

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)2491/11-12
(These minutes have been seen by
the Administration)

Ref : CB1/PL/TP/1

Panel on Transport

**Minutes of meeting held on
Thursday, 12 April 2012, at 8:30 am
in Conference Room 3 of the Legislative Council Complex**

- Members present** :
- Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo (Chairman)
 - Hon CHEUNG Hok-ming, GBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
 - Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, SBS, S.B.St.J., JP
 - Hon LAU Kong-wah, JP
 - Hon Miriam LAU Kin-ye, GBS, JP
 - Hon LI Fung-ying, SBS, JP
 - Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
 - Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
 - Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, GBS, JP
 - Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
 - Hon KAM Nai-wai, MH
 - Hon Starry LEE Wai-king, JP
 - Hon CHAN Hak-kan
 - Hon WONG Sing-chi
 - Hon IP Wai-ming, MH
 - Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP
 - Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
 - Hon Tanya CHAN
 - Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
- Member attending** : Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun, JP

Member absent : Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP

Public Officers attending : **Agenda item III**

Ms Eva CHENG, GBS, JP
Secretary for Transport and Housing

Ms Rebecca PUN Ting-ting, JP
Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing
(Transport)2

Mr José YAM Ho-san
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport and
Housing(Transport)4

Miss LUI Ying
Deputy Commissioner/Transport Services &
Management (Acting)
Transport Department

Mr LEUNG Kin-man
Assistant Director/Railways
Electrical and Mechanical Services Department

Agenda item IV

Mr YAU Shing-mu, JP
Under Secretary for Transport and Housing

Mr Patrick CHAN, JP
Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing
(Transport) 3

Miss Erica NG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport and
Housing (Transport) 2

Mr CHEUNG Yat-cheong
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (Fire Safety)
Fire Services Department

Mr LO Chun-man
Divisional Commander (New Territories South)
Fire Services Department

Mr LEUNG Wing-lim
Assistant Director (New Works)
Water Supplies Department

Mr Alfred YAU Kwan-wai
Assistant Director (New Territories Region)
Highways Department

Mr Albert SU Yau-on
Assistant Commissioner (Management &
Paratransit)
Transport Department

Attendance by invitation : Agenda item III

Mr Jay Herbert WALDER
Chief Executive Officer
MTR Corporation Limited

Ms Jeny YEUNG
Commercial Director
MTR Corporation Limited

Mrs Miranda LEUNG
General Manager – Corporate Relations
MTR Corporation Limited

Agenda item IV

Mr Stephanus SHOU W L
Director/Hong Kong
Black & Veatch Hong Kong Limited

Clerk in attendance: Ms Joanne MAK
Chief Council Secretary (1)2

Staff in attendance : Ms Macy NG
Senior Council Secretary (1)2

Miss Ariel SHUM
Clerical Assistant (1)2

Action

I Information papers issued since last meeting

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------|---|
| (LC Paper
CB(1)1274/11-12(01) | No. - | Memorandum referring to the Panel the views expressed by Kwun Tong District Council members on the heavy pedestrian flow and inadequate transport facilities in Kowloon Bay, and the Administration's responses |
| LC Paper
CB(1)1335/11-12(01) | No. - | Press release issued by KMB announcing operating loss for the year 2011 |
| LC Paper
CB(1)1382/11-12(01) | No. - | Referral from the former Subcommittee on the Six Orders Made under Section 5(1) of the Public Bus Services Ordinance and Gazetted on 20 January 2012 |
| LC Paper
CB(1)1472/11-12(01) | No. - | Information paper entitled "Legislative amendments relating to disabled person's parking permits" provided by the Administration |
| LC Paper
CB(1)1446/11-12(01) | No. - | Administration's response to a submission from a member of the public on the permitted operating areas for New Territories taxis |
| LC Paper
CB(1)1485/11-12(01) | No. - | Information paper entitled "Maintenance of high speed roads in Hong Kong" provided by the Administration |
| LC Paper
CB(1)1485/11-12(02) | No. - | Information paper entitled "Amendments to by-laws of Build-Operate-Transfer tunnels" provided by the Administration |
| LC Paper
CB(1)1481/11-12(01) | No. - | Information paper on latest progress of the negotiations with New World First Bus Services Limited, Long Win Bus Company Limited and Citybus Limited on new franchises |

LC Paper No. - provided by the Administration
CB(1)1504/11-12(01) - Administration's paper entitled
"Access to franchised buses for
persons carrying oxygen cylinders for
self-medical use")

Members noted the above papers issued since the last meeting.

II Items for discussion at the next meeting

(LC Paper No. - List of outstanding items for
CB(1)1488/11-12(01) discussion
LC Paper No. - List of follow-up actions)
CB(1)1488/11-12(02)

2. Members agreed to discuss the following items proposed by the Administration at the next regular meeting on 10 May 2012 –

- (a) franchises of New World First Bus Services Limited, Long Win Bus Company Limited and Citybus Limited (Franchise for Airport and North Lantau Bus Network); and
- (b) reversing video device on new goods vehicle.

Clerk 3. The Chairman proposed and members agreed to also discuss "Tow truck accident in Eastern Street" at the next regular meeting. .

(Post-meeting note: The meeting was subsequently rescheduled to 24 May 2012 at 8:30 am.)

III Adjustment to MTR fares and the Fare Adjustment Mechanism of the MTR Corporation Limited

(LC Paper No. - Administration's paper entitled
CB(1)1488/11-12(03) "Adjustment to MTR fares in 2012
and Fare Adjustment Mechanism of
MTR Corporation Limited"
LC Paper No. - MTRCL's paper entitled
CB(1)1488/11-12(04) "Adjustment to MTR fares in 2012"
LC Paper No. - Updated background brief prepared
CB(1)1488/11-12(05) by the Legislative Council
Secretariat

LC Papers CB(1)1488/11-12(06) CB(1)1541/11-12(01)	Nos. - and	Letters dated 29 March and 10 April 2012 from Hon LAU Kong-wah
LC Paper CB(1)1541/11-12(02)	No. -	Submission from Neighbourhood and Worker's Service Centre
LC Paper CB(1)1541/11-12(03)	No. -	Submission from Neighbourhood and Worker's Service Centre – District Council Member WONG Yun-tat's Office
LC Paper CB(1)1541/11-12(04)	No. -	Submission from North District Employment Concern Group
LC Paper CB(1)1541/11-12(05)	No. -	Submission from Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong – Diocesan Pastoral Centre for Workers (New Territories))

4. Secretary for Transport and Housing (STH) and Chief Executive Officer of MTRCL (CEO/MTRCL) briefed members on the salient points of the papers provided by the Administration and MTRCL respectively on this item. They advised that following the publication on 26 March 2012 by the Census and Statistics Department of the change in the Nominal Wage Index (Transportation Section) (Wage Index) for December 2011 over the same month in the previous year, MTRCL had announced that MTR fares would be adjusted by an overall +5.4% in accordance with the Fare Adjustment Mechanism (FAM) in June 2012.

(Post-meeting note: CEO/MTRCL's speaking note tabled at the meeting was issued vide LC Paper No. CB(1)1582/11-12(02)).

5. In response to Mr LAU Kong-wah's enquiry, STH said that the Administration's written response to Mr LAU's request for information as stated in his letters (LC Papers Nos. CB(1)1488/11-12(06) and CB(1)1541/11-12(01)) was under preparation and would be provided in due course.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's response was issued vide LC Paper No. CB(1)2220/11-12 on 21 June 2012.)

Discussion

Adjustment to MTR fares in 2012

6. Panel members in general expressed strong dissatisfaction with the 2012 fare adjustment and highlighted the public resentment against the fare increase. Members including Ms Miriam LAU, Mr WONG Kwok-hing, Mr Ronny TONG, Ms Starry LEE, Mr CHAN Hak-kan, Mr WONG Sing-chi, Mr IP Wai-ming and Mr Albert CHAN expressed objection to the 2012 fare adjustment on the following grounds -

- (a) the public was generally dissatisfied with the service standard of MTR given the frequent occurrence of railway incidents, the seriously over-crowded condition of MTR trains, and the lack of progress in retrofitting of automatic platform gates on the East Rail Line and the Ma On Shan Line as well as in providing public toilets at certain MTR stations;
- (b) FAM had failed to take into account the huge profits made by MTRCL. It was most unacceptable that while MTRCL had made about \$12 billion and \$14.7 billion profits in 2010 and 2011 respectively (in which about \$3 to \$4 billion per year was made from property developments since 2008), it still sought to increase its fares this year, and the rate of fare increase in 2012 was even the highest since the implementation of FAM in 2009. Some members opined that MTR had already benefited from the Government's policy of using railways as the backbone of Hong Kong's transport system and had thus become the most popular mode of public transport in Hong Kong. MTRCL therefore should not seek to maximize its profits by increasing fares in strict accordance with the rate calculated under FAM; and
- (c) the rate of fare increase this year (5.4%) had far exceeded the affordability of the general public as the wage increases of many sectors were below that rate and could not catch up with the fare increase rate. Given the huge profits that MTRCL had made, the revenue that could be derived from the fare increase this year would be insignificant compared with its high profit level.

7. In response, STH made the following points –

- (a) before the rail merger in December 2007, the then MTRCL and Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation had fare autonomy. It was in the context of the rail merger exercise that MTRCL agreed that in response to public demand, the post-merger corporation should adopt FAM for determining future fare adjustments in place of fare autonomy to achieve greater transparency and predictability in fare adjustment. FAM had been extensively discussed in the Legislative Council (LegCo) as part of the rail merger, and approved by independent shareholders of MTRCL after much consideration and deliberation;
- (b) under the current FAM, the fare adjustment rate for the prevailing year was determined in accordance with a direct-drive formula linked to the year-on-year percentage changes in both the Composite Consumer Price Index (CCPI), and the Wage Index in December of the previous year, as well as a productivity factor;
- (c) according to the FAM procedures laid down in the Operating Agreement (OA) signed between the Government and MTRCL in August 2007, MTRCL was required to provide the Government with two certificates issued by an independent third party to certify that its fare adjustment was in compliance with FAM. It was also required to formally notify the Panel and the Transport Advisory Committee three weeks prior to the implementation of the new fares. As OA was a legally binding document, the Government would act in accordance with the mechanism and ensure that MTRCL complied with the relevant accounting and notification requirements; and
- (d) given the relatively high inflation rate at present, the Government shared the public view that MTRCL should, apart from considering its commercial operations, give due regard to its corporate social responsibility. The Government had urged MTRCL to take into account the overall macro-economic environment and implement more and various effective fare concessions so as to address the needs of passengers and alleviate their burden of travelling expenses.

8. The Deputy Chairman and Mr WONG Sing-chi recalled that during discussion on the rail merger by the bills committee concerned, the Administration had advised members that the merger would achieve synergy and would benefit passengers by bringing about better services, more efficient deployment of resources, and fare reductions as MTRCL would have to reduce fares under specified circumstances under FAM. However, since the adoption of FAM, only MTRCL itself had benefited from the rail merger for it had led to a surge in demand for railway services by enhancing the convenience to passengers. Together with the effect of the individual visit scheme, the patronage of MTR had been increasing, contributing to profits of about \$0.27 billion from transport operations.

9. STH and CEO/MTRCL pointed out that MTRCL had reduced its fares immediately after the rail merger. Such reductions included a minimum of 10% decrease in Octopus fares for long-haul trips; a minimum of 5% decrease in Octopus fares for mid-haul trips; and a commitment to freeze its fares in the first two years following the merger until 30 June 2009. At the time of the rail merger in December 2007, MTR passengers benefitted from a general fare reduction that amounted to more than \$600 million per year. STH added that FAM was not introduced until 2009 after the merger, and the first fare increase was implemented in 2010.

10. Many members criticized the Government, being the major shareholder of MTRCL, for failing to monitor the level of MTR fares or to steer MTRCL to scrapping the fare increase. Mr WONG Kwok-hing considered it unacceptable that on the one hand the Government had to spend several billion of dollars to introduce economic relief measures in the budget proposals, it had on the other hand allowed MTRCL to considerably increase its fares. Mr WONG considered that the Administration should negotiate with MTRCL for its agreement to shelve its fare increase in consideration of the inflationary environment. Mr Ronny TONG opined that MTRCL was not forbidden under the law from scrapping the fare increase or reducing the increase rate as MTRCL should have full autonomy on the matter. Mrs Regina IP echoed Mr TONG's view.

11. In response, STH reiterated that as FAM formed part of the merger agreement between MTRCL and the Government and was legally binding, it should be followed and respected. She pointed out that while the Government was the major shareholder of MTRCL, the interests of all other shareholders had to be taken care of as well. She added that the Government had urged MTRCL to take into account the overall economic environment and introduce various additional and effective fare concessions to address the specific needs of the passengers and lessen their expenditure on public

transport, in order to strike a balance between MTRCL's commercial interests and its corporate social responsibility.

Review of FAM

12. In response to members' enquiries about the approach for conducting the review of FAM and the relevant timetable, STH said that the arrangement for review of the mechanism every five years was laid down during the rail merger. The Administration would carry out a review on FAM together with MTRCL in the second half of 2012, with a view to completing the exercise by end 2012/early 2013. To better prepare for the review, the Administration had engaged a consultant to conduct a thorough and objective study on the existing FAM and how it might be improved. The consultant had been asked to consider, inter alia, whether and how new elements, such as MTRCL's operational costs and profit level, its operational efficiency and service performance, as well as the affordability of general public, should be introduced to the formula. Recommendations made therein would serve as the Administration's reference in the upcoming review.

13. In response to Mrs Regina IP's enquiry about the productivity factor in the FAM formula, STH said that the rate of the productivity factor had been thoroughly discussed in the community and LegCo. Coupling with the immediate reduction in fares after the rail merger, the rate of 0.1% starting from the sixth year was set according to the expected synergy achieved.

14. Given the frequent occurrence of railway incidents in recent years, several members including the Deputy Chairman, Mrs Regina IP, Ms LI Fung-ying and Mr CHAN Hak-kan suggested that rail service performance should be added as one of the components to be introduced to the formula under FAM. They further suggested that the Administration should consider apportioning blame for railway incidents or setting up a demerit system.

15. STH responded that the proposal of apportioning blame for the incidents or setting up a demerit system would be considered in the course of the FAM review. Having said that, STH pointed out that the Administration would also bear in mind that any suggestion should not unnecessarily incur additional pressure on frontline railway staff, so that it would not bring about any adverse impact on railway safety checks and emergency repairs in their attempt to avoid points being deducted when carrying out repair works within tight timeframes. STH added that in fact, the Chief Executive-in-Council could impose on MTRCL a financial penalty for failure to comply with any provision of the Mass Transit Railway Ordinance (Cap. 556) or the OA.

16. Members including Mr Jeffrey LAM, Miss Tanya CHAN, Mr IP Wai-ming, Mr WONG Sing-chi, Ms Miriam LAU, Ms LI Fung-ying, Mrs Regina IP and Dr Priscilla LEUNG made further suggestions of improving FAM as follows –

- (a) the public affordability and non-fare revenues of MTRCL, such as the considerable revenue generated to MTRCL from property development, rental of commercial premises in MTR stations and property management, should also be taken into account;
- (b) under FAM, the fare adjustment rate for the prevailing year was determined in accordance with a direct-drive formula linked to, among others, the year-on-year percentage changes in both the Composite Consumer Price Index (CCPI) and the Wage Index. As a result, it was observed that the higher the inflation rate, the higher the Wage Index and the higher the increase was in MTR fares. It should also be noted that CCPI reflected to a large extent movement in food prices (i.e. this component made up about 27% of CCPI) which might not be relevant to MTR fares; and
- (c) due to inflation, the public might not benefit from any real wage increase. It was more appropriate for FAM to make reference to real wage increases in its calculation.

17. STH said that the views and comments expressed by members would be taken into full account during the FAM review. STH reiterated that at the time of the rail merger, the establishment of FAM and the elements contained in its formula were thoroughly discussed and considered by the community and LegCo. The formula of FAM was simple and transparent. It was also considered that CCPI reflected to a certain extent the macro-economic environment of Hong Kong whereas the Wage Index reflected the staff cost of MTRCL. She said that the FAM review would study the availability of other indices, such as the median household income, which might better reflect the economic situation and the public affordability. CEO/MTRCL said that since the announcement of MTRCL about its fare increase on 26 March 2012, the Corporation had heard many views expressed on the fare adjustment and the mechanism itself. He further said that while it would be inappropriate for him to prejudge the recommendations which would be made by the consultant, MTRCL would be happy to participate in the FAM review with the Administration in an open and constructive manner.

Proposals to mitigate the impacts of fare increase

18. Members enquired about the fare concessions that MTRCL would provide to its passengers. Mr WONG Sing-chi urged MTRCL to allocate the additional profits earned in 2011, which amounted to \$2.7 billion, to offer fare concessions. Members further made the following specific proposals on fare concessions which MTRCL should provide –

- (a) monthly passes, particularly for Tung Chung Line, should be introduced;
- (b) the fare concessions to elderly passengers, which were currently provided on Wednesdays, Saturdays and public holidays (excluding Sundays), should be extended to all days. Alternatively, MTRCL could consider reducing the fares to \$1 or offering free rides to elderly passengers;
- (c) passengers should be offered "same day return half-fare concessions" on all routes or long-haul routes;
- (d) "staggered hours discounts" should be reintroduced, and the current student travel scheme should be extended to also include those postsecondary students aged 25 or above;
- (e) MTRCL should introduce short-haul trip discounts and "Ride 10 Get 1 Free", add more fare savers in major estates, and expand the current interchange scheme with bus companies; and
- (f) MTRCL should implement fare reductions.

19. In response, CEO/MTRCL made the following points:

- (a) MTRCL had been continuously offering fare concessions and promotions to its passengers, amounting to more than \$1.7 billion in 2011. While those promotions aimed to thank passengers for their support and encourage further usage of the railway, they also helped offset the cost of transport for frequent customers. In addition to specific programmes offered to members of society with greater needs such as the elderly, students and people with disabilities, MTRCL had offered concessions for all passengers, such as the promotion of "Ride \$100 Get 1 Free";

- (b) based on the views that MTRCL had heard, MTRCL would be looking even harder at the promotions which it would offer in 2012. MTRCL was working to come up with a package of promotions that passengers would find attractive, practical and effective; and
- (c) MTRCL aimed to finalise the promotion package soon and to announce the package in May 2012.

20. Ms Starry LEE asked whether the Administration would consider using the dividends received by the Government as the major shareholder of MTRCL to set up a fare stabilization fund to moderate the rate of MTR fare increases. The Chairman said that there were views that FAM was objective and it also had the merit that MTRCL would have to reduce fares in circumstances such as deflation. He, however, considered that the Administration should also consider the establishment of a fare stabilization fund, with part of its proceeds from property development and other non-fare revenue, to moderate the rate of fare increase during inflation so that the burden of transport cost on the general public could be alleviated. Mr Albert CHAN considered that the Government should return its dividends to MTRCL so as to avert the fare increase in 2012.

21. In response, STH said that the suggestion of Mr Albert CHAN and the proposal of setting up a fare stabilization fund were not in keeping with the general framework of public finance management, according to which income received for the purposes of the Government should be paid into the general revenue, and withdrawal of money from the general revenue should be subject to the approval of the Finance Committee of the LegCo and in accordance with policy priority. In addition, if a fare stabilization fund which automatically took care of losses and deficits was set up, it might discourage public transport operators' incentives to use the resources efficiently. As such, the proposal had to be carefully considered.

Enhancement of facilities in MTR stations

22. Ms Miriam LAU said while MTRCL had committed over \$1 billion to introduce the "Listening • Responding" programme to improve the convenience and comfort of travel, it had not made sufficient efforts to respond to passengers' requests for various improvements to station facilities, such as provision of public toilets, facilities enabling passengers to receive radio broadcasting at MTR stations, and retrofitting APGs in stations.

23. CEO/MTRCL stressed that the most important thing for the long term reliability of the transit system was investment in the railway, and Hong Kong had invested more than any other cities in the world in such aspect. He stressed that MTRCL was dedicated to operating a safe, reliable and efficient railway service for Hong Kong people. Further, a series of new facilities and designs in stations of new railway projects would be rolled out by MTRCL.

Motion

24. After discussion, Mr CHAN Hak-kan moved the following motion, which was seconded by Mr IP Wai-ming –

"港鐵公司在有過百億的巨額盈餘下，仍然瘋狂加價5.4%，是罔顧民生，本會要求港鐵公司，立即擱置加價。"

(Translation)

"That as MTRCL has still introduced a crazy fare increase of 5.4% in total disregard for people's livelihood despite its huge surplus of over \$10 billion, this Panel requests MTRCL to immediately shelve its fare increase."

25. The Chairman put the motion to vote. Ten members voted for and no member voted against it. The Chairman declared that the motion was carried.

26. Mr Albert CHAN moved the following motion, which was seconded by Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung –

"本會要求政府向港鐵退回九億元的利潤，以抵銷今年加價的額外收入，並藉此取消今年加價5.4%的決定。"

(Translation)

"That this Panel requests the Government to return its dividends of \$900 million to MTRCL for off-setting the additional revenue to be generated by the fare increase this year, so that the decision on increasing fare by 5.4% this year can be abolished."

27. The Chairman put the motion to vote. Ten members voted for and no member voted against it. The Chairman declared that the motion was carried.

Admin 28. The Chairman requested the Administration and MTRCL to reconsider the MTR fare adjustment in 2012 taking into account the motions passed by the Panel. Members also agreed to hold a special meeting to receive public views on the MTR fare adjustment.

Clerk

(Post-meeting note: The special meeting was scheduled for 7 May 2012 at 4:30 pm.)

IV The fire incident of Lion Rock Tunnel and fire prevention in tunnels in Hong Kong

LC Paper CB(1)1488/11-12(07)	No. - Administration's paper entitled "Fire Service Equipment and Contingency Plans of Road Tunnels — Fire at Lion Rock Tunnel on 8 March 2012"
LC Paper CB(1)1488/11-12(08)	No. - Information note on the fire incident of Lion Rock Tunnel and fire prevention in tunnels in Hong Kong prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat)

29. Due to shortage of time, the Chairman said that the Administration's Powerpoint presentation for this item would be skipped. Members noted that the Administration's paper had provided information on the fire service installations and equipment (FSI) at road tunnels in Hong Kong and the contingency plans in place. The paper also provided details of the fire incident that occurred inside the south-bound tube of the Lion Rock Tunnel (LRT) on 8 March 2012 and the progress of investigation of the incident.

The fire incident at LRT

30. Mr LAU Kong-wah recalled that there had been some serious accidents occurred at LRT which had aroused concerns of members and the public about the disruptions caused to commuters and the safety conditions of LRT. In response to those concerns, the Administration had introduced a series of improvement measures and one of which was the installation of drencher system. Mr LAU queried why the system was not actuated during the fire incident at LRT and expressed concern on the safety of LRT, which had been built for many years.

31. Deputy Chief Fire Officer (Fire Safety) (DCFO(FS)) of Fire Services Department (FSD) explained that drencher system could isolate the fire and prevent it from spreading inside the tubes, giving tunnel users more time to

evacuate from the tunnel safely. He further said that the fire that occurred on 8 March 2012 originated from an underground utility chamber housing the water mains and the smoke was transmitted to the tunnel tube through the vent holes. During that time, there was no vehicle inside the tube as it was temporarily closed for carrying out water mains rehabilitation work. Based on the above reasons, on-scene FSD officers considered that there was no need to actuate the system, as the drencher water sprays could not check the spread of the underground fire, and might affect the fire fighting work of FSD by containing the smoke inside the tunnel. Under Secretary for Transport and Housing (USTH) supplemented that the Administration had taken a series of improvement measures to enhance the safety at LRT in response to the incidents occurred previously. He pointed out that in the past three years, only one fire incident happened at LRT.

32. Mr WONG Sing-chi urged the Administration to report on the causes of the fire incident at LRT and advise which government department should be held responsible. He also expressed concern about the air quality at LRT after the fire incident.

33. Assistant Commissioner (Management & Paratransit) (AC(M&P)) of Transport Department (TD) advised that the Administration had been monitoring the air quality at LRT and the air ventilation system had been able to extract the polluted air after the fire incident effectively. He supplemented that the Administration was upgrading the air ventilation system at LRT and the works were scheduled for completion in end of 2012.

FSI at road tunnels

34. Dr Raymond HO considered fire prevention at tunnels very important, given a large number of tunnels in Hong Kong. He enquired whether all tunnels were equipped with the same ventilation system and whether the standard met the one used by the Hong Kong section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link, which was a 26-kilometre long underground rail corridor. If not, whether the Administration would consider upgrading or replacing the FSI of existing tunnels with a view to meeting the most up-to-date standards.

35. DCFO(FS) advised that as different tunnels were constructed at different times, the fire safety design and FSI, including the ventilation system, of tunnels built in early days might not be identical to those which were constructed more recently. Nevertheless, all road tunnels and cross-harbour tunnels in Hong Kong were installed with FSI required by the FSD such as fire hydrant/hose reel systems, portable fire extinguishers, smoke

extraction systems and emergency lighting systems. Details of the relevant standards and requirements were set out in the Code of Practice for Minimum Fire Service Installations and Equipment (the Code). He added that FSI requirements for road tunnels were formulated by making reference to international safety standards and taking into account the conditions and actual operational needs of individual tunnels. FSD would review the Code from time to time in light of various factors such as improvements in FSI technology and increasing public expectation for enhanced fire safety requirements. Every tunnel operator was required under the law to engage a registered fire service installation contractor to conduct annual inspection on FSI to ensure their compliance with relevant standards and legal requirements.

36. In response to Mr IP Wai-ming's concern on the availability of automatic sprinkler system in tunnels to ensure the safety of maintenance workers, DCFO(FS) responded that automatic sprinkler system was normally not installed in tunnels, as it was not required under the relevant international fire safety standards, and might not be effective in putting out fire that occurred inside a vehicle. AC(M&P) added that in response to the fire incident at LRT, the Administration would enhance its monitoring of maintenance works conducted inside the tunnel to avoid recurrence of similar incidents.

Contingency arrangements in case of fire at tunnels

37. Mr WONG Sing-chi said it was fortunate that the fire incident at LRT happened during mid-night and so the impact of which on the safety of tunnel users had been minimised. He, however, expressed concern about the contingency arrangements if there was a fire incident occurred during daytime with busy traffic.

38. USTH responded that the fire incident at LRT was rare as it occurred inside the underground utility chamber. He explained that any underground works inside the tunnel would only be carried out when the tunnel was closed and would normally be carried out at night. As such, the possibility of reoccurrence of similar fire incident during daytime was very low. AC(M&P) said that FSD, TD and all tunnel operators had drawn up contingency plans for handling emergency incidents inside tunnels including traffic accidents, fires and water flooding. In order to ensure efficient and prompt execution of the contingency plans in case of tunnel emergencies, individual tunnel operators would conduct fire drills every six months jointly with relevant departments, including TD, FSD and the Police to test the effectiveness of the contingency plans and functionality of FSI. Relevant Government departments would also review with the tunnel operators the

contingency measures from time to time and make adjustments when necessary. The Administration believed that the contingency plans and the fire drills would enable front-line staff to handle the fire incidents effectively.

39. Noting that the fire incident at LRT had necessitated the closure of the tunnel for emergency repairs for about two weeks, Mr IP Wai-ming expressed concern about the emergency traffic arrangements if a fire incident happened at other major tunnels which were even busier, such as the Eastern Harbour Crossing.

40. AC(M&P) said that all tunnels, including private tunnels, had their own contingency plans. In case there was a serious incident which required closure of a tunnel for a considerable period of time, TD would implement emergency traffic arrangements with relevant departments, the tunnel operator and public transport operators to maintain smooth traffic as far as possible. TD would also regularly disseminate real-time traffic information to keep motorists informed of the traffic arrangements to allow them to choose more appropriate routes or switch to public transport, so as to alleviate the traffic congestion at the affected tunnel. He added that upon notification of the fire incident at LRT, TD immediately activated the contingency measures and implemented the emergency traffic arrangements with relevant departments, the LRT operator and public transport operators to maintain smooth traffic between Sha Tin and Kowloon as far as possible. During the fire, the LRT operator followed the contingency plan by immediately halting all incoming traffic and prohibiting vehicles from entering the tunnel tubes; dispatching its emergency response team to the smoking scene to provide support; reporting to FSD and informing the Emergency Transport Co-ordination Centre of TD by direct phone line.

V Any other business

41. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10:45 am.