

Legislative Council Panel on Transport

2020 Policy Address

Transport-related Policy Initiatives of the Transport and Housing Bureau

Introduction

The 2020 Policy Address and Policy Address Supplement set out the Government's initiatives in the coming year. This paper elaborates on policy initiatives relevant to land and waterborne transport.

New Initiatives in 2020

(a) Cross-boundary Transport

2. Since the commissioning of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge ("HZMB") in October 2018, the governments of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao have been working closely to take forward various cross-boundary transport initiatives. The Government will press ahead with the "Quota-free scheme for Hong Kong private cars travelling to Guangdong via the HZMB" ("the Scheme"), allowing eligible Hong Kong private cars to travel between Hong Kong and Guangdong via the HZMB without quota. We expect that the Scheme will facilitate Hong Kong residents to drive to Guangdong for business, visiting families or sight-seeing on a short-term basis, thereby better utilising the HZMB and promoting the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area ("GBA"). We are finalising with the Guangdong government the implementation details and commencement date of the Scheme, and will announce the details in due course. The governments of Guangdong and Hong Kong will also draw on the implementation experience of the Scheme at the HZMB and proactively study the extension of the Scheme to a Hong Kong/Shenzhen land boundary control point, such that Hong Kong private cars can travel to both the eastern and western parts of Guangdong without a quota.

(b) Comprehensive Traffic and Transport Strategy Study

3. The Government will carry out a comprehensive traffic and transport strategy study which includes surveying the latest travel patterns of the public, making reference to and introducing innovative transport modes and technologies as appropriate with a view to enhancing our public transport services to meet the demand of the public, as well as deploying different transport resources more effectively to support sustainable development and facilitate the flow of people and goods in the GBA.

(c) Smart Mobility

4. To dovetail with the concept of smart mobility, the Transport Department (“TD”) has started to commission the pilot real-time adaptive traffic signal systems with sensors for pedestrians and vehicles at five road junctions since the fourth quarter of 2020 to help optimise the green times allocated to vehicles and pedestrian with an aim to reduce congestion and delay.

5. In addition, in order to alleviate the shortage of public parking spaces through application of technology, TD is actively taking forward six pilot projects on automated parking systems (“APS”). The Lands Department invited open tenders for the first pilot project at Hoi Shing Road, Tsuen Wan in end September 2020, and it is expected that the APS will be put into service in 2021.

6. The Government has all along been promoting the opening-up of the operating data by public transport operators to facilitate commuting and trip planning of the public. To provide real-time arrival information of green minibuses (“GMBs”), TD completed the pilot scheme of the relevant data system in late 2019 and is now proceeding with the development work. With a view to fully covering all GMB routes by 2022, TD will install location detection devices and conduct field testing on around 3 300 GMBs in phases starting from end 2020. The Government aims to disseminate the real-time arrival information of GMBs with relevant devices installed through the mobile application “HKeMobility” from December 2020

onwards. The relevant data will also be released in machine-readable format via “data.gov.hk” for public use free of charge.

(d) Enhance Taxi Service Quality

7. TD will continue to collaborate with the taxi trade to further enhance the quality of taxi service. Through leveraging on technology (e.g. exploring the feasibility of installing electronic taxi meters for e-payment system and electronic driver identification plate) and organising commendation schemes, we encourage taxi drivers and taxi fleet to provide quality service to the public.

8. In addition, we have earlier consulted this Panel on the proposals to increase penalties for taxi-driver-related offences (including the introduction of taxi-driver-offence points system) and for illegal carriage of passengers for hire or reward by motor vehicles respectively. We are preparing the relevant legislative amendments and aim to introduce the bills into the Legislative Council as soon as possible to protect the interest of the passengers.

(e) The Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme – To Extend the Special Measure of Relaxing the Monthly Public Transport Expenses Threshold

9. The Government implemented the non-means tested Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme (“PTFSS”) on 1 January 2019 to relieve the fare burden of commuters whose public transport expenses are relatively high. Under the PTFSS, commuters with public transport expenses exceeding \$400 are eligible for the fare subsidy. To further alleviate commuters’ fare burden, the Government has enhanced the Scheme since 1 January 2020 by increasing the subsidy rate of the Scheme from one-fourth to one-third of the monthly public transport expenses in excess of \$400, as well as raising the subsidy cap from \$300 to \$400 per month.

10. Since its launch, the PTFSS has been well received by the public and operating smoothly. To allow more commuters to benefit from the PTFSS

during the epidemic, the Government has implemented a special measure under the second round of the Anti-epidemic Fund to temporarily relax the monthly threshold of the Scheme from \$400 to \$200 from 1 July to 31 December 2020. In light of the ongoing impact of the epidemic on the local economy, the Government has decided to extend the special measure for six months, so as to relieve the public's burden of transport expenses. From 1 January to 30 June 2021, the Government will continue to provide a subsidy amounting to one-third of the monthly public transport expenses in excess of \$200, subject to a maximum of \$400 per month. It is estimated that around 3.8 million people will benefit each month.

(f) MTR Fares

11. To further alleviate the public's burden of transport expenses during the epidemic, after discussion with the Government, the MTRCL has decided to extend the "20% Rebate for Every Octopus Trip", which is supposed to cease at the end of this year, for three months until March 2021; and extend the \$100 discount for each purchase of MTR City Saver and all five types of Monthly Pass Extras by six months until June 2021, in order to benefit more passengers. The Government will continue the earlier arrangement to shoulder half of the revenue foregone up to March 2021, while the MTRCL will bear the remaining expenses. The total government funding commitment will be capped at \$800 million as previously earmarked.

On-going Initiatives in 2020

(a) Developing Transport Infrastructure

Strategic Studies on Railways and Major Roads beyond 2030

12. Based on the final development strategy of the "Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030" planning study, we will conduct the "Strategic Studies on Railways and Major Roads beyond 2030" to explore the layout of railway and major road infrastructure and conduct preliminary engineering and technical assessments for their alignments and supporting facilities, so as to ensure that the planning of

large-scale transport infrastructure will complement or even reserve capacity to meet the overall long-term development needs of Hong Kong.

Railway Projects

13. To continue the development of railways as the backbone of our passenger transport system, we are implementing the new railway projects under the Railway Development Strategy 2014 in a proactive manner. The Transport and Housing Bureau invited the MTR Corporation Limited (“MTRCL”) to embark on the detailed planning and design of Tung Chung Line Extension and Tuen Mun South Extension in the first half of this year. As regards the Northern Link, the Government is in the final stage of scrutinising the project proposals and other supplementary information submitted by MTRCL. The relevant detailed planning and design work will commence shortly. At the same time, the Government is also examining the project proposals and supplementary information submitted by MTRCL in respect of three other projects (viz East Kowloon Line, North Island Line and Hung Shui Kiu Station), with a view to announcing the way forward of these projects in due course. For South Island Line (West), MTRCL will submit the project proposal by the end of this year. Relevant Government departments will then consider it immediately with a view to implementing the project in a timely manner to tie in with the redevelopment programme of Wah Fu Estate.

Route 6 and Cross Bay Link, Tseung Kwan O

14. Route 6 forms an integral part of the strategic road network of Hong Kong. Construction for the Tseung Kwan O – Lam Tin Tunnel, the Trunk Road T2 and Cha Kwo Ling Tunnel and the Central Kowloon Route, as the eastern, middle and western sections of Route 6 respectively, have commenced, and the entire Route 6 is expected to be commissioned around 2026. By then, the journey time in peak hours between Tseung Kwan O Town Centre and Yau Ma Tei Interchange along Route 6 will be substantially reduced from about 65 minutes now to about 12 minutes. Besides, construction for the Cross Bay Link, Tseung Kwan O, which will link up with the east of the Route 6, commenced in June 2018 and is expected to be

completed in 2022.

Tuen Mun – Chek Lap Kok Link (“TM-CLKL”)

15. The construction of the TM-CLKL Northern Connection (including the Tuen Mun-Chek Lap Kok Tunnel) has been completed and it will be commissioned on 27 December. Together with the Southern Connection commissioned in October 2018, the entire TM-CLKL connects the Northwest New Territories, the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, North Lantau and the Hong Kong International Airport (“HKIA”) and will offer a more direct route between the Northwest New Territories and Lantau. The journey time between Tuen Mun South and the HKIA will be reduced by about 20 minutes. Moreover, upon its full commissioning, the TM-CLKL will provide an alternative road access between the HKIA and the urban area in addition to the Lantau Link and will help divert traffic to and from Lantau.

(b) Improvement of Public Transport Services

Further enhancing the operating safety of franchised buses

16. The Government has always attached great importance to the operating safety of franchised bus service, and has set aside \$500 million to subsidise franchised bus operators for retrofitting Electronic Stability Control (“ESC”), speed limiting retarder and seat belts on seats in the upper deck of suitable existing buses. Under the subsidy scheme, the Government will subsidise the franchised bus operators 80% of the relevant costs. The remaining costs and maintenance in future will be borne by the franchised bus operators. The relevant retrofitting works have gradually commenced since the third quarter of 2020 with target completion within three to four years. The retrofitted buses will be deployed with priority to long-haul routes operated via expressways starting from early 2021.

Ongoing Initiatives for Enhancing Public Transport Services and Ancillary Facilities

17. The Government has been pursuing a public transport-oriented policy.

At present, about 90% of commuters use public transport services with the passenger trips reaching 12 million daily in 2019. We will continue to strive to enhance the level of public transport services and provide more comprehensive ancillary facilities that keep up with the times in order to create a more convenient and comfortable passenger waiting environment.

18. On enhancing franchised bus service, TD will continue to make use of established mechanisms to pursue rationalisation of bus routes and adjust their services having regard to the changes in passenger demand, thereby reducing unnecessary bus trips, alleviating traffic congestion on bus trunk roads and reducing roadside air pollution. Franchised bus companies may redeploy the resources so saved to introduce routes or increase frequencies which can meet passengers' demands with a view to enhancing the efficiency of the franchised bus network. In addition, to address public concerns and enhance the service level of franchised buses, TD reviewed the standing capacity of franchised buses in 2019 and proposed to amend the indicators for adjusting vehicle deployment/ service frequency in the Guidelines on Service Improvement and Reduction in Bus Route Planning Programme (the "Guidelines"), and adopt four persons per square metre as the benchmark for service level. The amendments will help lower the thresholds for increasing bus deployment, while requiring franchised bus companies to increase the frequency of routes with high passenger demand during peak hours, in turn enhancing the standing space for passengers and enabling them to have more comfortable journeys. The Government has discussed with franchised bus companies the implementation plan of the proposal. Subject to the progress of the procurement of buses and recruitment of bus captains, and the development of the epidemic, TD envisages that the revised Guidelines could be implemented in mid-2021 at the earliest.

19. The Government endeavours to improve in-harbour and outlying island ferry services. For in-harbour ferry services, the "Central – Hung Hom" route commenced operation in June 2020. The operator is also actively gearing up for the "water taxi" service. In addition, we are implementing the long-term operation model for outlying island ferry services to extend the Special Helping Measures to other outlying island ferry routes with a view to maintaining affordable fare level; and subsidising the replacement of

existing vessels of outlying island routes with greener vessels in phases starting from 2021.

20. In addition, the Government has been striving to promote green and barrier-free transport policies. In terms of light buses, the Government had completed the legislative amendments on relaxing the vehicle length and maximum gross weight restriction of light buses, and the relevant regulations took effect on 5 July this year. The Government is also reviewing the design of emergency exits, and the promotion of wheelchair accessible or low floor light buses etc., in order to provide more options to the trade while accommodating the development needs of the industry. We will continue to monitor the operation mode of public light buses and the latest technological development to ensure that the relevant policies and legislations are able to meet the actual needs of society and trade.

21. To improve the ancillary facilities, the Government will continue to provide subsidies to the franchised bus companies for installation of real-time bus arrival information display panels and chairs at suitable bus stops, implement pilot projects to upgrade covered public transport interchanges and ferry piers, subsidise Hong Kong Tramways, Limited to replace tram tracks at key locations using new technology, and conduct a proof-of-concept trial on seat occupancy and seat belt fastening detection technology for green minibuses.

(c) Smart Mobility

22. One of the major initiatives under “Smart Mobility” is the implementation of Free-Flow Tolling System (“FFTS”), which enables motorists to pay tolls of government tolled tunnels and Tsing Sha Control Area remotely using Toll Tags. To this end, we will conduct a public engagement exercise on the detailed arrangements of FFTS and Toll Tags starting from December 2020. Subsequently, we will introduce a bill into the Legislative Council (“LegCo”) in 2021 to provide the requisite legal backing for FFTS and enable TD to issue Toll Tags to vehicle owners for the phased implementation of FFTS.

23. For greater convenience to motorists by leveraging technology, a new generation of on-street parking meters is ready for launch. The Amendment Bill providing legal basis for the new functions of the new parking meters and related matters was passed by LegCo in November 2020. We will install the new parking meters, which support multiple electronic payment means and provide real-time parking vacancy information of the related parking spaces, by phases starting from December 2020.

24. We also encourage enterprises or organisations to conduct research on and application of vehicle-related innovation and technology, with a view to further promoting “Smart Mobility”. We have already embarked on the preparatory work for the \$1-billion Smart Traffic Fund (“the Fund”). TD has earlier on consulted relevant stakeholders on the scope and modus operandi of the Fund, and the Fund is expected to be launched in the first quarter of 2021 for application.

25. Besides, TD is actively studying necessary legislative amendments to create favourable conditions for promoting the development and application of autonomous vehicle (“AV”) technologies in Hong Kong. In November 2019, TD set up the Technical Advisory Committee on the Application of AV Technologies in Hong Kong, comprising representatives from the trade and relevant research and development institutes, to jointly explore the appropriate regulatory framework. We would continue to listen to the views of relevant stakeholders and endeavour to facilitate the trials of AV technologies by the trade and relevant research and development institutes.

(d) Pedestrian-friendly Environment

26. With a view to taking forward the “Walk in HK” policy and creating a pedestrian-friendly environment, the TD will launch a series of measures which include expanding the walking route search function (including barrier-free route option) on the TD’s all-in-one mobile app “HKeMobility” to 18 districts in December 2020. In addition, the first batch of works to enhance pedestrian connectivity between Wan Chai and Sheung Wan was completed in June 2020 while other improvement measures will be implemented by phases. It is expected that the overall walkability strategy

for Hong Kong will be finalised by end-2020. Furthermore, for provision of cover for walkways connecting to public hospitals, the TD started to consult relevant District Councils (“DCs”) in October 2020, inviting 18 DCs to nominate the second round projects for provision of cover for walkways. As regards the provision of cover for walkway projects nominated by the DCs in the first round, the first project was completed in February 2020 while another nine projects have commenced construction progressively. The remaining eight projects are under planning and design. Besides, the TD commenced the Review of Assessment Mechanism for Hillside Escalator Links and Elevator Systems (“HEL”) and Preliminary Feasibility Studies in December 2017 and, based on the revised mechanism, carried out initial screening, shortlisting and prioritisation of a total of 114 HEL proposals received over the past few years. TD has commenced consultation with the relevant DCs starting from this month so as to finalise the first batch of projects for implementation.

Universal Accessibility Programme

27. The Highways Department (“HyD”) will continue to press ahead with the implementation of the “Universal Accessibility” (“UA”) Programme to proactively install barrier-free access facilities (such as lifts) at walkways. As at end October 2020, 165 items were completed. Besides, the Government has expanded scope of the UA Programme to retrofit lifts at walkways of the following three types of housing estates under the Hong Kong Housing Authority, namely estates under the Tenants Purchase Scheme, the Buy or Rent Option Scheme, and public rental housing estates with non-residential properties divested. HyD has been working out the implementation details with a view to commencing construction works as soon as possible.

Transport and Housing Bureau December 2020