

立法會

Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)2073/99-00

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by the Administration and
cleared with the Chairman)

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Legislative Council Panel on Transport

Minutes of Meeting held on Friday, 16 June 2000, at 10:30 am in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon Mrs Miriam LAU Kin-ye, JP (Chairman)
Hon LAU Kong-wah (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Edward HO Sing-tin, SBS, JP
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP
Hon LEE Wing-tat
Hon LEE Kai-ming, SBS, JP
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, JP
Hon CHAN Wing-chan
Hon CHAN Kam-lam
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon FUNG Chi-kin
Dr Hon TANG Siu-tong, JP
- Non-Panel member attending** : Hon James TO Kun-sun
- Members absent** : Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP

**Public officers
attending**

: Item II

Transport Bureau

Miss Margaret FONG
Deputy Secretary for Transport (3)

Transport Department

Mr Robert FOOTMAN
Commissioner for Transport

Mr Peter LUK
Principal Transport Officer/Management

Hong Kong Police Force

Mr Ian STENTON
Chief Superintendent of Police (Traffic) (Atg.)

Mr Edmond C C CHU
Senior Treasury Accountant (Finance Control)

Highways Department

Mr P C WONG
Chief Engineer/Structures

Agenda Item III

Transport Bureau

Ms Linda LAI
Deputy Secretary for Transport (2)

Mr Patrick HO
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport (1)

Transport Department

Mr Robert FOOTMAN
Commissioner for Transport

Mr Daniel AU
Assistant Commissioner for Transport (Atg.)

Hong Kong Police Force

Mr Ian STENTON
Chief Superintendent of Police (Traffic) (Atg.)

Agenda Item IV

Transport Bureau

Mr Kevin HO
Secretary for Transport (Atg.)

Miss Margaret FONG
Deputy Secretary for Transport (3)

Transport Department

Mr Robert FOOTMAN
Commissioner for Transport

Mr C W KWAN
Chief Engineer

Highways Department

Mr Y S HEUNG
Chief Highways Engineer

Agenda Item V

Transport Bureau

Mr Kevin HO
Secretary for Transport (Atg.)

Miss Margaret FONG
Deputy Secretary for Transport (3)

Transport Department

Mr Robert FOOTMAN
Commissioner for Transport

Mr Peter LUK
Principal Transport Officer/Management

Fire Services Department

Mr KWOK Jing-keung, Joe
Chief Fire Officer

Mr TAM Chi-chung
Deputy Chief Fire Officer/Kowloon Fire Command

Attendance by invitation : **Agenda Item V**

Hong Kong Tunnels and Highways Management Company Limited

Mr Frankie YICK
General Manager

Mr Kenneth PANG
Tunnel Manager

Mr Michael WONG
Deputy Tunnel Manager

Clerk in attendance : Mr Andy LAU
Chief Assistant Secretary (1)2

Staff in attendance : Ms Alice AU
Senior Assistant Secretary (1)5

I Information papers issued since last meeting

- (LC Paper Nos. CB(1)1827/99-00 - Executive Summary of Second and CB(1)1828/99-00 Railway Development Study Report
LC Paper No. CB(1)1865/99-00 - Progress Report of the Construction of the Multi-storey Public Carpark in Stanley
LC Paper No. CB(1)1866/99-00 - Progress Report to Measures to Enhance Pedestrian Safety)

Members noted the information papers provided by the Administration.

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II Revision of Government fees and charges on transport-related items
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1829/99-00(01) - Information paper provided by
the Administration)

2. At the invitation of the Chairman, the Deputy Secretary for Transport (3) (DS for T (3)) briefed members on the proposed revision of Government fees and charges of transport related services as set out in LC Paper No. CB(1) 1829/99-00(01).

Vehicle removal service

3. Members generally considered that the cost of the Police's vehicle towing service was relatively high when compared with the towing cost of private towing agents. Mr CHAN Wing-chan pointed out that the towing fees charged by private agents for a vehicle having a permitted gross vehicle weight not exceeding 5.5 tonnes or exceeding 5.5 tonnes but not exceeding 24 tonnes were \$250-\$280 and \$800 respectively. When compared with the respective Government's fees of \$530 and \$1,280 for these two categories of vehicles, the Government's fees were obviously too high. Members therefore queried the justifications for increasing the vehicle removal fees under such circumstances. Noting that around 60% of the Government's vehicle towing service had been contracted out, members urged the Administration to contract out the entire vehicle towing operation to private towing agents as an alternative to fee revision.

4. On the different towing fees charged by the Police and private towing agents, the Chief Superintendent of Police (Traffic) (Atg) (CS of P (Atg)) explained that the towing fees charged by private towing agents would vary, depending on situations. The fees for normal tows would be much lower than difficult tows, including removal of vehicles from hillsides, removal of immobile vehicles, and removal of vehicles requiring special equipment or methods. As such, a simple comparison might not be appropriate. The Senior Treasury Accountant (Finance Control), Hong Kong Police Force (STA/HKPF) highlighted the Government's costs for towing vehicles by contracted towing agents which normally involved a police officer in uniform of the rank of Sergeant or above to authorize the operation. The whole operation would also be escorted by a police constable (PC) to ensure the safety of valuables inside the vehicles.

5. Noting that the unit costs of the contracted agents were relatively lower than those of the Police, members took the view that the vehicle removal fees should be maintained at the current level, pending a review on contracting out the entire vehicle towing service to private towing agents.

6. STA/HKPF advised that whilst supporting the audit recommendation on contracting out the entire vehicle towing service to private towing agents,

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appropriate arrangements would need to be made to deal with surplus staff arising therefrom. DS for T (3) added that the Administration was working on the subject matter and it would take two to three years to complete. Under such circumstances, it would be against the "User Pays" principle if the vehicle removal fees be kept at the current level. Having regard to all relevant factors, the Administration considered a moderate rate of increase as suggested in the paper appropriate.

7. Mr CHENG Kar-foo pointed out that there might be cases whereby vehicle owners might be over-charged due to the variation between the towing cost of the contracted agents and that of the Police. DS for T (3) explained that police officers only took actions to remove vehicles under special circumstances. It could be reflected in the number of vehicles towed by the Police which amounted to only less than 4000 a year. STA/HKPF added that even though the entire towing service could be contracted out in two to three years' time, the towing costs could not be reduced significantly. He advised that similar to the present arrangements, police officers would still be required to authorize and oversee the whole removal and towing process. As such, the towing cost could at most be reduced by 10-20% and the exact rate would be subject to further determination. Considering that the cost recovery rates for removing vehicles less than 5.5 tonnes or exceeding 5.5 tonnes but less than 24 tonnes after fee revision were only 48% and 61% respectively, owners of these two categories of vehicles would still be paying a fee below the full cost recovery rate even if the savings of 10-20% from switching to private towing agents were included in the calculations. In fact, the proposed increase would enable the Administration to recover the cost incurred gradually rather than in one go after the review on contracting out the entire vehicle towing operation to private towing agents.

8. Mr LEE Kai-ming queried why the cost recovery rates for different fee items varied ranging from 36% to 100%. DS for T (3) explained that in line with the "User Pays" principle, it was important for various users of Government services to pay the costs incurred in the provision of services. The full implementation of this policy had been held in abeyance for more than two years as a result of the fee revision moratorium, which was an exceptional relief measure taken at a time of economic setback. In recognition of the current state of economic recovery and taking into account affordability and acceptability, the Administration proposed to moderately increase the fees and charges of transport-related services as follows:

- (a) make at most a 5% increase for a full-cost recovery within one year for those fees with existing cost recovery rate of over 90% (fee items 1 & 3.3);
- (b) make at most a 15% increase for a full-cost recovery within five years for those fees with existing cost recovery rate of between 40% and 70% (fee items 2.1, 2.2 & 3.2); and

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- (c) make at most a 20% increase for a full-cost recovery within five to seven years for those fees with existing cost recovery rate of less than 40% (remaining fee items).

9. Mr LAU Kong-wah said that the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong had reservation about any proposed revision of Government fees and charges exceeding 10%. He also opined that the Administration should speed up the review with a view to contracting out the entire vehicle towing service to private towing agents as an alternative to fee revision.

10. Mr CHENG Kar-foo opined that the proposed fee revision for fee items 3.1 to 3.3 should be withheld. Meanwhile, the Administration should focus its work on contracting out the entire vehicle towing service to private towing agents.

11. Considering that fee revision proposals from the Administration would invariably have an impact on people's livelihood by encouraging other public utilities to increase their charges, Mr LAU Chin-shek stated his reservation about all the items of fee revision proposed at this time.

III Operation of non-franchised bus services

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1829/99-00(02) - Information paper provided by the Administration)

12. Mr CHENG Kar-foo pointed out that buses were efficient mass carriers and provided an essential service for many commuters, particularly those in the New Territories. He noted from the Administration's reply to a recent LegCo question that franchised buses only constituted about 8% of the total traffic volume in Central during the morning and evening peak periods. He queried why the Administration had not considered other measures to restrain the usage of private cars to ease congestion in Central before introducing measures to suppress the growth of residents' services (RS). Due to inadequate provision of public transport services in some areas, he opined that there was a genuine need for the introduction of RS services provided that their stopping activities were properly regulated.

13. The Commissioner for Transport (C for T) replied that there was no question of Government targeting anybody. However, the growth in bus services had contributed to problems on roads which were already congested. In order to achieve a more efficient use of road space, there was a need to enhance the efficiency of the bus network. In this regard, the franchised bus services were regulated and adjustments were made where appropriate to their operations. Likewise, it was also necessary to better manage the operation of RS and their stopping activities, especially in the evening peak period when they waited for passengers. The Administration was mindful of the need to provide adequate

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public transport services for the travelling commuters. It would closely monitor the situation and introduce appropriate service adjustment and improvement in a timely manner.

14. Mr CHENG was not satisfied with the Administration's reply. He requested the Administration to provide further information on the traffic volume of RS against the total traffic volume in Central during the morning and evening peak periods. The Assistant Commissioner for Transport (Atg) (AC for T (Atg)) undertook to provide the requested information to the member. He however pointed out that RS activities were a major cause of congestion in the main roads in the central business districts, especially in the evening peak period when they waited for passengers. Also due to the design of the coach, it required a longer loading and unloading time than franchised bus which, in turn, would seriously block the traffic behind.

(Post meeting note : The requested information was circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(1) 1953/99-00).

15. Referring to the existing policy of promoting the use of public transport for better protecting the environment of Hong Kong, Mr LAU Kong-wah queried why the Administration had introduced measures to curtail the RS services which might run against the said policy objective. He requested that the existing legal RS services should continue to be allowed to operate.

16. The Deputy Secretary for Transport (2) advised that railway would form the backbone of Hong Kong's transport system and buses would play a prominent role in the system. The Administration would introduce measures to rationalize and improve co-ordination of public transport services to better match demand. Low demand services would be curtailed where appropriate. However this did not imply that the Administration would not introduce new bus services to cater for the demand of commuters.

17. Noting that out of the 107 applications for new RS services, only seven of them were approved, members enquired about the reasons for turning down the applications. AC for T (Atg) advised that as a general principle, new RS route to the congested urban areas would not be allowed unless there was inadequate peak-hour capacity on the other public transport modes to meet passenger demand. The Administration would also reject applications from operators for designating excessive bus stops en-route.

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The need for new regulatory measures

18. Mr Edward HO indicated that he was in support of a policy to promote the greater use of railway for traffic and environmental considerations. He asked if existing RS services would also be rationalized, taking into account the said policy objective. He also expressed concern about the operation of a substantial amount of empty buses on roads.

19. AC for T (Atg) advised that on existing RS services, the Administration would, wherever appropriate, encourage modification of their routings into feeders to connect to railway stations. However, it was not appropriate for the Administration to reject applications for service renewal across-the-board, given that many of the RS routes were operated from the New Territories which were not served by external railways. However, the Administration would keep the subject matter under review, taking into account the gradual completion of the railway expansion programme.

20. Referring to the RS services on Hong Kong Island, particularly those operating at Mid-Levels, Mrs Selina CHOW requested the Administration to rationalize the services so as to ease traffic congestion in Central. She could not accept the Administration's stance that the area was not served by public transport, and hence, RS services were approved. She considered that the various routes could be replaced by green minibus routes. AC for T (Atg) said that the Administration was aware of the situation and applications for new RS services would only be granted with regard to the level of services already provided by other public transport operators. Mrs CHOW requested the Administration to look into the problems generated by existing routes as well.

Insurance protection

21. Mr LAU Chin-shek was concerned about the validity of the third party risk insurance in respect of the vehicles of the illegal RS services. AC for T (Atg) advised that for RS services not approved by the Transport Department, third party risk insurance might be invalidated in respect of their vehicles. The Administration had already conveyed the message to the trade. Appropriate notices had also been displayed on RS stop signs to advise passengers of the risk. Mr LAU considered the situation highly undesirable as it would seriously affect the interest of passengers. He urged the Administration to either formalize the illegal RS services or to step up enforcement actions against illegal operation of RS.

22. The Chairman said that the Administration should provide the necessary assistance to the trade so that the operation of employees and students' services would not be unduly restricted by the Administration.

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IV Regulation of traffic movement during road openings

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1829/99-00(03) - Information paper provided by the Administration)

23. Mrs Selina CHOW briefed members on the background of the item. She said that she had repeatedly requested the Administration to address the problem relating to the regulation of traffic movements during road openings, in particular, the non-compliance of traffic light signals by motorists but in vain. She apologized for the inconvenience caused to motorists due to an earlier traffic incident. She hoped that with the occurrence of the incident, it could arouse the Administration to address the matter in a more serious manner.

24. The Secretary for Transport (Acting) (S for T (Atg)) said that non-compliance of traffic light signals was an offence in law and would also attract the imposition of demerit points. The Administration had already taken steps to erect additional signs on the temporary traffic light poles to advise motorists of the above.

25. Mrs Selina CHOW pointed out that despite the Administration's effort, the situation had not been improved. She requested the Administration to step up enforcement action. S for T (Atg) agreed to convey the request of Mrs CHOW to the Police. He added that motorists could also complain to the Police if they observed any irregularities. If there were sufficient evidence and witnesses, the Police could take necessary prosecution action.

26. In response to the Chairman, S for T (Atg) advised that the Police would review the site arrangements before road openings. Any malfunctioning of temporary traffic lights would need to be reported to the Police for follow-up.

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27. Members requested the Administration to consider the following proposals and report to the Panel in six months' time:

- (a) installing enforcement cameras on site;
- (b) deploying additional manpower to regulate the traffic until 10:00 pm;
- (c) adjusting the green time of temporary traffic lights to tie in with the varying traffic volume on each direction in an automatic manner; and
- (d) installing an automated barrier as was the case in the entry gate of a car park to stop moving traffic when the traffic light was red.

28. S for T (Atg) took note of the members' suggestions and undertook to examine the matter further and report back to the Panel in six months' time. The Chairman also asked the Administration to include such information as the prosecution figures for related offences and the publicity programme to arouse the awareness of motorists in the paper to be provided to the Panel.

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V Fire incident at the Cross Harbour Tunnel on 29 May 2000

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1829/99-00(04) - Information paper provided by the Administration)

29. The Chairman advised that in order to facilitate members' understanding of the incident, she had requested the Administration to replay a video tape on the fire incident taken by ATV cameramen (incidentally trapped by the incident). She thanked ATV for agreeing to lend the video tape to the Panel. Members then watched the full ATV video of the incident.

30. On the basis of the evidence available largely from the video tape, members queried the Administration's findings that the tunnel operator had responded and handled the fire incident generally in an effective manner and in accordance with established procedures. They highlighted the following observations and cast serious doubt on the Administration's assessment:

- (a) the long time taken for the tunnel staff at the control room to detect the fire;
- (b) the delay of the recovery staff to arrive at the fire scene;
- (c) the failure of the recovery staff to wear smoke masks;
- (d) the failure of the recovery staff to help control the fire;
- (e) the confusing radio broadcasts by the tunnel company about the fire; and
- (f) the unsatisfactory evacuation process.

In view of the above, some members considered that the tunnel company should have been reprimanded by the Administration.

31. C for T advised that the full ATV video of the incident was only made available to the Transport Department one day before the Panel meeting. This was after the Administration had concluded the report on the basis of the evidence available largely from the operator of the tunnel. After reviewing the video, he considered a need to ask the tunnel operator to confirm whether his staff had, as they claimed, approached the fire scene and used fire extinguishers to control the fire. He however maintained his view that it was not possible to see through the smoke. As such, there was no clear evidence concerning the arrival or non-arrival of the tunnel staff.

32. C for T said that according to the incident record of the tunnel operator, the company had immediately activated the standard fire emergency procedures, namely, informing the Fire Services Department (FSD) through the direct telephone line, dispatching the first rescue team to the incident scene, stopping all vehicles at both tunnel entrances, alerting tunnel users of the emergency situation through tunnel radio broadcast, switching on the fire mode of the

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ventilation system and opening the emergency gate to facilitate the fire engines to access the incident scene. All these had proved that the tunnel operator had responded and handled the fire incident generally in an effective manner and in accordance with established procedures. He emphasized that the Administration was equally concerned about the time taken to detect the fire and the recovery actions taken by individual staff. There were also some procedural issues of concern which they considered unsatisfactory and improvements were required. However, the failure of individual staff in complying with some of the standard procedures did not mean that the tunnel operator had not responded and handled the fire incident in an effective manner and in accordance with established procedures.

33. Some members were not convinced of the Administration's reply. They pointed out that after reviewing the video, there was no sign of action of the operator's staff in the scene. They queried the accuracy of the statement that the first rescue team of the company arrived at the scene at 1328 hours and attempted to control the fire, but failed. Mr LAU Kong-wah requested the Administration to review their assessment. He pointed out that arrival alone was not enough, necessary assistance should have been provided by the rescue team to control the fire and to evacuate the people from the tunnel during the incident. Mr James TO opined that he could not accept the Administration's view point that the first rescue team arrived at the scene had made an attempt to control the fire based on the evidence available from the video.

34. C for T reiterated that it was not possible to see through the smoke, and hence, there was no clear evidence concerning the arrival or non-arrival of the tunnel staff. However, after reviewing the full video of the fire incident, he would request the operator to confirm whether his staff had approached the incident and attempted to control the fire. The General Manager of Hong Kong Tunnels and Highways Management Company Limited (GM/HKT) stated that he would like to make an amendment to the arrival time of his staff at the fire scene. He said that the tunnel rescue team arrived at Alcove 9 instead of the fire scene at 1328 hours as previously announced. It took them about one minute to arrive at the fire scene from Alcove 9 when there was already heavy smoke behind the vehicle on fire. The company had carried out an internal investigation but there was no clear evidence concerning the arrival or non-arrival of the tunnel staff at the fire scene.

(Post-meeting note: Following the meeting, C for T requested for a further report from HKT on the incident and the findings were circulated to Members vide LC Paper No. CB(1)1958/99-00(01).)

The slow response of the tunnel operator

35. As to why it took two minutes for the tunnel staff at the control room to detect the fire, GM/HKT explained that a private car broke down in the Kowloon

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bound tube at about 1310 hours. No stoppage of traffic was required during the vehicle recovery procedure and the broken down vehicle was taken out of the incident tube at about 13:16 hours. Traffic had already built up inside the incident tube and was moving very slowly. Under such circumstances, it added difficulties to the tunnel staff to detect the incident based on traffic movements inside the tunnel both in front and behind of the fire scene. The fire was only detected at 1325 hours when smoke was detected via the closed circuit television (CCTV). The tunnel staff immediately informed the FSD. C for T said that in this particular case, it might have taken the tunnel vehicle over a minute just to reach the fire scene due to the earlier incident. The Principal Transport Officer/Management (PTO/M) added that Transport Department would seek funds to replace the cameras and the monitors of the CCTV system in the tunnel to enhance surveillance at the tunnel control room on traffic movements inside the tunnel. He however confirmed that the existing CCTV system did not have any blind spots.

The confusing radio broadcasts and the evacuation process

36. Regarding the complaint that bus passengers were trapped in the buses for some time before being directed to evacuate, GM/HKT explained that this might be due to an early incident which happened at 1310 hours when a private car broke down in the Kowloon bound tube. This caused slow down to the Kowloon bound tunnel traffic and the tunnel company had made 5 broadcasts informing motorists of the incident. The incident ended at about 1316 hours with the fire occurring soon after that event. These two separate incidents might have trapped some vehicles inside the tunnel as early as 1310 hours. Some motorists therefore had first received broadcasts about the breakdown of a vehicle and later on about the fire incident.

Fire fighting equipment

37. On the adequacy of fire fighting equipment, the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) advised that the provision was considered sufficient. The fire fighting procedures formulated by the company were also in order. However, the way in which the driver concerned and individual tunnel staff handled the incident might need to be improved. GM/HKT also confirmed that sufficient fire fighting equipment including smoke masks were available. Adequate training on fire fighting was also provided to staff. He stressed that this was an isolated incident and the company had the capability and necessary equipment to handle similar incidents as was demonstrated in a previous fire incident which occurred on 7 January 2000. In the present case, he recognized that there was room for improvement, particularly the omissions of individual staff. The company would review the issue and put in place adequate measures to prevent a recurrence of similar incidents.

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Improvement measures

38. Mr CHENG Kar-foo opined that penalties should be imposed on the company for failure in complying with the performance pledges and standards.

39. C for T said that the target two-minute response time was quite stringent and could be met by the company on most occasions (98%). As a further safeguard, the Administration was discussing with the tunnel company on the deployment of motor cycles to improve the efficiency of the recovery teams. It would continue to identify problems and resolve them in a positive manner. GM/HKT reiterated that the company had the capability to meet the target as was demonstrated in the past. Apart from deploying motor cycles, the company also proposed to upgrade the existing fire hydrant system to fire hydrant/hose reel system in the tunnel to facilitate fire fighting.

40. Mrs Selina CHOW however took the view that imposing penalties might not be effective in the circumstances. She pointed out that there was a need to ensure that tunnel staff would act in accordance with standing procedures. The CCTV system should be upgraded to enhance surveillance on traffic movements inside the tunnel. She also stressed the need to strengthen the role of the commander in case of emergency and formulate proper procedures for evacuation. GM/HKT responded that role play was being incorporated in their routine fire fighting training such that the most senior staff on duty would know how to react properly.

41. C for T took note of the member's concern and said that the Administration would shortly seek funds to replace the existing CCTV system. Annual workshop would also be conducted to ensure that the equipment deployed would be kept up-to-date to meet the operational requirements.

42. GM/HKT clarified that the existing CCTV system was workable and did not have any blind spots. However there was certainly room for improvement as objects far away from the cameras might not be displayed clearly. He pointed out that at present, the company conducted monthly internal emergency training for their staff. The FSD also conducted monthly visit to the control room and discuss emergency handling procedures with the tunnel staff. The FSD also conducted fire drills at least once a year with the tunnel operator on fire fighting and evacuation work. The Company would step up their training on fire fighting and protection and fine-tune the related procedures in handling fire incidents including the communication between the controller at the control room and the recovery staff at the incident scene.

43. In response to Ir Dr Raymond HO, CFO clarified that it was considered not appropriate to install a sprinkler system inside tunnels as different types of vehicles would be operating there. In fact, the United States National Fire Protection Association also stated its reservation in this regard. Regarding the

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safety of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) vehicles, he said that with the advent in vehicle design, LPG vehicles were considered suitable for operation inside tunnels. The Electrical and Mechanical Services Department had conducted an assessment of the risk level of LPG vehicles in tunnels. It confirmed that the risk associated with the operation of LPG minibuses and taxis with a fuel tank capacity of less than 65 kg was comparable to that of diesel and petrol vehicles.

44. In concluding deliberation, the Chairman asked the Administration to review the problems identified in the fire incident and take the necessary steps to improve the fire fighting capability of the staff and the equipment of the tunnel with a view to avoiding a recurrence of similar incidents in future.

VI Any other business

45. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:30 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat
27 September 2000