

LCQ20: Alleviating pressure on carrying capacity of MTR East Rail Line

Following is a question by the Hon Tony Tse and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (February 23):

Question:

It has been reported that, to tie in with the full commissioning of the MTR Shatin to Central Link, the 12-car trains running on the MTR East Rail Line (ERL) are gradually replaced by nine-car trains. This has led to a substantial decrease in the carrying capacity of such trains and an intensifying crowded situation. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective design capacities and maximum train frequencies of the nine-car and 12-car trains running on ERL;

(2) given that the authorities have anticipated that the MTR Tuen Ma Line (TML), upon full commissioning, would be conducive to alleviating the pressure on the carrying capacity of ERL, of the anticipated and actual passenger volumes of ERL alleviated since the full commissioning of TML in June last year; and

(3) whether the authorities have plans to study the replacement of the Intercity Through Train services by Express Rail Link services, so as to alleviate the pressure on the carrying capacity of ERL; if so, of the timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply

President,

Having consulted the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), my reply to the question raised by the Hon Tony Tse is as follows:

(1) To tie in with the upcoming commissioning of the East Rail Line (ERL) Cross-Harbour Extension, the new ERL signalling system commenced service in February 2021. The ERL trains now run at a headway of about three minutes during peak hours, while the maximum headway under the new signalling system is about two minutes. The actual service frequency will depend on factors including passenger demand, number of trains, service arrangement, etc.

The ERL is currently operated with a mixed fleet of new nine-car trains and old 12-car trains. The old 12-car trains will be replaced progressively by the new nine-car trains to meet the operational need of the Cross-Harbour Extension. The design capacity of each 12-car train is about 3 750

passengers, while that of new nine-car train is about 2 845 passengers. The train body of the new nine-car trains is wider, with design improvements in handrail positions and distribution of train doors, which facilitate the more even distribution of passengers within the compartment. Besides train capacity, factors including train frequency and service arrangement will also affect the overall carrying capacity of railway lines. The MTRCL will adjust train frequency and arrange short-haul trips running between busy stations based on patronage and the actual situation to meet passenger demand.

(2) With the full line commissioning of the Tuen Ma Line (TML) on June 27, 2021, about 30 per cent of the ERL southbound passengers switched to TML for destinations in East Kowloon, which was higher than the original estimate of about 18 per cent. This brought significant diversion effect on ERL southbound trains, and had relieved the congestion of the busiest section of the ERL in the past (i.e. from Tai Wai Station to Kowloon Tong Station).

(3) Most of the Intercity Through Train (ITT) services run during non-peak hours of the ERL, in order to avoid occupying the ERL tracks during peak hours. Since the commissioning of the Hong Kong Section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) in September 2018, some of the ITT passengers switched to XRL for travelling to and from the Mainland. The Government and MTRCL will continue to closely observe the change in passengers' travel patterns and patronage of the ITT service when the pandemic eases and cross-boundary rail service resumes.