

## LCQ10: Measures to improve road surface conditions

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (June 28):

Question:

Regarding the measures to improve road surface conditions to ensure traffic safety, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the specific work undertaken by the Government since it put forward the 10 enhancement measures on roadside tree planting and maintenance and tree risk assessment early this year, and set out in a table the details of the various tasks and the latest progress; whether these tasks include regular removal of trees blocking road signs and tree felling; if so, of the number of such tasks; whether the authorities have formulated performance pledges for the handling of complaints about roadside trees affecting road safety; if so, of the time limits for replying and taking action after receipt of a complaint;

(2) whether it has compiled statistics on the number of cases in the past five years in which the front windscreens of vehicles were broken or the bodies of vehicles were damaged as a result of being struck by road debris, and the number of times the road debris was cleared each month; whether measures are in place to step up the clearance work and improve the situation concerned; if so, of the details and the timetable; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) of the number of cases in the past five years in which miscellaneous objects fell onto the road from moving green materials collection vehicles or goods vehicles, the types of miscellaneous objects involved and the number of prosecutions; whether the authorities will consider amending the legislation to require such vehicles to use a more enclosed goods compartment; if so, of the details and the timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Development Bureau (DEVB), the Environment and Ecology Bureau, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD), the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), the Highways Department (HyD), the Transport Department (TD), the Leisure and Cultural Services Department and the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF), our reply to the Hon Chan Han-pan's question is as follows:

(1) The Government adopts an "integrated approach" for tree preservation and

management, under which departments are responsible for maintaining the trees in the facilities or land within their purview according to the requirements and guidelines promulgated by DEVB as the policy bureau.

The tree management departments will take appropriate mitigation measures according to the results of the tree assessment, including crown pruning and removal of withered branches, etc. As the work of pruning or removing trees blocking street signs or streetlights, etc is part and parcel of the routine maintenance work of the tree management departments, relevant departments do not have the breakdown of such work.

Members of the public may report problematic trees to the Call Centre 1823, which will refer the complaints to the relevant tree management department for follow-up. Responsible departments will handle tree inquiries/complaints in accordance with established monitoring mechanism and performance pledges. For general cases, departments are required to provide a reply to 1823 within 14 working days upon receipt of the case. Since the content of complaints varies and the locations of the trees will also have a bearing on the work arrangements (e.g. the need to apply for temporary traffic arrangement for handling roadside trees or consult affected individuals in surrounding areas), the completion time for a typical case may range from a few days to several months upon receipt. In any case, cases involving public safety (including road safety) will be accorded priority and handled as soon as possible.

DEVB recommended 10 enhancement measures on roadside tree planting and maintenance in January 2023. Their progress of implementation is tabulated below:

Recommendation	Implementation
1. Making clear the line of command concerning tree management	The measure has been implemented.
2. Expanding the scope of "tree basis" risk assessment	Updated "Tree Risk Assessment and Management Arrangement" Guidelines for tree management departments to adopt starting from the tree risk assessment and management cycle in 2023.
3. Arranging periodic inspections for trees along village roads on unleased and unallocated government land	The LandsD is arranging resources with a view to commencing the periodic inspections of trees on both sides of village roads by end of 2023 and completing the cycle of inspection within a few years.
4. Enhancing implementation of risk mitigation measures	Tree management departments have established internal monitoring mechanism to enable the senior management to monitor the progress of risk mitigation work.

5. Enhancing reporting of tree failure cases and stepping up auditing of tree risk assessment reports	The format of tree failure reports has been refined to provide important and essential information, and the relevant electronic forms have been updated.
6. More extensive use of technology in tree management	The tree risk assessment and management instructions have been updated, including the development of guidelines on the application of appropriate types of technology for various tree health risks.
7. Replacement of senescent pioneer species	Tree management departments are implementing enhancement measures systematically.
8. Formulating new guidelines for minimum soil volume and soil depth for tree planting	Relevant new guidelines are being drafted so as to improve the planting environment for sustainable growth of trees.
9. Introducing suitability and sustainability assessment; devising suitable measures to improve site conditions or replacing trees which are no longer suitable for site in urban areas	A consultancy study is being commissioned to draw up the criteria for determining the suitability and sustainability of roadside trees in Hong Kong. The preliminary recommendations are expected to be available in 2024.
10. Building up capacity of tree management personnel	Through the Study Sponsorship Scheme and Trainee Programme of the Urban Forestry Support Fund, more new entrants are attracted to join the industry and in-service practitioners are encouraged to further advance their arboricultural knowledge and skills.

(2) The HyD and the FEHD are responsible for the daily cleansing of expressways and standard roads (including footpaths and carriageways with a speed limit of less than or equal to 70 kilometres/hour) respectively.

At present, the FEHD provides mechanical sweeping services at about 800 sections of traffic roads. The cleansing frequency of each of these sections ranges from once daily to once bi-monthly, depending on the actual situation. The HyD, on the other hand, arranges its contractors to conduct road sweeping and clear obstacles from expressways on a daily basis. Upon receipt of reports on any obstacles on expressways affecting the safety of road users, the HyD will separately arrange its contractors to carry out the clearance work as soon as possible. In the past five years (i.e. from 2018-19 to 2022-23), the HyD received a total of four reports from the public on damages to vehicles caused by road debris, while the FEHD has no relevant figure.

(3) At present, the EPD's contractors have about 50 recycling vehicles, which generally have enclosed truck bodies. In the past five years, the EPD did not receive any reports of miscellaneous objects falling from its contractors' recycling vehicles onto the road, while the TD and the HKPF do not maintain

statistics of cases of miscellaneous objects from vehicles onto the roads, the type of objects involved or the number of prosecution.

Currently, there are legal provisions regulating proper and secured loading of vehicles to ensure road safety. Under the Road Traffic (Traffic Control) Regulations (Cap. 374G), the driver shall ensure that any load is properly secured to or contained inside the vehicle and that its weight and manner in which it is placed in the vehicle shall not cause danger to any person. Any driver who contravenes the relevant regulation is liable to a fine of \$5,000 and imprisonment for three months on first conviction; and to a fine of \$10,000 and imprisonment for six months on second or subsequent convictions.

Besides, the TD has been conducting publicity and educational activities through various channels to enhance the goods vehicle trade's awareness of safe loading. For example, a Code of Practice for the Loading of Vehicles is compiled in accordance with the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374), which provides guidelines covering various areas of safe loading, including the use of suitable vehicles for carrying loads, proper methods of placing loads inside vehicles, etc. Messages are shown on variable message signs to remind drivers to transport the loads properly. The TD also issues the Goods Vehicle Trade Newsletter and holds regular meetings with the goods vehicle trade to disseminate the message of road safety and remind them to adopt good practice for transportation of loads. The TD and the HKPF have also been working with the Road Safety Council to conduct various publicity and educational programmes, such as publishing and distributing the Road Safety Bulletin, and disseminating information through social media platforms.

The Government will continue to promote safe loading on various fronts, including enforcement, publicity and education, with a view to reducing road safety and environmental pollution problems caused by moving vehicles with loads that are not properly contained or secured.