

LCQ22: Impacts of abolition of manual toll payment on tunnel staff

Following is a question by the Hon Luk Chung-hung and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (May 26):

Question:

The Government plans to adopt, starting from the end of next year, a free-flow tolling system at the various government tolled tunnels and the Tsing Sha Control Area (tunnels), under which the manual toll payment will be replaced by remote toll payment. Some trade unions' representatives have pointed out that by then, the various tunnels' toll collectors and supporting staff (affected staff) may lose their jobs; as such, the Government and the operators responsible for the management, operation and maintenance of the tunnels (the operators) should make appropriate arrangements for the affected staff as soon as possible, so as to protect their rights and interests. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the total number of staff affected, as well as their highest, lowest and average service years, with a tabulated breakdown of the number of such staff by name of tunnel and grade of staff;

(2) as the Government has indicated that it will require the operators to provide re-training and job transfer arrangements for the affected staff, of the details and progress of such work; whether the Government will (i) provide subsidies on re-training expenses and (ii) offer ex-gratia compensation payments to the affected staff on accounts of their livelihood having been affected by the Government's policy; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether the Government will specify in the tunnel management contracts to be signed in the future that the operators are required to set aside funds for providing ex-gratia compensation payments to those affected staff who are unable to have successful job transfer; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Luk Chung-hung is as follows:

The Government plans to gradually implement a free-flow tolling system (FFTS) at government tolled tunnels and the Tsing Sha Control Area (TSCA) from late 2022 onwards. Following the implementation of FFTS, toll collectors will no longer be required to collect tolls at government tolled tunnels and

the control area. In this connection, the Transport Department (TD) will continue to review in detail the operating arrangements with the contractors responsible for the management, operation and maintenance of the tunnels and the TSCA (hereinafter referred to as the Contractors) in order to work out the manpower requirements after the implementation of FFTS.

The number of affected staff of various government tunnels and the TSCA will be subject to change depending on staff redeployment (e.g. internal transfer) and the operating condition in the coming two to three years (i.e. before the full implementation of FFTS). On this premise, the preliminary estimation is that about 260 toll collectors will be affected, the breakdown of which by tunnel and control area is as follows:

Tunnel/Control area	Number of toll collectors (preliminary estimate)
TSCA	28
Aberdeen Tunnel	32
Cross-Harbour Tunnel	52
Eastern Harbour Crossing	36
Lion Rock Tunnel	48
Shing Mun Tunnels	30
Tate's Cairn Tunnel	36
Total	262

The manpower arrangements in various tunnels and the TSCA may change before the implementation of FFTS; and hence the information of the toll collectors concerned (including their length of service) cannot be provided at this stage.

Apart from toll collectors, some posts such as assistant operations controllers, operations supervisors, administrative and supporting staff as well as technicians will no longer be required to perform tolling-related tasks as part of their duties with the implementation of FFTS. The TD will continue to maintain close liaison with the Contractors to review the manpower arrangements for the posts concerned upon the implementation of FFTS.

The TD has all along been encouraging the Contractors to assist their toll collectors and other affected staff in taking up other suitable positions, for instance by continuing to provide subsidies/training (e.g. driving test fees/training) to toll collectors for facilitating their transfer to become traffic officers employed by the Contractors. With a view to enabling more staff to stay in employment, if a toll collector has met the TD's requirements by completing a 24-day training programme and fulfilling other entry qualifications of traffic officer, the TD, having considered the operation and staff establishment of the various government tunnels and the

TSCA, will consider suitably exempting him/her from the entry requirement, as specified in the Contractors' management contracts, of having one year of working experience relevant to the post of traffic officer.

Taking into account the experience in implementing the toll waiver of the Lantau Link, the TD also encourages the Contractors to, apart from redeploying suitable staff to other posts in the respective tunnels/control area, arrange their staff to work in other businesses of the Contractors or their parent companies (e.g. as fee collectors at car parks). The Contractors will provide support and training to the staff, and encourage as well as make arrangements for them to seek job transfers.

In addition, the new service provider of FFTS will also require experienced personnel to assist in operating the tolling system and handling relevant tasks. The Government will actively consider to include, in the tender for toll service provider, requirements for the tenderers to submit proposals on the recruitment of existing tunnel staff and related manpower arrangement.

As for the existing Contractors, the TD will continue to monitor their related work. In case the employment contract of an employee needs to be terminated, the TD will ensure that the Contractor concerned will pay all the termination payments, e.g. outstanding wages, annual leave and severance payments, to the employee in accordance with the Employment Ordinance (Cap. 57) and the management contract.