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Panel on Transport **Meeting on 26 February 2010**

Background brief on the provision of hillside escalator links and elevator systems

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the policy of provision of hillside escalator links and elevator systems for uphill areas in Hong Kong. It also summarizes the views expressed by members of the Panel on Transport (the Panel) on the subject.

Background

The pilot scheme - the Central Mid-Levels Escalator Link

2. Opened in October 1993, the Central Mid-Levels Escalator Link between Central and the Mid-Levels is the first of its kind in Hong Kong. The Escalator Link was built as a pilot scheme to enable the cost-effectiveness of mechanized walkway system to be properly assessed. The escalator starts at Des Voeux Road Central, passes through narrow streets and ends at Conduit Road. It is a transit link for residents of the Mid-Levels.

3. A "Before and After" Study of the Escalator Link carried out by the Administration in 1994 concluded that the Escalator Link had promoted walking and relieved the pressure on public transport services. However, it had not induced motorists to give up driving to the extent of reducing traffic congestion in the area.

Study on the benefits of cost-effectiveness of the Escalator Link

4. In 1996, the Public Accounts Committee of the Legislative Council raised the need for an assessment study of the cost-effectiveness of the Escalator Link. The Administration subsequently conducted such a study in 1997. The Study results revealed that it was difficult to quantify the social benefits of the Escalator Link and its economic return. Nevertheless, rough calculations showed that the

economic return of the Escalator Link was low, and such return was expected to diminish over time. While the Escalator Link could not be considered as cost-effective, it did benefit over 35 000 people a day in 1999. It also indirectly benefited other road users by providing some relief in terms of road space, although the reality was that roads had become more congested as a result of intensified housing development in the Mid-Levels. The Escalator Link had also stimulated development along its catchment area.

5. An investigation conducted by the Planning Department on escalator link system in 1999 found that escalator links had the following benefits -

- (a) the links could improve pedestrian accessibility to the uphill areas;
- (b) the links could encourage the travelling habit of walking which is environmentally friendly and would reduce the reliance on vehicular transport, especially for hillside areas with severe physical constraints for building additional road links;
- (c) if an escalator link was located near a railway station, it would expand the catchment area of the station; and
- (d) the links would minimize potential conflicts between vehicular and pedestrian traffic, thus enhancing the safety, convenience and comfort of pedestrians.

6. In view of these benefits, the Administration considered it desirable to embark on new escalator links/elevator systems for the development of an environmentally friendly and sustainable system of pedestrian facilities, as advocated in the Chief Executive's 1999 Policy Address and the Third Comprehensive Transport Study.

Criteria for provision of hillside escalator links and elevator systems

7. On 15 March 2002, the Administration briefed the Panel on the criteria for identifying the locations for the provision of escalator links/elevator systems. These criteria are -

- (a) the catchment area should either be reasonably populated, or there exists a commercial element which could be further enhanced to attract users;
- (b) there should be a steady flow of users throughout the day (areas where usage is confined to certain short periods of the day, such as school area, did not alone justify the provision of the system);
- (c) the gradient of the area should be steep;
- (d) priority should be given to systems that can connect areas to railway

stations or major public transport interchanges;

- (e) environmental considerations (e.g. whether the provision can encourage the habit of walking which is environmentally friendly and reduce the reliance on vehicular transport);
- (f) consideration would also be given to developed areas with severe physical constraints for building additional road links or expanding public transport services, and yet where major re-development schemes are anticipated to generate substantial traffic demand; and
- (g) social benefits arising from the provision of escalator links/elevator systems (e.g. beneficial effects on those with disabilities, the elderly and tourists).

8. These criteria were intended to be general guidelines and each case would be considered on its individual merits, having regard to resource considerations. The Administration informed the Panel that using these criteria, the Centre Street in the Western District and Fortress Hill in the Eastern District were identified as two potential locations for the installation of escalator links/elevators.

9. Panel members welcomed the Administration's initiative to provide escalator links and elevator systems, and called on the Administration to draw up an implementation programme on a territory-wide basis, taking into account the social and economic benefits of the proposed scheme, and the cost effectiveness of individual projects. The Panel also made suggestions to improve the design of the two proposed systems.

Territory-wide review on provision of escalator links/elevator systems

10. At the request of the Panel, the Administration agreed to conduct a comprehensive review on the provision of escalator links/elevator systems for uphill areas on a territory-wide basis. The Administration subsequently provided an information paper (LC Paper No. CB(1)2130/01-02(04)) to the Panel in June 2002. The Administration planned to commission a consultant to carry out a study in December 2002, and would consult the relevant District Councils in the course of the study. The study would cover the establishment of objectives for the provision of escalator links/elevator systems and selection criteria for identifying suitable locations for further detailed study.

Proposed assessment system for provision of hillside escalator links and elevator systems

11. The Chief Executive announced in the 2008 Policy Address that an assessment system would be established for the provision of hillside escalator links and elevator systems in view of the growing number of requests from the public for

these pedestrian facilities. The proposed assessment system aims at providing a more comprehensive set of objectives and transparent evaluation criteria in determining the merits and priority of proposals on hillside escalator links and elevator systems.

12. The Administration informed the Panel on 22 May 2009 that the Transport Department had commissioned a consultancy study to establish the proposed assessment system. With reference to the seven assessment criteria for the provision of hillside escalator links and elevator systems (paragraph 7 refers) which were presented to the Panel in March 2002, the consultant proposed an assessment system comprising an initial screening and a scoring system.

13. The proposed initial screening helps screen out proposals which are obviously infeasible or unjustifiable for implementation. Proposals which pass the proposed initial screening will be evaluated by a scoring system based on the following criteria -

(a) Circumstantial factors

- (i) existing population / employment within catchment¹;
- (ii) existing population of 65 year-old or above within catchment;
- (iii) topographical conditions, i.e. steep gradient / level difference;
- (iv) connectivity with other existing / committed pedestrian facilities;
- (v) connectivity with existing / committed mass public transport facilities within catchment;
- (vi) connectivity with existing / committed centres of activity within catchment;
- (vii) steadiness of existing pedestrian flow;

(b) Beneficial factors

- (viii) revitalization of / benefits to local community;
- (ix) journey time / cost saving;
- (x) improvement to existing traffic conditions;
- (xi) improvement to existing pedestrian conditions;

¹ Catchment is defined as the area within the radius of 300 metres from every entrance/access point of the proposed facility.

- (xii) road safety;
- (xiii) tourism promotion;
- (c) Implementation factors
 - (xiv) land requirement;
 - (xv) technical / environmental constraints; and cost-effectiveness.

14. According to the relative importance of these three sets of evaluation factors, weightings of 40, 35 and 25 are allocated to the factors respectively to form a total score of 100. Higher scores will be given to a proposal which is comparatively more beneficial, ready for construction and cost-effective. Based on the scores obtained, the relative rankings among various proposals will be determined. Those proposals with higher rankings will have priority to proceed to the next stage of planning and investigation to ascertain their technical feasibility, and to be followed by public engagement exercises as necessary.

15. The Panel discussed the proposed assessment system with the Administration, and also received views from deputations comprising representatives of community organizations in Choi Hung, Lai King, Tseung Kwan O (TKO) and Choi Wan. These deputations generally welcomed the proposed assessment system but urged for the provision of escalator links and elevators for the uphill residential areas in their respective districts to enhance connectivity between those areas and MTR stations as well as district facilities. Panel members generally found the proposed evaluation criteria agreeable while raising the following concerns and suggestions -

- (a) places where public housing estates (PHEs) clustered should be accorded priority for consideration under the assessment system;
- (b) the criteria of "revitalization of/benefits to local community" and "tourism promotion" should not rank too high as these criteria might work to the disadvantage of proposals involving residential areas where normally did not have much scope for tourism promotion/revitalization. The criterion of "connectivity with existing/committed mass public transport facilities within catchment" should also be modified in such a way that housing estates outside the radius of 500 metres of a MTR station within the same district could also be considered for provision of hillside escalator links/elevators as necessary. A case in point was Hong Sing Garden in TKO where such pedestrian facilities connecting with TKO Station were much needed to enhance the connectivity;
- (c) hillside escalator links and elevators should be provided for places with conspicuous needs as soon as possible. These places included Kwong Fai Circuit in Kwai Chung Estate, the Kwai Chung Integrated

Rehabilitation Services Centre at Kwai Shing Circuit, and PHEs in the uphill areas of Kwai Ching and Lai King where residents were mostly old and poor;

- (d) flexibility should be allowed in considering provision of escalator links/elevators in certain school area such as in Braemar Hill notwithstanding the criterion requiring "a steady flow of users *throughout* the day". The traffic flow arising from the schools in Braemar Hill had indeed caused serious traffic congestion during the morning peak hours; and
- (e) residents would benefit more from the provision of hillside escalator links and elevators, if such facilities were provided together with covered walkways and greening facilities.

16. The Administration's responses to members' views were as follows -

- (a) as PHEs entailed high population and a relatively large size of elderly population, which were amongst the evaluation criteria, a proposal involving PHE clusters should score high marks under the assessment system;
- (b) in giving scores to proposals under the assessment system, residents' needs and practical difficulty in the use of MTR service would be taken into consideration;
- (c) the provision of hillside escalator links and elevators should satisfy the evaluation criteria of "steadiness of existing pedestrian flow" and "achieving cost-effectiveness". The Administration was confident that the priorities of all relevant requests would be determined objectively under the proposed assessment system;
- (d) the Transport Department would take into account the traffic impact caused by school area to its nearby places under the proposed assessment system; and
- (e) where development of new pedestrian facilities was planned, consideration would be given to the provision of covered links. Retrofitting of cover for existing walkways would, however, be examined on a case-by-case basis taking into account technical constraints and resource implications.

17. As for the time frame of the assessment exercise, the Administration advised that there was a great demand in districts for provision of hillside escalator links and elevators. While the Administration aimed at finalizing the proposed assessment system as soon as possible, it would take about six months to conduct assessments of proposals that had been received. The Administration undertook to provide the assessment outcome when available.

Latest developments

18. The Administration has proposed to update the Panel on the finalized assessment system and the assessment outcome at the Panel meeting scheduled for 26 February 2010.

Relevant papers

19. A list of relevant papers is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
23 February 2010

Provision of hillside escalator links and elevator systems
List of relevant papers

Panel	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Transport (TP)	15 March 2002	Administration's paper on Provision of Escalator Link/Elevator System (LC Paper No. CB(1)1266/01-02(03)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr01-02/english/panels/tp/papers/tp0315cb1-1266-3e.pdf Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. CB(1)1517/01-02) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr01-02/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp020315.pdf
TP	--	Administration's paper on Territory-wide Review on Provision of Escalator Links/Elevator Systems (LC Paper No. CB(1)2130/01-02(04)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr01-02/english/panels/tp/papers/tp0315cb1-2130-4e.pdf
TP	--	Administration's paper on Fortress Hill Pedestrian Link (LC Paper No. CB(1)1926/03-04(01)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr03-04/english/panels/tp/papers/tpcb1-1926-1e.pdf
TP	22 May 2009	Administration's paper on Establishment of an assessment system for provision of hillside escalator links and elevator systems (LC Paper No. CB(1)1613/08-09(06)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/tp/papers/tp0522cb1-1613-6-e.pdf Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. CB(1)2756/08-09) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp20090522.pdf

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