

立法會
Legislative Council

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Panel on Transport

Subcommittee on matters relating to railways

Minutes of meeting on
Friday, 20 December 2002, at 4:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon Miriam LAU Kin-yee, JP (Chairman)
Hon LAU Kong-wah
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip

Members absent : Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP
Hon CHAN Kwok-keung
Hon LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon LAU Ping-cheung

Non-Subcommittee : Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Member attending

Public Officers : **Agenda Items IV and V**
attending
Environment, Transport and Works Bureau

Mr Arthur HO
Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works

Mr Patrick HO
Principal Assistant Secretary for the Environment,
Transport and Works (T)1

Mr William SHIU
Principal Assistant Secretary for the Environment,
Transport and Works (T)4

Transport Department

Mr Peter LUK
Assistant Commissioner for Transport/New Territories

Mr WONG Wai-ming
Principal Transport Officer/Bus and railway (Acting)

Attendance by invitation : **Agenda Items IV and V**

Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation

Mr Jonathan YU
Director, Light Rail

Mr W K TSUI
General Manager, Light Rail Operations

Mr Michael LAI
General Manager, Revenue

Mr Victor LEUNG
Marketing and Planning Manager, Light Rail

Mr K H SIU
Public Affairs Manager - Light Rail

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

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

Miss Winnie CHENG
Legislative Assistant 5

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I Schedule of meetings for 2003

Members agreed that meetings of the Subcommittee would normally be held once every two months. Special meetings would be held if necessary to deal with urgent items.

2. Members further agreed that for the remainder of the session, the Subcommittee would hold its meetings on 7 February, 4 April and 6 June 2003, at 10:45 am to 12:45 pm, in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building.

(Post-meeting note: The meeting schedule of the Subcommittee was subsequently circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(1)653/02-03.)

II Discussion items for next meeting

(LC Paper No. CB(1)535/02-03(01) - List of railways and projects)

3. Members went through the list of railways and projects (LC Paper No. CB(1)535/02-03(01)).

4. In view of the derailment of a Light Rail train at Siu Hong stop on 18 December 2002, members agreed that the Subcommittee should review with the Administration and the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC) the performance of Light Rail Service in light of the said incident.

5. In this respect, Mr Albert HO considered that KCRC should take the opportunity to conduct a thorough review on the operation and contingency measures of LRT so as to assure members and the public that LRT was able to cope with the additional demand arising from WR's opening.

6. Referring to the supplementary information paper provided by the Administration vide LC Paper No. CB(1)540/02-03(01), Mr CHENG Kar-foo suggested that the Subcommittee should follow up on previous discussions by the Transport Panel on the review of MTR service and incidents in respect of the performance of the new MTR trains from Korea and the progress of fine-tuning of the signalling systems.

7. After deliberation, members agreed to discuss the following items at the next Subcommittee scheduled for Friday, 7 February 2003:

- (a) Review of the Light Rail Service and the incident that occurred on 18 December 2002; and
- (b) Performance of the new MTR trains from Korea.

(Post-meeting note: The above meeting was subsequently rescheduled to be

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held on 25 February 2003.)

III Information papers issued since last meeting

(ETWB(T)CR 14/1016/99 - Progress report on Northern Link)

8. Members noted the above information paper issued since last meeting.

IV Reorganization of Light Rail Transit services upon commissioning of West Rail

(LC Paper No. CB(1)535/02-03(02) - Information paper provided by Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation)

9. Members noted the information paper provided by KCRC (LC Paper No. CB(1)535/02-03(02)) on the proposed Light Rail Transit (LRT) service reorganization to tie in with the opening of West Rail (WR) in 2003. With the aid of PowerPoint, Mr Jonathan YU, Director, Light Rail of KCRC (D/LR, KCRC), presented the salient points of the proposed LRT reorganization plan.

10. To facilitate deliberation, members agreed that this item would be discussed with the following item on "Better co-ordination of public transport services in North West New Territories arising from the commissioning of West Rail".

V Better co-ordination of public transport services in North West New Territories arising from the commissioning of West Rail

(LC Paper No. CB(1)535/02-03(03) - Information paper provided by the Administration)

11. Members noted the information paper provided by the Administration on the proposed public transport service plan to tie in with the opening of WR (LC Paper No. CB(1)535/02-03(03)).

Implementation of LRT and public transport services reorganization plans

12. Highlighting the need for both KCRC and the Administration to conduct early consultation with relevant District Councils (DCs) and other local parties, Mr TAM Yiu-chung stressed that any service changes in respect of the LRT system and other public transport modes should be introduced in a progressive manner, taking into account the need and actual change in transport pattern of local residents after WR's opening. To avoid unnecessary confusion, he also cautioned that WR's commissioning should be scheduled to avoid the start of the new school year. Taking note of Mr TAM's view, D/LR, KCRC advised that while WR was scheduled for opening in December 2003, early commissioning might be achieved in September 2003.

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13. Mr TAM Yiu-chung further said that in order to promote greater use of WR, it would be important to keep the fare level of feeder LRT and franchised bus services competitive while maintaining a frequent and convenient service to the passengers. On the other hand, he pointed out that given the need for feeder trips and interchanging services, some passengers in the North West New Territories (NWNT) might be less inclined to switch to WR. Hence, the Administration should not seek to curtail external franchised bus routes or their frequencies serving those areas not conveniently served by WR in the first instance.

14. Mr Albert HO also said that in order to maintain competition in the market to ensure commuter choice, the Administration should not rush through any reorganization of franchised bus services after the commissioning of WR. He also said that any applications from the franchised bus companies to reduce the fare of existing routes after WR's opening should be given favourable consideration by the Administration.

15. Sharing similar views, Mr Albert CHAN emphasized the importance for the Administration to maintain competition among service providers in the market. As such, any decision to cancel existing bus routes should only be made after their actual utilization was clearly established after WR's opening. Apart from LR, feeder services could also be provided by franchised buses and green minibuses (GMB). In this respect, he said that new feeder bus and GMB routes serving WR stations should be finalized as soon as possible.

16. In response, the Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (DS for ETW) said that the Administration was also mindful of the need for maintaining healthy competition among service providers to enable a reasonable choice for passengers. However, taking into account the substantial increase brought about by WR's opening in the capacity of external public transport services for NWNT, adjustments to the public transport services being provided would have to be made, including the introduction of new routes and re-routing of some existing routes to better feed passengers to WR stations, and frequency adjustments or route modification/cancellation for overlapping services. It was expected that the service changes would help reduce bus trips in the busy urban areas and hence relieve congestion and reduce roadside emission. Responding to Mr Albert HO, the Assistant Commissioner for Transport/New Territories (AC for T/NT) advised that the Administration would consider any applications from franchised bus operators to reduce fare or offer concessions to passengers in a positive light.

17. On the implementation of the proposed public transport service plan, AC for T/NT stated that consultation with relevant DCs would start from early January next year. Working groups would also be set up with DC members and local representatives to examine and discuss details of the arrangements. The target was to finalize the public transport service plan in mid-2003 so that adequate publicity could be mounted before WR's opening. He assured members that changes would be introduced gradually in the light of on-the-ground observation to ensure smooth

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implementation and avoid confusion.

18. Notwithstanding the Administration's explanation, Mr CHENG Kar-foo pointed out that at present, the passengers in NWNT were conveniently served by a number of long-haul external franchised bus routes. While he was not convinced that such routes should be cancelled after WR's opening, he was also worried that such competition from franchised bus services would create a heavy burden on the viability of WR. Furthermore, the offer of fare discounts for WR/LR transfer passengers would aggravate the financial loss suffered by LR. Mr CHENG was concerned that under the circumstances, the Corporation would be faced with tremendous pressure for fare increases. Should this happen, the travelling public would be the ones to suffer. In this connection, he enquired about the Administration's criteria for bus route cancellation under the proposed public transport service plan, as well as the basis of KCRC's estimate that about 30% of the future WR passengers would use LR as feeder service.

19. Citing the crippling impact of LR's continuous losses on KCRC's financial position and the overlapping local services provided by LR and WR, Mr CHENG Kar-foo called on the Administration to critically review the viability of LR from both the financial and transport perspectives. Echoing this view, Mr Albert CHAN said that he had serious doubts about the desirability of maintaining LR service. Worrying that the proposed integration of WR and LR would still fail to improve the performance of LR, Mr LAU Kong-wah expressed concern about the long-term financial position of LR.

20. In reply, D/LR, KCRC stressed that while the Corporation was mindful of its statutory obligation to operate according to prudent commercial principles, railway operation was essentially a long-term investment. When planning for the WR project, due regard had already been given to the tough competition posed by franchised bus services and the Corporation was convinced of WR's long-term financial viability. In anticipation of WR's operation, the Corporation had embarked on a \$2,300 million project that would enable LR to take on an expanded role as a feeder service for WR. Given the vast area in NWNT to be served by the limited number of WR stations, it was estimated that about 50% of WR's forecast patronage would require feeder service. Taking into account LR's extensive network and its dominant market share of internal public transport in NWNT, it was estimated that about 30% of the future WR passengers would use LR as feeder service. He assured members that while LR would maintain its role as the primary means of internal transportation in NWNT, its integration with WR would be beneficial to the performance of both railways. The extension of LRT and WR network would also present the opportunity for new residential development and activities in the area. All these would help improve the financial viability of the railways.

21. Acknowledging the importance for WR to maintain financially viable operation, DS for ETW pointed out that the Corporation had been working on ways to improve its connectivity by reorganizing LRT services to facilitate access by passengers. He

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also stressed that with the proposed public transport service plan, the Administration's aim was to strike a right balance among the services provided by different public transport modes and there was no intention to protect the interest of the railway corporation. With WR providing a fast, reliable and convenient service to the passengers, there was a clear need for rationalizing and improving co-ordination of public transport services so that an efficient public transport network was maintained to bring overall benefits to the community. Taking into account the experience with the opening of MTR Tseung Kwan O Line, the Administration would carefully consider local views when finalizing the details of the public transport service plan to ensure public acceptance.

Changing role of LRT as a means of local transportation

22. Highlighting the importance for LRT to maintain local transportation services within NWNT, Mr Albert HO was worried that as LRT took on the new role of feeding passengers to WR, its inter-town (between Tuen Mun and Yuen Long/Tin Shui Wai) services might be neglected. As a result, passengers would have no choice but shift to the more expensive WR for such journeys. He thus sought assurance from KCRC that LRT's inter-town service would be maintained at the same level after WR's opening.

23. In response, D/LR, KCRC reiterated that LRT would maintain its role as local commuter service provider. At present, only about 20% LRT trips were long inter-town journeys. Those passengers wanting to travel on LR on long journeys would still be able to use LR services after the proposed reorganization. However, with the expansion of the LRT network, there would be certain changes to the route structure and some journeys might require interchange/transfer. Most of the passengers who interchanged between LRT routes would only need to interchange on the same platform, while cross-platform interchange would only be necessary for certain routes at a few locations. Assuring members that the same fare would be maintained for journeys between Tuen Mun and Yuen Long, D/LR, KCRC further said that an integrated fare structure would be introduced for passengers transferring between WR/LR and KCR buses, giving transfer passengers a discount.

24. While welcoming KCRC's assurance, Mr Albert HO considered that given the need for more interchange, the Corporation should improve the platform facilities at various interchange stations to ensure the safety of waiting passengers. D/LR, KCRC replied that as a major interchange for inter-town service, the existing LR Stop at Siu Hong was being upgraded with the construction of a new concourse. This stop would also be connected to the WR Siu Hong Station via elevators. When the on-going grade separation project was completed, the existing LR San Fat Stop would also be improved to facilitate interchange between LR and WR services at the WR Tuen Mun Station.

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Fare level of WR

25. Notwithstanding the envisaged benefits of WR, Mr TAM Yiu-chung cautioned that WR's patronage would very much depend on its fare level. Hence, when determining WR fares, KCRC should take into account the affordability and the heavy burden of transport costs of local residents in NWNT. In addition, he pointed out that with WR, passengers from Tuen Mun would have to travel to urban areas via Yuen Long. Considering the extra journey time required, the same fare should be charged for journeys between Tuen Mun/Yuen Long and urban areas.

26. To ensure its financial viability, Mr LAU Kong-wah considered that the key was to attract passengers in NWNT to shift to use WR for external transportation. Considering the fast and direct services offered by franchised buses, WR could only compete in terms of fare. In this regard, he asked whether WR's integrated fare structure would be at a level lower than franchised bus fares for journeys between NWNT and Central via WR/LR. He also enquired about WR's projected market share for external transportation in NWNT.

27. In reply, D/LR, KCRC stated that while the Managing Board had yet to make a decision on the exact level of WR fares, it was envisaged that WR fares would not be lower than franchised bus fares. Notwithstanding the tough competition in the market, the Corporation was confident that WR would offer an attractive choice for passengers in NWNT with its fast and reliable service, particularly in the long-term when the whole KCR network was completed with the construction of Kowloon Southern Link and Shatin to Central Link. As a very rough estimate, it was expected that WR would account for about 30% of the total external public transport market in NWNT during its initial years of operation.

28. Conveying the view of local residents, Mr LAU Kong-wah said that public response to any proposed cancellation of existing bus routes would very much depend on the level of integrated WR/LR fares. He thus called on the Corporation to finalize its decision on WR fare as soon as possible, say in January 2003, so that the local communities could be properly consulted. Noting Mr LAU's view, D/LR, KCRC said that while he could not make any commitment at this stage, the Corporation would seek to brief members and the public once a decision was made by the Managing Board.

29. Noting that only about 25% of the population in NWNT would fall within the 500-metre catchment area of WR stations, the Chairman considered that the estimate of a 30% market share might be too optimistic. As a related matter, Mr Albert HO said that the Administration should also ensure that adequate feeder service was provided for residential developments located farther away from WR stations.

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Other improvements

30. Mr Albert CHAN raised the following points for the Administration and KCRC to consider:

- (a) Adequate bicycle parking spaces should be provided in the vicinity of WR stations in NWNT.
- (b) Better covered walkway links should be provided for residential developments within the distance of one kilometre from WR stations.
- (c) Contingency plans should be drawn up to cater for WR's commissioning together with the operation of LR feeder services.

31. D/LR, KCRC responded that to ensure the safe and efficient operation of WR right from the start of operation, the Corporation had set up an Operational Readiness Steering Committee chaired by the Chief Executive Officer of KCRC. Regular meetings had also been held with relevant government agencies and other external bodies so that operational plans including contingency measures could be drawn up as soon as possible. Following system testing and commissioning, WR would undergo trial operation for three months to allow sufficient time to spot and resolve any teething problems before opening to the public. Towards the end of the trial operation, emergency drills would be conducted with all relevant parties to test the adequacy of the contingency measures and the responsiveness of the rescue teams.

32. On the provision of ancillary facilities, AC for T/NT confirmed that bicycle parking spaces had already been provided for near the six WR stations in NWNT. Additional spaces could also be made available subject to actual demand. The Administration would also actively consider the provision of covered walkways and pedestrian crossings in the vicinity of residential developments where possible to facilitate the use of WR by the residents. In this connection, the Chairman said that every effort should be made to improve WR's connectivity for easy access by passengers. D/LR, KCRC also advised that to promote patronage, the Corporation had initiated discussions with franchised bus operators on the offer of inter-modal fare discounts for interchange passengers at WR's urban stations in Tsuen Wan West and Nam Cheong.

33. Concluding the discussion, the Chairman invited the Administration and KCRC to broadly consult local views on the proposed reorganization plans. When the detailed arrangements and the level of WR fares were finalized, the Administration and KCRC should revert to the Subcommittee.

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VI Any other business

34. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 5:50 pm.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
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