Date of meeting	Committee	Minutes/Paper	LC Paper No.
20.12.2013	Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways	Administration's paper on Tseung Kwan O Line service disruption on 16 December 2013	CB(1)595/13-14(01) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr13-14/chinese/panels/tp/tp_rdp/papers/tp_rdp1220cb1-595-1-c.pdf
		Minutes of meeting	CB(1)1011/13-14 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr13-14/english/panels/tp/tp_rdp/minutes/rdp20131220.pdf
3.1.2014	Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways	MTR Corporation Limited's paper on rail inspection: advanced ultrasonic testing vehicle	CB(1)637/13-14(07) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr13-14/english/panels/tp/tp_rdp/papers/tp_rdp0103cb1-637-7-e.pdf
		Administration's follow-up paper	CB(4)520/14-15(01) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr13-14/chinese/panels/tp/tp_rdp/papers/tp_rdp4-520-1-c.pdf
		Minutes of meeting	CB(1)1339/13-14 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr13-14/english/panels/tp/tp_rdp/minutes/rdp20140103.pdf

Date of meeting	Committee	Minutes/Paper	LC Paper No.
28.2.2014	Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways	Administration's paper on follow-ups on the service suspension of Tseung Kwan O Line and part of Kwun Tong Line on 16 December 2013, and report on subsequent major incidents on East Rail Line and Light Rail	CB(1)980/13-14(05) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr13-14/english/panels/tp/tp_rdp/papers/tp_rdp0228cb1-980-5-e.pdf
		Administration's follow-up paper	CB(4)520/14-15(01) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr13-14/chinese/panels/tp/tp_rdp/papers/tp_rdp4-520-1-c.pdf
		Minutes of meeting	CB(1)1928/13-14 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr13-14/english/panels/tp/tp_rdp/minutes/rdp20140228.pdf
19.3.2014	Council meeting	Dr Hon LAU Wong-fat raised a question on MTR services	http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201403/19/P201403190438.htm
2.1.2015 6.3.2015	Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways	MTR Corporation Limited's paper on the outcome of the independent expert's review on MTR overhead line system as a result of the insulator incidents in February 2014	CB(4)287/14-15(05) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr14-15/english/panels/tp/tp_rdp/papers/tp_rdp20150102cb4-287-5-e.pdf
		Administration's follow-up paper	CB(4)98/15-16(02) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr13-14/chinese/panels/tp/tp_rdp/papers/tp_rdp0228cb4-98-2-c.pdf

Date of meeting	Committee	Minutes/Paper	LC Paper No.
		Minutes of meetings	CB(4)623/14-15 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr14-15/english/panels/tp/tp_rdp/minutes/rdp20150102.pdf CB(4)1108/14-15 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr14-15/english/panels/tp/tp_rdp/minutes/rdp20150306.pdf
3.2.2016	Council meeting	Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-yea raised a question on the MTR Corporation Limited's railway businesses	http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201602/03/P201602030607.htm
18.11.2016	Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways	Minutes of meeting	CB(4)240/16-17 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr16-17/english/panels/tp/tp_rdp/minutes/rdp20161118.pdf