

Letterhead of Transport Department

CB(1)1958/99-00(01)

Our Ref. (126) in TPM 151/201-64
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28 June 2000

Mr. Andy Lau,
Clerk to Panel,
Legislative Council,
Legislative Council Building,
8 Jackson Road,
Hong Kong.

Dear Sir,

**LegCo Panel on Transport
Meeting on 16 June 2000
Fire Incident at Cross Harbour Tunnel on 29 May 2000**

I refer to the discussion of the above incident at the meeting of the Panel held on 16 June 2000.

In the meeting we presented the Transport Department's report on the incident, which concluded that the tunnel operator had responded and handled the fire incident generally in an effective manner and in accordance with established procedures. However, we are concerned about the time taken to detect the fire, to get to the incident scene and there are four procedural issues of concern requiring improvement. Details are shown in the Panel paper.

We then also watched the full ATV video of the incident, which ATV had made available to the Transport Department, at our request, the day before the Panel meeting. Unfortunately, this was after we had concluded the report on the basis of the evidence available largely from the operator of the tunnel. The video had not, at the time of the Panel meeting, been reviewed by all concerned, but Transport Department had seen it and considered that the tunnel operator should be asked to confirm whether his staff had, as they claimed, approached the incident and used fire extinguishers. This was because, although it was not possible to see through the smoke, there was no sign of action of the operator's staff in the scene. Several Panel Members had also made the same point at the meeting.

The tunnel operator had now replied on the results of their further investigation. We have identified two additional points requiring improvement. On

the basis that the staff knew that nobody was trapped inside the incident vehicle and that Fire Services Department officers were arriving and approaching the incident scene, they decided to leave the scene to help evacuation. The tunnel operator now established that their staff had not used fire extinguisher to control the fire, contrary to their earlier report to the Transport Department that one staff had used a fire extinguisher to control the fire. This further compounds the failure to comply with procedures in this area. Furthermore, the management failed to obtain a truthful account in the first instance from their staff. This is a point of general concern, as it could result in a failure to identify important problems which need to be addressed. This indicates a need for the management to further strengthen the sense of discipline and duty among their staff and underlines the need for closer supervision of adherence to procedures. The tunnel operator will take appropriate disciplinary actions against those concerned staff who did not comply with the established procedures. The tunnel operator has also been asked to devise suitable improvement measures to address the above deficiencies and to report to Transport Department accordingly.

Transport Department notes that the action of the staff concerned compounds their failure to comply with certain procedures. Nevertheless, the Department remains of the view that the operator had responded and handled the fire incident generally in an effective manner. The Department will ensure the effective implementation of the various improvement measures as outlined in the Panel paper, including those to be adopted by the tunnel operator. To strengthen first-hand training for tunnel staff, the Department will organise a seminar on safety guidelines in tunnels for all tunnel operators and a fire drill for the Cross Harbour Tunnel involving bus operators next month.

I should be grateful if you would convey the above to the Members for their information.

Yours sincerely,

(Peter Y K Luk)
for Commissioner for Transport