

**For discussion**  
**25 May 2012**

## **Legislative Council Panel on Transport**

### **Tow Truck Accident on Eastern Street and Related Issues**

#### **Purpose**

This paper aims to brief Members on a recent traffic accident involving a tow truck on Eastern Street and related issues.

#### **Background**

2. On 10 April 2012, a fatal accident occurred on Eastern Street in Western District, involving a tow truck and a light goods vehicle (LGV) pulled by it prior to the accident. According to police investigation, the tow truck stopped on its way up Eastern Street due to some incident. When the tow truck driver was handling the LGV, the LGV rolled back down the slope and hit some nearby pedestrians, resulting in one pedestrian being killed, another pedestrian and a grocery store assistant seriously injured.

#### **Road conditions on Eastern Street**

3. The road section of Eastern Street between Queen's Road West and High Street measures about 190 metres (m) long and 5.5m wide and has a good sightline. The road section has pedestrian pavements of approximately 1.8m in width on both sides. Railings are installed to separate the pavement from the carriageway. Given the surrounding terrain, the road section is relatively steep and single-lane one-way traffic is implemented currently. The uphill southbound sub-section between Queen's Road West and Hospital Road is about 80m long, with an approximate gradient of 1:5. The downhill northbound sub-section between Hospital Road and High Street is about 110m long, with an approximate gradient of 1:6.

4. The section of Eastern Street in question is not a traffic accident black site. In the past five years, an average of 1.2 accidents took place each year and most of them were slight. The statistics of these accidents are at Annex 1.

5. The Transport Department (TD) has been monitoring the traffic situation on road sections that are relatively steep on Hong Kong Island, and from time to time reviews the relevant traffic management measures. The steep section of Eastern Street has been paved with anti-skid material since 1985. Also, the sub-section of Eastern Street between Queen's Road West and Hospital Road was changed to uphill traffic only in 1985 from the original downhill traffic, having regard to factors such as road gradient and road safety. In 2008, a prohibited zone was further designated on this sub-section, because of road width and junction space considerations, to forbid entry by vehicles exceeding 10m in length. At the scene of the accident, three traffic signs were displayed to inform drivers of the relevant traffic regulations. Two of them were erected on Eastern Street and one on the carriageway of Queen's Road West near Eastern Street (illustrated at Annex 2).

6. Since 1985, the TD has erected traffic signs "Steep Hill Downwards Ahead" and "Keep in Low Gear" on the roadside of the downhill sub-section of Eastern Street between High Street and Hospital Road, to remind drivers to drive safely. Since 2000, the TD has been installing crash barriers on the roadside and has imposed restriction in 2010 to prohibit access by vehicles exceeding 7m in length on the downhill sub-section to further enhance road safety. According to TD, the current traffic management measures imposed at the road section are appropriate and the traffic signs erected can give clear directions to drivers.

### **Operation of tow trucks**

7. Under the existing law, persons who drive motor vehicles shall hold vehicle driving licences of the appropriate classes. Tow truck is classified as a goods vehicle which is further classified as light, medium or heavy according to the gross vehicle weight. As such, a tow truck driver shall hold a driving licence for the appropriate class of goods vehicles to ensure that his driving standard has met the requirements for driving that particular class of vehicles.

8. According to the current legislation, if a motor vehicle is driven to tow another vehicle, the vehicle being towed shall carry a sign affixed to the rear end with the words “ON TOW” and the characters “拖車” in white on a dark surface, and each word/character must be at least 150 millimetres in height. If a tow rope or chain is used to tow a vehicle, the distance between the towing vehicle and the vehicle being towed shall not exceed 4.5m, and the tow rope or chain has to be clearly visible to other road users. If all the wheels of the vehicle being towed are in contact with the ground, the vehicle shall be in the charge of a person holding an appropriate driving licence who can control its brakes and steering wheel.

9. In the past ten years, there was an average of one traffic accident involving a tow truck in operation per year. Most of these accidents were slight. Their detailed breakdown is at [Annex 3](#).

### **Post-accident Follow-Up Measures**

10. The Police is investigating the accident in question. The Police will examine in depth various aspects including the construction and maintenance of the vehicle, whether the driver has violated any traffic regulations and whether the operation of the tow truck has contravened any statutory requirements. Prosecution will be initiated if there is sufficient evidence. The Police will also continue to strengthen enforcement and prosecution against driving behaviour which may pose safety hazards to road users or involve dangerous acts, such as dangerous or careless driving; failure to comply with traffic signals, traffic signs and road markings; and overloading of vehicles.

11. On 12 April, two days after the accident, the TD met with members of the tow truck trade to remind them to pay attention to safety at all times during towing operation. Trade members were also urged to ensure that their drivers and frontline staff in charge of tow trucks and vehicles being towed comply with the Road Traffic Ordinance and relevant codes of practice to safeguard other road users. The trade agreed that tow truck drivers should give prime consideration to safety when operating their trucks.

12. Although the trade considered the accident an isolated incident, we still encouraged trade members to enhance the safety awareness of and training for their frontline staff. As regards letting employees attend training courses provided by relevant organisations to enhance professional knowledge, the trade's response was positive. It is understood that there are already organisations in the trade offering courses on tow truck operation. The Administration will further explore with the Vocational Training Council the feasibility of organising relevant courses so that more suitable training can be provided for frontline staff to enhance their awareness of safe operation.

13. In the light of the traffic accident on Eastern Street, the Central and Western District Council will establish an ad hoc working group to review comprehensively the road facilities and management measures at road sections that are relatively steep in the district. Relevant departments such as the TD, the Police and the Highways Department will actively participate in the working group's review.

14. The TD will continue to monitor the traffic situation on Eastern Street and the related road sections within the district. Based on the Police's traffic accident investigation report and the review results and recommendations of the ad hoc working group of the Central and Western District Council, the TD will implement appropriate traffic management measures with regard to the actual situation.

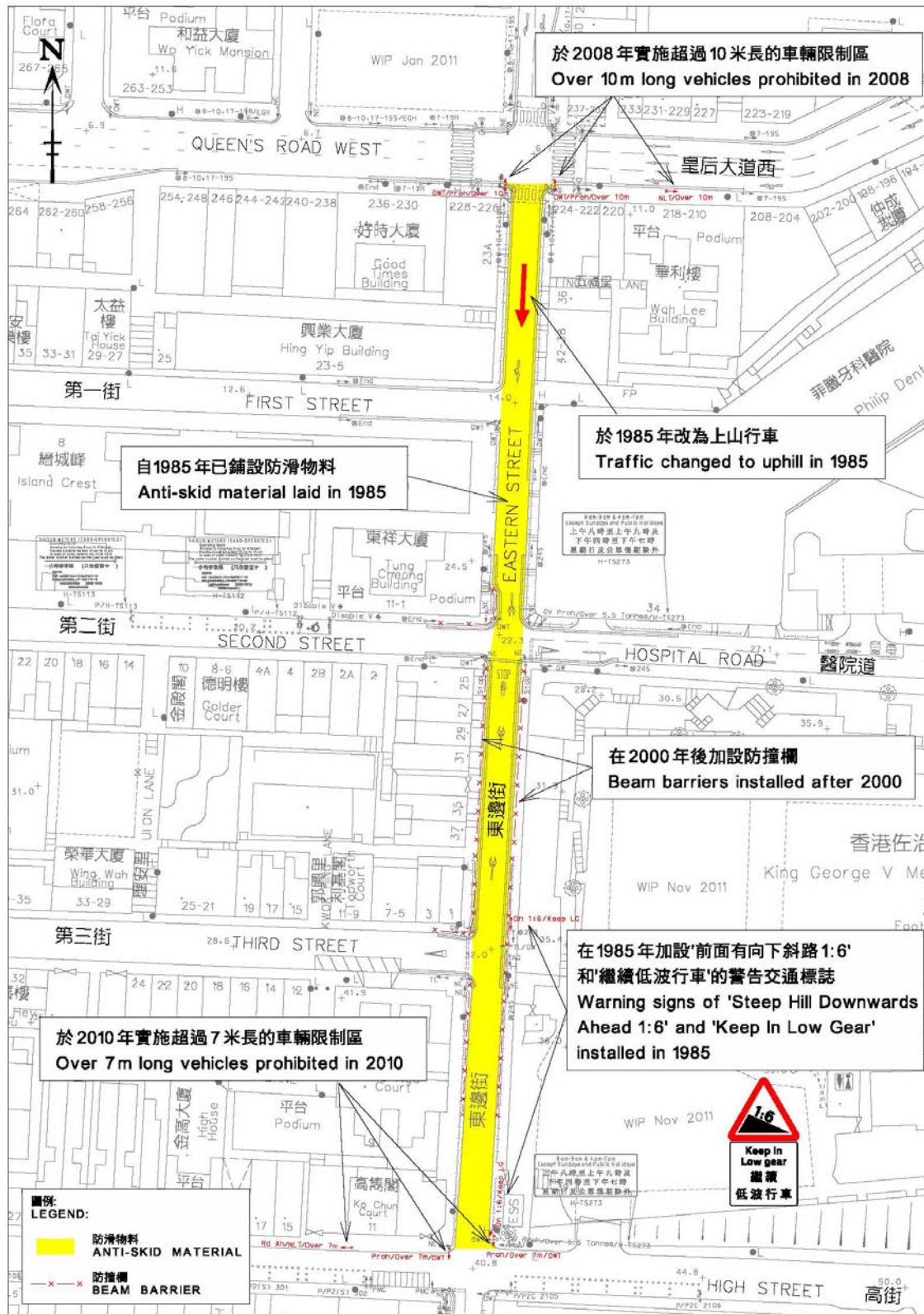
### **Advice Sought**

15. Members are invited to note the content of this paper and provide their views.

**Transport and Housing Bureau**  
**May 2012**

**Number of traffic accidents  
on the section of Eastern Street  
between Queen's Road West and High Street**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of traffic accidents</b>			
	<b>Fatal</b>	<b>Serious</b>	<b>Slight</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2007</b>	0	1	3	4
<b>2008</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>2009</b>	0	0	1	1
<b>2010</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>2011</b>	0	0	1	1



**Number of traffic accidents involving tow trucks in operation**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of traffic accidents</b>			
	<b>Fatal</b>	<b>Serious</b>	<b>Slight</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2002</b>	0	0	2	2
<b>2003</b>	0	2	0	2
<b>2004</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>2005</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>2006</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>2007</b>	0	0	1	1
<b>2008</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>2009</b>	0	0	1	1
<b>2010</b>	0	1	2	3
<b>2011</b>	0	0	1	1