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Panel on Economic Services

Meeting on 18 July 2006

Updated Background Brief on Ngong Ping 360

Purpose

This paper sets out the background to the development of the Tung Chung Cable Car system (“the Cable Car System”), and the themed cultural village and associated attractions and facilities in Ngong Ping (now collectively known as “Ngong Ping 360”) and the problems encountered during trial runs of the Cable Car System. The paper also summarizes members’ deliberations in the past over the related issues.

Background

2. In 1998, the Financial Secretary announced Government’s decision to proceed with the construction of a cable car project (“the Project”) linking Tung Chung and Ngong Ping on Lantau Island as a tourist attraction. Under the framework approved for implementing the Project, the Government proposed to grant a 30-year franchise for the financing, design, construction, operation and maintenance of the Cable Car System on a Build-Operate-Transfer basis. The Government also provided the land required for the Cable Car System.

Provisional Agreement with MTR Corporation Limited

3. In July 2002, the Government entered into a Provisional Agreement with the MTR Corporation Limited (“MTRCL”), under which MTRCL would commence preparatory work on the Project before the grant of the franchise. The Government, on the other hand, would seek the enactment of the enabling legislation for the franchise and would work with MTRCL to prepare a Project

Agreement to provide a legal framework for the granting of the franchise and the construction, operation and maintenance of the Cable Car System.

Tung Chung Cable Car Bill

4. On 12 February 2003, the Administration introduced the Tung Chung Cable Car Bill (“the Bill”) into the Legislative Council. The Bill sought to provide the legal framework for the grant of a franchise for the operation of the Cable Car System.

5. A Bills Committee was formed to study the Bill. In the course of deliberation, the Bills Committee had examined, inter alia, the following issues:

- (a) franchise for the financing, design, construction, operation and maintenance of the Cable Car System and the mechanism for resolving disputes between the Government and the franchisee;
- (b) easements and miscellaneous land matters;
- (c) royalty payments by the franchisee to the Government;
- (d) financial penalties on the franchisee in the event of persistent failure to comply with the statutory requirements and substantial breaches of the Project Agreement;
- (e) power conferred on the franchisee to make bylaws and prosecute offences under the bylaws made under the Bill;
- (f) operation and safety standards of the Cable Car System, including the impact of sudden change of wind speed on the operation of the Cable Car System¹;
- (g) environmental implications of the Cable Car System;
- (h) impacts of the Cable Car System on public transport operators;
- (i) justifications for granting the development rights of both the Cable Car System and the themed cultural village and associated attractions and facilities in Ngong Ping to the same proponent; and

¹ At the request of the Bills Committee, the Administration provided the wind data collected by MTRCL through their temporary wind monitoring stations along the cable car route for the period between December 2002 to February 2003. The information is in Annex A.

- (j) local views on the proposed implementation of the Cable Car System, in particular, Po Lin Monastery, and whether Po Lin Monastery would continue to open its facilities, including the Statue of Buddha to the public upon commencement of the Cable Car System.
6. On 28 May 2003, the Council passed the Tung Chung Cable Car Bill.

Project Agreement with MTR Corporation Limited

7. In November 2003, the Government entered into a Project Agreement with MTRCL for a franchise of 30 years based on a Build-Operate-Transfer model for the finance, design, construction, operation and maintenance of the Cable Car System linking Tung Chung and Ngong Ping on the Lantau Island. The Government also granted the MTRCL a 30-year land lease for the development of complementary tourist facilities in the form of a themed village leading from the Ngong Ping Terminal of the Cable Car System to the core area of Ngong Ping.

8. MTRCL appointed the Skyrail-ITM (Hong Kong) Limited (Skyrail) to operate and manage the whole Project. According to the Administration, Skyrail has experience in operating the Rainforest Cableway in Cairns, Australia, which is considered one of the best ecotourism projects in the world.

9. Skyrail launched a marketing campaign for the Project in April 2005. It announced the new name of the Project as the “Ngong Ping 360”, implying the panoramic views of the North Lantau Country Park, Tung Chung Bay, the Hong Kong International Airport and the Giant Statue of Buddha at Ngong Ping that visitors would enjoy from the Cable Car System. The new name of the Cable Car System is “Ngong Ping Skyrail”, while that of the themed village is the “Ngong Ping Village”.

Tung Chung Cable Car Bylaw

10. In June 2005, the Secretary for the Economic Development and Labour (“the Secretary”) gave notice to move a motion at the Legislative Council meeting of 29 June 2005. The motion sought the Legislative Council’s approval for the Tung Chung Cable Car Bylaw (“the Bylaw”) made by MTRCL under section 22 of the Tung Chung Cable Car Ordinance (Cap. 577).

11. MTRCL proposed to make the Bylaw to achieve the following purposes:
 - (a) provide safety precautions to passengers on the Cable Car System and people in the Cable Car System area;
 - (b) avoid causing any inconvenience or nuisance to other passengers by authorizing MTRCL to manage certain conduct of passengers on the Cable Car System;
 - (c) provide a system for the effective management of the Cable Car System such as the ticketing arrangement and the handling of property found on the Cable Car System and in the Cable Car System area; and
 - (d) provide for proper traffic management in the Cable Car System area such as dealing with vehicles left there and regulating the conduct of drivers and vehicles in the Cable Car System area.

12. A Subcommittee was formed to examine the Bylaw. In the course of deliberation, the Subcommittee had examined, inter alia, the following issues:
 - (a) mechanism for notifying the general public and the travel and tourism trades of any fare adjustments by the operator;
 - (b) refund policy of the operator;
 - (c) conduct of persons on the Cable Car System or in the Cable Car System area;
 - (d) enforcement of the Bylaw; and
 - (e) impact of the Cable Car System on existing public transport services and tourism development in other parts of Lantau.

13. The Council passed the resolution moved by the Secretary on 2 November 2005.

Discussion at Panels

14. The Administration and Skyrail briefed the Panel on Economic Services at its meeting on 24 April 2006 on the preparatory work for the commencement of the Ngong Ping Skyrail, including the ticketing arrangements, pricing strategy, passenger safety, rescue plan, crowd management strategy, impact of the Cable

Car System on other public transport operators, outcome of the discussions with Po Lin Monastery on the commencement and operation of Ngong Ping 360, and environmental measures to safeguard the natural environment of North Lantau. The minutes of the meeting were circulated vide LC Paper No. CB(1) 1497/05-06.

15. The Environmental Affairs Panel also discussed with the Environmental Protection Department and Skyrail on measures to reduce the environmental impacts of the Tung Chung Cable Car Project on the ecology of Ngong Ping and to prevent hill fire associated with the Cable Car System and in country parks at its meetings on 24 April 2006 and 22 May 2006. The minutes of the meetings were circulated vide LC Papers No. CB(1)1534/05-06 and CB(1)1784/05-06 respectively.

Latest development

Deferred opening of Ngong Ping Skyrail

16. The Ngong Ping Skyrail was originally scheduled for opening on 24 June 2006. During the trial run on 17 June 2006, a service interruption incident occurred leading to some passengers being stranded in the cable cars while repair works were in progress. Skyrail subsequently announced the postponement of the launch of the service until further notice.

17. After investigation, Skyrail is of the view that the suspension of service on 17 June 2006 was caused by three technical problems that occurred closely together, namely—

- (a) a fault with the system that controls the spacing of cable cars in Ngong Ping Skyrail Terminal;
- (b) a friction-related problem with the conveyor rail system that transports cable cars around the contour of the Ngong Ping Skyrail Terminal; and
- (c) a failure of the gate leading into the cable car parking area at Ngong Ping Skyrail Terminal which blocked the parking of the cable cars.

18. In reply to an oral question raised by Hon James TIEN at the Council meeting on 28 June 2006, the Secretary advised Members that the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department was examining the report submitted by Skyrail and would monitor closely the tests to be conducted by the operator.

Operation of Ngong Ping Skyrail under inclement weather

19. The operation of Ngong Ping Skyrail under inclement weather is another issue of concern to the public. During the trial run on 8 June 2006, the Cable Car System had temporarily ceased operations due to strong winds exceeding 90 kilometres per hour. Skyrail subsequently issued a press statement on 9 June 2006, providing details of the operations of the Cable Car System in the circumstances of adverse weather conditions, the notification mechanism and refunding arrangements. The press statement is in **Annex B**.

20. According to the design of the Cable Car System, there will be temporary suspensions of the system in the circumstances of adverse weather conditions, including Typhoon Signal No. 8 and above, black rainstorm warning, lightning or strong winds, i.e. wind speed of 90 kilometres per hour persistent wind and 135 kilometres per hour gust wind. On the advice of the Cable Car System manufacturer, Skyrail defines persistent wind speed as the average wind speed over a period of 30 seconds and the gust wind speed over a period of one second. This definition is also adopted by some similar cable car systems overseas. The Administration also clarifies that according to the wind speed data collected at Ngong Ping by the Hong Kong Observatory over the past four years during the operating hours of the cable car, i.e. between 9 am and 6.30 pm, there were on average 7 days in a year (totalling 23 hours) when such wind conditions (i.e. wind speed exceeded 90 kilometres per hour) existed.

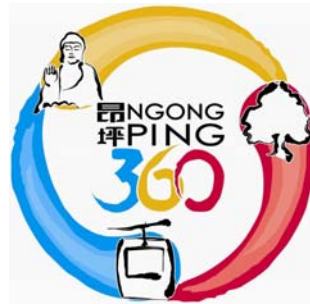
21. As to the decision on whether the operation of the Cable Car System should be temporarily suspended, it will be made by the operator having regard to the safety and comfort of the passengers. Under the Aerial Ropeways (Safety) Ordinance, the operator has the power to suspend the operation on safety grounds. The operator may suspend the cable car service having regard to a host of factors including wind speed.

22. The question raised by Hon James TIEN at the Council meeting on 28 June 2006 and the Administration's reply are in **Annex C**.

Annex A

Wind data from the Temporary Wind Monitoring Stations Collected by MTRCL

Month	Prevailing wind direction (degrees)	Mean wind speed (km/h)	Maximum gust (km/h)
Wind Sensor #1			
Dec-02	50	14	50
Jan-03	60	13	82
Feb-03	180	14	75
Wind Sensor #2			
Dec-02	130	16	45
Jan-03	130	17	81
Feb-03	140	17	71
Wind Sensor #3			
Dec-02	30	19	70
Jan-03	60	17	77
Feb-03	150	21	135
Wind Sensor #4			
Dec-02	150	21	77
Jan-03	90	23	85
Feb-03	150	20	78



Hong Kong, 9 June 2006

**Ngong Ping 360 Media Statement
From Bill Calderwood, Managing Director of Ngong Ping 360**

Ngong Ping Skyrail Operations in Adverse Weather

The safety and comfort of visitors to Ngong Ping 360 are the top priority for Skyrail-ITM (Hong Kong) Ltd., the operators of Ngong Ping 360, whose Australian parent company built and operates the world-famous Skyrail Rainforest Cableway in Cairns, which has operated successfully and safely for over 10 years in similar weather conditions to Hong Kong

Ngong Ping Skyrail will need to temporarily cease operations at times due to adverse weather conditions, including Typhoon Signal No. 8, black rainstorm warning, electrical storms and excessively strong winds.

In the case of electrical storms and strong winds in the local area, Ngong Ping Skyrail will usually be able to resume operations within a short time period.

The decision on whether to temporarily suspend operations of Ngong Ping Skyrail is made by Skyrail-ITM (Hong Kong) Ltd, taking into account all wind indicators, including the speed and direction of the wind as well as the persistence of the wind and wind gusts, rain and other weather conditions

The cableway, its equipment and structures are designed to operate at wind conditions of up to 90kmh persistent wind and 135kmh gust wind. If these wind speeds are exceeded, the operation of the cableway is to cease while these conditions persist.

There may also be rare instances where the decision is taken to cease operations under lower wind conditions depending on the circumstances at the time.

The final decision is always determined by the operating experienced personnel based on ensuring the comfort and safety of our passengers.

Situations that may cause the operator to temporarily halt operations of Ngong Ping Skyrail includes the following:

Typhoon Signal No. 8

When the typhoon signal no. 8 is hoisted, or immediately beforehand, the cableway is to cease operations and the cable cars are returned to the storage area at Tung Chung Terminal

Black Rainstorm Warning

Ngong Ping 360 has no special conditions for amber rainstorm warning and will continue to operate, unless other adverse weather conditions dictate otherwise. In black rain conditions Ngong Ping 360 follows the guideline advice of the Hong Kong Observatory which suggests that individuals refrain from unnecessary travel.

Lightning

In the event of an impending electrical storm in the vicinity of the cableway, operation of the cableway is to cease until the storm has passed. The reason for this is that a lightning strike on the cableway could result in a stoppage, and the first priority is always to ensure that no passengers are stranded on line for a prolonged period. In the unlikely event that passengers were on line during a strike however, they would not be in any danger.

Ngong Ping 360 does not automatically cease operations when there is a thunderstorm warning, only when there is an electrical storm (lightning) associated.

High Winds

High winds and wind direction can affect the behaviour of the cable cars. Because the cableway changes direction and traverses the hills and valleys of the North Lantau Country Park with the alignment changing direction between Tung Chung and Ngong Ping, its behaviour in one area may be different to another. A seemingly favourable wind direction at a certain tower does not mean that there are favourable conditions along the entire route.

The speed that the cabins of Ngong Ping Skyrail move can be decreased to reduce the effects of the wind on the cabins.

Ngong Ping Village will be closed when a Typhoon Signal No. 8 or black rainstorm warning are hoisted.

Duration and Frequency of Stoppages

The frequency of stoppages obviously depends on weather conditions so it is difficult to accurately predict their frequency. However, it is highly unlikely that stoppages caused by strong winds other than typhoon 8 signals would last for a protracted period.

In most cases of strong winds, it is our expectation the Ngong Ping Skyrail service would probably be suspended for less than an hour, so it is highly unlikely to cause frequent protracted delays.

During the period 2002-5, information from the Hong Kong Observatory shows that wind speeds exceeded 90kmh on an average of 56 days per year. However, these speeds generally were not maintained for a protracted period, so this does not in any way mean that Ngong Ping 360 is likely to be suspended for 56 days a year.

Notifying the Public in Case of Suspension

If Ngong Ping Skyrail temporarily ceases its operations, the public will be informed through the following means:

- ☞ Through station notice and public announcement in selected MTR stations
- ☞ Through signage at the Tung Chung Skyrail Terminal and Ngong Ping Skyrail Terminal
- ☞ Through Guest Service officers of Ngong Ping 360
- ☞ Through the Ngong Ping 360 hotline number 2109 9898
- ☞ Where necessary, through news statement to the media and communications to the travel trade, including travel agents
- ☞ On the Ngong Ping 360 website

Alternative Arrangements and Refunds

Should Ngong Ping 360 visitors be unable to enjoy the ticket package due to a temporary halt in Ngong Ping Skyrail operations, Skyrail will offer them the alternative of either coming on another day or refunding them for the unused portion of the ticket. All refunds should be arranged at point of purchase.

Should operations of Ngong Ping Skyrail halt service, complimentary buses will be arranged for visitors who are at Ngong Ping Village to return to Tung Chung.

For travel agents, a change of date or refund is available upon application with the operator.

About Ngong Ping 360

Ngong Ping 360 is a dynamic new tourism experience which combines a stunning 5.7 km cable car journey with an impressive cultural themed Village and easy access to the Tian Tan Buddha Statue, the world's largest, seated, outdoor, bronze Buddha statue.

Ngong Ping 360 is destined to become one of Hong Kong's 'must do' attractions, providing a fully integrated and memorable visitor experience.

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Press Release

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LCQ1:Ngong Ping 360

Following is a question by the Hon James Tien and a reply by the Secretary for Economic Development and Labour, Mr Stephen Ip, in the Legislative Council today (June 28):

Question

The "Ngong Ping 360" cable car service between Tung Chung and Ngong Ping ("Ngong Ping Skyrail") had been suspended when wind speed exceeded 90 kilometres per hour (km/h), and according to the Hong Kong Observatory, there was an average of 55 days with gust equal to or greater than 90 km/h recorded at Ngong Ping in each of the past three years. In addition, following the suspension of the trial run of the Skyrail on June 17, 2006 due to system failure which could not be repaired immediately, the company announced the postponement of the launch of the service. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council if it knows:

- (a) the circumstances that necessitate suspension of service of Ngong Ping Skyrail;
- (b) whether it was envisaged at the initial stage of designing this cable car system that cable car service would have to be suspended under such circumstances; if so, whether the relevant details have been disclosed at that time; if not, of the reasons for that; and
- (c) the contingency measures to be adopted when the cable car service is suspended in the situation mentioned above, including measures for handling the flow of visitors?

Reply

Madam President,

(a) According to the design of the cable car system, there will be temporary suspensions of the system in the circumstances of adverse weather conditions, including Typhoon Signal No. 8 and above, black rainstorm warning, lightning and strong winds, i.e. wind speed of 90 kilometres per hour persistent wind and 135 kilometres per hour gust wind. On the advice of the cable car system manufacturer, the operator, Skyrail defines persistent wind speed as the average wind speed over a

period of 30 seconds and the gust wind speed over a period of one second. This definition is also adopted by some similar cable car systems overseas.

In the case of lightning and strong winds in the local area, the cable car will usually be able to resume service within a short period of time.

The decision on whether to temporarily suspend operation will be made by Skyrail having regard to the safety and comfort of the passengers. Under the Aerial Ropeways (Safety) Ordinance, the operator, Skyrail, has the power to suspend the operation on safety grounds. Skyrail may suspend the cable car service having regard to a host of factors including wind speed. According to the wind speed data collected at Ngong Ping by the Hong Kong Observatory over the past four years during the operating hours of the cable car, i.e. between 9am and 6.30pm, there were on average 7 days in a year (totalling 23 hours) when such wind conditions existed.

As regards the suspension of cable car service during the trial run on June 17, 2006, Skyrail is of the view that the suspension was caused by three technical problems that occurred closely together, namely -

- (i) a fault with the system that controls the spacing of cable cars in Ngong Ping Skyrail Terminal;
- (ii) a friction-related problem with the conveyor rail system that transports cable cars around the contour of the Ngong Ping Skyrail Terminal; and
- (iii) a failure of the gate leading into the cable car parking area at Ngong Ping Skyrail Terminal which blocked the parking of the cable cars.

Skyrail has submitted a report on the incident to the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department. The Department is now examining the report and will monitor closely the tests to be conducted by Skyrail on the cable car system.

(b) When the Government introduced the Tung Chung Cable Car Bill to the Legislative Council in 2003, we pointed out that the operation and safety standards of cable car systems were regulated by the Aerial Ropeways (Safety) Ordinance. We pointed out to the Bills Committee that the design submissions from the MTR Corporation Limited indicated that the cable car system was designed to cope

with the prevailing weather conditions of Hong Kong. The Bills Committee examined the safety requirements for the operation of the cable car system under inclement weather, including requirements to reduce the speed or to stop the operation of the system under specified conditions. The Bills Committee noted that the operation and safety standards of the Cable Car System would be regulated by the Aerial Ropeways (Safety) Ordinance. The MTR Corporation Limited had also informed the Legislative Council of the wind data collected at that time.

(c) Skyrail has formulated a rescue plan and a transport contingency plan to deal with suspension of the cable car service.

When the rescue plan is activated, the Fire Services Department, the Government Flying Service and the Civil Aid Service will provide assistance as appropriate. Staff of the Fire Services Department have already received intensive training under the rescue plan. Upon the opening of "Ngong Ping 360", Skyrail and the Fire Services Department will also organise regular on the job training for their staff to familiarise themselves with the rescue operation.

The transport contingency plan outlines the steps to be taken, including relief buses to take visitors from the Ngong Ping Village to Tung Chung. Upon notification by Skyrail of cable car service suspension, the Transport Department will closely monitor the operation of bus service at Ngong Ping including the relief bus service; and arrange publicity for the traffic and transport arrangements from time to time. The Police will also increase its manpower for traffic and crowd control measures.

During suspension of the cable car service, the MTR Corporation Limited and Skyrail will post signage and notices in the MTR network and at the Tung Chung and Ngong Ping Skyrail Terminals. Skyrail will deploy its staff on site to explain the situation to visitors. It will also disseminate information through the "Ngong Ping 360" hotline, its website, press statements and communication with the travel trade.

Ends/Wednesday, June 28, 2006

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