

LCQ15: Stepping up monitoring of underground water mains

Following is a question by the Hon Leung Man-kwong and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Ms Bernadette Linn, in the Legislative Council today (February 26):

Question:

It is learnt that there has been a rising trend in the number of road subsidence incidents on public roads occurred between 2021 and 2023. In addition, a few major road subsidence incidents also occurred in 2024, and in one such incident which took place at Lai Chi Kok Road in Cheung Sha Wan, a taxi fell into a pit and almost caused casualties. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the total number of road subsidence incidents recorded in the whole year of 2024, as well as the location, cause and number of persons affected in each incident;

(2) given that two serious road subsidence incidents occurred in Sham Shui Po District between May and September 2024, whether the authorities have assessed if the district is a high-risk area for road subsidence; whether the authorities conducted inspections and repairs for the underground water mains at the locations of the road subsidence incidents 12 months prior to the occurrence of the two incidents;

(3) given that the Water Supplies Department completed the Risk-based Improvement Programme of Water Mains in 2015 to replace and rehabilitate aged water mains of about 3 000 kilometres, and has implemented the risk-based asset management programme for water mains since 2015 to replace or rehabilitate specific sections of water mains assessed to be of higher risk, whether the underground water mains at the locations of the two road subsidence incidents mentioned in (2) have been included in the latter programme; if not, whether the authorities will include the underground water mains concerned in the latter programme in the future for replacement and rehabilitation; and

(4) given the frequent occurrence of extreme weather in recent years, whether the authorities have stepped up the monitoring of underground water mains facilities in the past year?

Reply:

President,

Generally speaking, the main causes of road subsidence include damage to underground pipes (e.g. water mains and drainage pipes), resulting in soil

surrounding the pipes being washed away or soil and water flowing into the pipes through cracks and being carried away respectively; and improper handling of foundation works in sites adjoining roads (in particular those sites involving deep excavation and lowering of groundwater level), resulting in soil and water of the road base flowing into the excavation area of the works, creating voids. If the filled materials are not properly backfilled and compacted after road excavation works, the road surface may subside as a result of settlement of the underlying soil after being driven over by vehicles.

In consultation with the Transport and Logistics Bureau and the relevant departments, the reply to various parts of the question raised by the Hon Leung is as follows:

(1) In 2024, the Highways Department (HyD) received a total of 19 cases of road subsidence on public roads, a decrease compared to 2023. Details of the cases are shown in the Annex. In response to road subsidence incidents affecting road traffic, the relevant departments had promptly arranged temporary traffic measures and repaired the damaged road surfaces so as to resume the traffic to normal as soon as possible, minimising the impact of the incidents on the public.

(2) Regarding the road subsidence cases that occurred in Sham Shui Po District last year, as shown in the Annex, they were caused by individual factors leading to the subsidence. Therefore, it does not necessarily indicate the presence of the same road subsidence risk in the underground environment of that district.

The Water Supplies Department (WSD) would inspect the underground water mains under its maintenance approximately every 18 months. Based on the inspection results, maintenance works would be carried out in a timely manner to reduce the risk of water mains burst or leak.

Two road subsidence incidents occurred in Sham Shui Po District on May 31 and September 29, 2024 at Hai Tan Street and Lai Chi Kok Road respectively. As there was no underground water mains managed by the WSD and in service at the road subsidence location at Hai Tan Street, the WSD did not conduct inspection or maintenance works for any water mains there in the preceding 12 months before the incident. As for the road subsidence location at Lai Chi Kok Road in Sham Shui Po, the WSD inspected the underground water mains in April 2024 and no irregularities were identified during the inspection.

(3) From 2000 to 2015, the WSD carried out a territory-wide replacement and rehabilitation of water mains programme to replace and rehabilitate about 3 000 kilometres long aged water mains (including fresh and salt water mains), raising the operational effectiveness of water supply networks.

Since 2015, the WSD has implemented multi-pronged measures, including implementation of risk-based asset management programme for water mains by assessing the risk of water mains based on a number of factors such as period

of usage, material, past burst or leak records, surrounding environment and consequence resulting from burst or leak, to replace or rehabilitate individual pipe sections with higher risk progressively, continue to enhance the overall healthiness of the water supply networks, and reduce the risk of water main bursts or leaks. As at December 2024, a total of approximately 540km long water mains have been included in the programme in which approximately 235km long water mains have been replaced or rehabilitated.

As mentioned in item (2) above, there was no underground water main managed by the WSD and in service at the location of road subsidence at Hai Tan Street. Regarding the road subsidence incident at Lai Chi Kok Road, the subject water main was a 300mm diameter cast iron pipe laid at a depth of about 1.5 metres below the ground in the 1960s. There have been no record of burst and leak in the past, and the inspection conducted by the WSD in April 2024 did not reflect any abnormalities. Therefore, this water main has not been included in the programme and accorded with a higher priority for replacement in the past.

The WSD has reviewed the mechanism of the programme to assess the weighting of the factors contributing to the risk of water main burst or leak. Specifically, we will increase the weighting assigned to factors involving the aged pipe materials (including cast iron pipes and pipes used more than 60 years), and the severity of the consequences for incidents occurring in water mains located at the major road sections, and reassess the risk of all water main bursts or leaks. This reassessment aims to prioritise the replacement or rehabilitation of the water mains at risk of bursting or leaking, expediting the replacement or rehabilitation of the above-mentioned cast iron water pipes commonly used in older designs. This proactive approach aims to avoid serious impact on traffic in the event of pipe burst.

In addition, to speed up the implementation of the works, the WSD set up an inter-departmental task force under the chairmanship of the Director of Water Supplies at the end of last year. The task force includes representatives from various relevant departments such as the Development Bureau, the WSD, the Transport Department, the HyD, the Hong Kong Police Force, the Environmental Protection Department, and the Home Affairs Department. They collaborate to discuss and formulate temporary traffic arrangement schemes and implementation programme, etc, related to the replacement of water mains, and formulate contingency plans earliest to minimise the potential impact of the projects on traffic and the public.

(4) In general, if the road surface and road base are in normal condition, heavy rain itself will not cause road subsidence or interference with underground water mains. Nevertheless, the WSD is establishing approximately 2 400 Water Intelligent Network (WIN) district metering areas (DMAs) within the fresh water distribution networks in the territory (covering appropriately 80 per cent of the fresh water distribution networks) which facilitate detection of leakage of water mains and adjustment of the water pressure of the water mains to reduce the risks of water main burst or leak. As of end December 2024, the WSD has completed the establishment of about 2 360 DMAs and the remaining works are anticipated to be completed by the first

quarter of 2025.

The WSD has commenced the enhancement of WIN, focusing on the following two aspects:

(i) The WSD will expand the monitoring area of WIN to include fresh water trunk mains and the remaining part of the fresh water distribution mains (covering appropriately 20 per cent of the fresh water distribution networks) that are currently not covered by WIN by adding sensors to monitor water flow and pressure at strategic locations to provide more comprehensive coverage of the fresh water supply network.

(ii) On the other hand, the WSD has started upgrading the functions of the existing WIN, which includes upgrading the sensors used for monitoring the water flow and pressure in phases to collect real-time data with a view to speeding up detection of any abnormal conditions in the pipe network.

The above expansion and upgrading work are expected to be completed in phases starting from the second quarter of 2025, with the entire project scheduled for completion by 2027.

The WSD would also study the use of advanced technologies, such as acoustic detection and optical fiber, to monitor underground water mains to facilitate early detection of leakage situations.

In addition, the WSD has strengthened emergency management of water supply incidents. The WSD has strengthened its communication mechanisms with various stakeholders through setting up instant messaging platforms to enhance communication with relevant departments and local parties including District Offices, District Council members and Care Teams. In the event of significant water supply incidents, timely updates on the latest information regarding the incident, temporary water supply locations, as well as the locations of water tanks and water wagons, can be rapidly disseminated. The WSD has also developed clear internal guidelines that outline specific factors to be considered for emergency repair of water mains and associated time required, ensuring more accurate communication of anticipated water resumption time and allowing local residents to make appropriate preparations.

[Tung Chung Swimming Pool temporarily closed](#)

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible and repeat it at regular intervals:

Here is an item of interest to swimmers.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (February 26) that the Tung Chung Swimming Pool in Islands District has been temporarily closed for cleaning and superchlorination following the discovery of a small amount of vomit in the pool.

It will be reopened at 6.30am tomorrow (February 27).

The department appeals to swimmers to be considerate and to keep the swimming pools clean. They are advised not to swim after a full meal and should use the toilet facilities if necessary before swimming.

[Convenor of ExCo Non-official Members speaks on Budget](#)

â€‹The following is issued on behalf of the Executive Council Secretariat:

Following are the remarks by the Convenor of the Non-official Members of the Executive Council (ExCo), Mrs Regina Ip, at a media session on the 2025-26 Budget in the Legislative Council Complex this afternoon (February 26):

Reporter: Does the Executive Council believe that the cuts in measure in this current budget have been enough? Would it be able to lift Hong Kong out of the current deficit that we are encountering now? And the second question, does the city itself need to consider alternate revenue streams to help better balance the books in the long term, as stated by some observers? Will it consider things like sales tax or other forms of revenue increase for the Government? Thank you.

Convenor of ExCo Non-official Members: The Financial Secretary made it quite clear that by the year 2027-28, I think, cumulatively, there will be 7 per cent cuts in Government expenditure. And, the Government will delete 10 000 Government positions and will ask the Director of Audit to discuss with Heads of Departments and Bureaux Directors how to achieve further savings. I think the Government is working very hard to cut back unnecessary Government expenditure. As for sources of revenue, I think it is entirely correct to stick to the "user pays" principle. The Government said that it would consider restoring tunnel fees and will consider charging cross-border private vehicles at land control points \$200 per private vehicle, which is not a new proposal. It was first proposed by then Financial Secretary Anthony Leung back in 2003. And as the Government said, as the Government implements global minimum tax in accordance with the requirement of G20 nations, in the next five years, there will be \$15 billion additional revenue, plus possible revenue after Government has studied the possibility of instituting basketball betting, that sort of thing, to counter illegal online betting. I think the Government is looking at different sources of revenue and also

instituting cutbacks of government expenditure, which we fully welcome.

Reporter: In this year's financial budget, civil servants' pay will be frozen and there is an adjustment on the \$2 transport subsidy. What's your opinion on such adjustment?

Convenor of ExCo Non-official Members: I think freezing public servants' pay, including our pay, legislators' pay, is the best option forward in the present circumstances. Cutbacks will have ripple effects on the private sector, and it will affect the labour sector as well. As for the \$2 transport concession, which has been the focus of much public attention, I think the Government measures introduced to make it sustainable are fairly moderate. No impact on the qualifying age of those benefiting from this concession, but would help to resolve the problem of paying very little fare for very long journeys.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the remarks.)

[LCQ8: Promoting cooperation with the Belt and Road countries](#)

Following is a question by the Hon Tang Fei and a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Algernon Yau, in the Legislative Council today (February 26):

Question:

It has been reported that in recent years, the Government has been actively promoting Hong Kong's advantages as an international financial, trade and investment hub to the Belt and Road (B&R) countries, in particular the Middle East countries, and has signed a number of Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with the Middle East countries. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of MOUs signed between Hong Kong and the Middle East countries participating in the B&R Initiative (such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt) in the past three years, and set out the names of the countries, regions and relevant organizations which have signed the MOUs;

(2) of the following information on the MOUs mentioned in (1): (i) the specific areas of cooperation covered, (ii) the current implementation situation, (iii) the specific assistance expected to be brought to Hong Kong's economic development, and (iv) how to specifically implement the contents of such MOUs and ensure their effective implementation, so as to

leverage their benefits to the fullest extent; and

(3) whether it has plans to sign more MOUs or deepen the existing cooperation with the B&R countries, so as to attract more foreign direct investment, thereby enabling local enterprises to "go global" and consolidating Hong Kong's role as a "super-connector"?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong is an active participant, contributor and beneficiary of the Belt and Road Initiative (B&RI). We have been fully participating and contributing to the B&RI, utilising the role as a functional platform for the Belt and Road (B&R) and serving our role as a "super connector" and "super value-adder". The Middle East region is a key area in the B&RI. The Government is committed to deepening the co-operation with B&R countries in the region through various measures.

In consultation with relevant bureaux, the consolidated reply to the Hon Tang Fei's question is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSARG) and B&R countries in the Middle East region have signed Memoranda of Understandings (MOUs) for co-operation to help drive all round, multi field collaboration for mutual benefit to Hong Kong and the Middle East region, thereby laying a solid foundation for long-term exchange and co-operation. In the past three years, the HKSARG signed 11 MOUs with governments and related organisations in various B&R countries in the Middle East region (tabulated at Annex), with scope covering finance, investment promotion, legal, anti-corruption co-operation and customs co-operation. Relevant bureaux and departments of the HKSARG have been implementing and taking forward the related co-operation, and continue to maintain close contact with relevant governments and related organisations in B&R countries in the Middle East region, with a view to boosting the benefits of these co-operation.

In addition, the business sector and relevant organisations in Hong Kong have been actively engaging in co-operation and signing MOUs with various B&R countries in the Middle East region. These non-governmental MOUs are not covered at Annex.

(3) The Government will continue to deepen the co-operation with B&R countries in the Middle East region through a range of measures, including:

(a) Expanding economic and trade networks

The Government will continue to expand our economic and trade networks, with a view to facilitating Hong Kong enterprises and investors in expanding into the Middle East region markets and promoting the long-term economic development of Hong Kong. The Government established the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office (ETO) in Dubai in October 2021 to strengthen Hong Kong's

economic and trade relations with trading partners in the region. The Government is following up on the establishment of an ETO in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, while Invest Hong Kong (InvestHK) set up a consultant office in Cairo, Egypt in July 2024 and commenced operation of its consultant office in Izmir, Türkiye's third largest city, in January this year to explore emerging markets in the region;

(b) Negotiating and signing bilateral agreements

Hong Kong has signed 24 Investment Promotion and Protection Agreements (IPPAs) with 33 overseas economies (including B&R economies), including Bahrain, Kuwait, Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Government is negotiating an IPPA with Saudi Arabia with a view to concluding the negotiations as soon as possible. We also plan to commence negotiations with Egypt. In addition, Hong Kong has signed Comprehensive Avoidance of Double Taxation Agreements with 49 overseas jurisdictions (including B&R jurisdictions), including Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and Türkiye;

(c) Organising outbound visits

In February 2023, the Chief Executive led an over 30-strong high-level business delegation, comprising representatives of the Government and the business sectors as well as professionals, to visit the Middle East region, promoting the unique advantages of Hong Kong to local government and business sectors in Saudi Arabia and the UAE;

In May 2024, the Secretary for Justice led a delegation comprising representatives from the Law Society of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Bar Association, the Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited, InvestHK and related sectors to visit Saudi Arabia and the UAE to promote Hong Kong's legal and dispute resolution services and enhance co-operation and exchanges between Hong Kong and the Middle East region;

In October 2024, the Financial Secretary led a business delegation of over 100 members, including representatives from the finance as well as innovation and technology (I&T) sectors, on a visit to Saudi Arabia. This visit aimed to strengthen and deepen connections between Hong Kong and the Middle East in trade, finance, and I&T, and included participation in the 8th Future Investment Initiative (FII) Conference. The visit yielded fruitful results, facilitated a number of joint projects, including the listing of two exchange-traded funds tracking Hong Kong stocks in the local market, investment pitches by over 20 Hong Kong startups during the FII Conference, and 11 co-operation agreements signed between Hong Kong institutions and companies and their Saudi counterparts. These co-operation agreements include an MOU signed by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority and the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia to jointly establish a US\$1 billion investment fund focused on investing in companies connected to Hong Kong and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area engaged in sectors such as manufacturing, renewable energy, fintech and healthcare, to expand in Saudi Arabia. This initiative will provide a platform for these companies to expand their international business. Additionally, the Hong Kong Science and Technology

Parks Corporation signed a co-operation agreement with the FII Institute to enhance collaboration, exchange, and knowledge sharing;

The Government will continue to organise a number of outbound missions to markets in the Middle East region to assist Hong Kong enterprises and professional services to further expand business opportunities and build long-lasting collaborative relationships with relevant local enterprises and organisations; and

(d) Organising major events

The Commerce and Economic Development Bureau will continue to actively organise various major events to promote Hong Kong's advantages and facilitate business matching and project participation between Hong Kong and the Middle East region. In April 2024, the Belt and Road Office (BRO) partnered with NEOM of Saudi Arabia to organise the "Discover NEOM Hong Kong" roadshow, which attracted around 1 100 participants, including enterprises, investors and professional representatives from the Mainland and Hong Kong. During the roadshow, the BRO organised two business matching sessions, facilitating potential collaborations between 40 Hong Kong and Mainland enterprises and NEOM. Hong Kong has been organising the Belt and Road Summit (Summit) annually since 2016, and the Summit has been recognised by our country as a case of significance for the implementation of the B&RI in building a global community of shared future. The ninth Summit was held on September 11 and 12, 2024, and attracted around 6 000 government officials and business leaders from over 70 B&R countries and regions (including the Middle East region), as well as more than 100 delegations. The BRO has also organised 10 exchange sessions since November 2023, inviting Consul Generals from B&R countries (including relevant countries in the Middle East region) in Hong Kong as well as representatives of professional bodies and enterprises to share the opportunities and relevant experience in B&R countries.

[Import of poultry meat and products from Gunsan-si of Jeollabuk-do Province in Korea suspended](#)

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (February 26) that in view of a notification from the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) about an outbreak of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in Gunsan-si of Jeollabuk-do Province in Korea, the CFS has instructed the trade to suspend the import of poultry meat and products (including poultry eggs) from the area with immediate effect to protect public health in Hong Kong.

A CFS spokesman said that according to the Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong imported about 80 tonnes of chilled and frozen poultry meat, and about 21.9 million poultry eggs from Korea last year.

"The CFS has contacted the Korean authority over the issue and will closely monitor information issued by the WOA and the relevant authorities on the avian influenza outbreak. Appropriate action will be taken in response to the development of the situation," the spokesman said.