

LCQ5: Enhancing Express Rail Link services

Following is a question by the Hon Yiu Pak-leung and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (October 30):

Question:

Some members of the tourism industry are of the view that further increasing the number of destinations in the Mainland served by the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) connecting to the Hong Kong West Kowloon Station (WKS), as well as building up the XRL's long-haul sleeper service network in an orderly manner, are conducive to promoting the development of the tourism industry and facilitating Hong Kong's integration into the country's overall development. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective monthly patronage of the XRL service plying between WKS and Guangzhoudong Station and Guangzhounan Station, as well as those plying between WKS and each of the intermediate stations along the routes between WKS and these two stations, since the resumption of XRL service last year; as it has been reported that at present, it takes at least about 90 minutes to travel from WKS to Guangzhoudong Station, which fails to demonstrate the advantages of XRL, whether the authorities have studied with the Mainland authorities the feasibility of raising the speed of the relevant route; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (2) as it is learnt that Xintang Station, commissioned last year with its location at the core of the new development area in the eastern part of Guangzhou, is not only a necessary stop but also an important hub for travelling to the eastern part of Guangzhou, yet the relevant XRL routes only pass the station currently without stopping on it, whether the authorities will expedite negotiation with the Mainland authorities to make Xintang Station an intermediate station of XRL, so as to achieve better linkage between the XRL Hong Kong Section and the Mainland's railway network; and
- (3) as some members of the industry have relayed that XRL sleeper trains plying between Hong Kong and Beijing/Shanghai are well-received by travellers, whether the authorities have studied the provision of long-haul sleeper train service to more destinations, such as Xi'an and Chengdu in western China, so as to open up the long-haul rail passenger market in the western part of the country, thereby facilitating "two-way travel" by travellers?

Reply:

President,

The Hong Kong Section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) was commissioned on September 23, 2018, connecting with the over 46 000 kilometres long national high-speed rail network. It is a key component of the highly accessible transport network and economic circle of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), and consolidates Hong Kong's position as a regional transport hub. The MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) is responsible for operating the XRL Hong Kong Section, and has been in active liaison and collaboration with the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government and the Mainland railway authorities to continuously enhance the various operational arrangements of the XRL Hong Kong Section, with a view to fully realising its socio-economic benefits and the advantages of interconnectivity in the national high-speed rail network for the promotion of better integration of Hong Kong into the national development. Serving 80 directly connected destinations at present, the Hong Kong Section of the XRL is a crucial link between Hong Kong and the Mainland, and a testament to the increasingly frequent exchanges between the two places for business, leisure and other purposes.

In consultation with the MTRCL, my reply to the question raised by the Hon Yiu Pak-bleung is as follows:

(1) and (2) With the resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland after the pandemic, the XRL Hong Kong Section has progressively resumed train services since January 15, 2023. New short-haul and long-haul destinations have been introduced progressively, including the short-haul destinations of Dongguannan, Dongguan, Guangzhoudong and Changping, making it a more comprehensive network. In view of the increasingly frequent flow of people between the two places, upon discussion between the MTRCL and the Mainland railway authorities, the frequency of short-haul train trips of the XRL Hong Kong Section have been increased continuously. The number of trains running to and from Guangzhounan Station has increased from 16 trips per day in early 2023 to the present 38 trips per day. Passengers may also take long-haul trains that call at Guangzhounan Station, which are operating at 20 train trips per day; whilst the number of trains running to and from Guangzhoudong Station has increased from 12 trips per day in early 2023 to the present 26 trips per day.

The services of the XRL Hong Kong Section have been popular among passengers. In the first nine months of 2024, the XRL Hong Kong Section recorded an average daily patronage of about 70 000 passenger trips, with the total number of passenger trips approaching the annual total of approximately 20 million passenger trips in 2023. According to the ticket sales provided by the MTRCL, for short-haul destinations, more than 60 per cent of short-haul passengers are destined for stations in Shenzhen (i.e. Futian and Shenzhenbei), and nearly 30 per cent are destined for Guangzhoudong and Guangzhounan. Less than 10 per cent travel to the remaining short-haul destinations (i.e. Guangmingcheng, Humen, Qingsheng, Dongguannan, Changping and Dongguan).

To meet the travel needs of passengers, the MTRCL and the Mainland railway authorities review the operation schedule of train trips from time to time and enhance services in a timely manner. For instance, train trips

running between Hong Kong West Kowloon Station (WKS) and Futian Station or Shenzhenbei Station have been enhanced during weekends since early April this year. The MTRCL will also operate additional short-haul train trips for popular destinations during festive holidays in response to passengers' travel needs. As for the travelling time of trains between WKS and Guangzhoudong Station, a balance has been struck between the journey time of trains and the number of intermediate stops needed for passenger convenience. The MTRCL will continue to liaise with the Mainland railway authorities with a view to providing better cross-boundary rail service.

As for new stations, the number of directly connected destinations on the XRL Hong Kong Section has increased from 44 at the beginning of its operation to 80 currently. In addition to the aforementioned short-haul destinations, the XRL Hong Kong Section has been connected to the Chengdudong Line in southwest part of the country, including Chengdudong and Leshan, as well as the Zhanjiangxi Line, including Jiangmen, Kaipingnan, Yangjiang, Maoming and Zhanjiangxi. A long-haul route to Hunan Province was introduced in mid-2024, which directly connects to popular tourist destinations such as Zhangjiajie and Fenghuanggucheng. As for the proposal of introducing Xintang Station as a directly connected destination to the XRL Hong Kong Section, the MTRCL and the Mainland railway authorities are actively looking into the matter with a view to offering passengers a more convenient and comfortable travelling experience, while facilitating the flow of people between the two places.

(3) Thanks to the Central Government's care for Hong Kong and the strong support from various Mainland authorities, sleeper train service between WKS and Beijingxi Station/Shanghai Hongqiao Station was introduced on the XRL Hong Kong Section on June 15, 2024, with trains departing in the evenings and arriving the following mornings. This arrangement was an upgrade of the original ordinary-speed train service between the Hong Kong Hung Hom Station and Beijing/Shanghai, and reduced the journey time by almost a half. The trains also call at Shijiazhuang in Hebei and Hangzhou in Zhejiang as intermediate stations. In October 2024, the sleeper train service to Beijing and Shanghai was further upgraded. Fuxing high-speed sleeper trains have been deployed to serve passengers, along with adjustments to routes and departure times. The journey time between WKS and Beijing/Shanghai takes about 11.5 hours and 11 hours respectively. The service upgrade provides passengers with more caring, comfortable and comprehensive service, further leveraging the benefits of "evening departures and morning arrivals".

The HKSAR Government and the MTRCL have been actively observing the development of the high-speed rail network in the Mainland, and striving to further introduce destinations directly connected to the XRL Hong Kong Section, so as to provide passengers with more diversified options and services. Regarding the western region of the Mainland, direct train services are currently available at WKS, serving stations such as Chengdudong, Chongqing and Kunming. As for the introduction of direct sleeper trains to those destinations, various considerations and arrangement of different railway authorities are involved. The HKSAR Government and the MTRCL will maintain liaison and co-ordination with the Mainland railway authorities and

relevant departments to explore feasible options for further enhancing the service of the XRL Hong Kong Section.

Thank you, President.