

LCQ8: Government tunnels and trunk roads

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Siu-hung and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Ms Mable Chan, in the Legislative Council today (April 2):

Question:

The 2025-2026 Budget announced that as the Government has invested heavily in building the infrastructure of major tunnels and strategic routes, the Transport and Logistics Bureau will review the tolls of various government tunnels and trunk roads to embody the "user pays" principle. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) in the past year, of the respective average daily vehicular flows of the government-owned road tunnels (including the 10 tolled tunnels and 11 toll-free tunnels) and the Tai Lam Tunnel of which the franchise will expire on May 31 this year (collectively referred to as "the tunnels"), and the respective average percentages of the tunnels' vehicular flows during the morning and evening peak hours to the total vehicular flows;

(2) of the respective details of the actual/estimated expenditure and income (if applicable) involved in the daily management, operation and maintenance of the tunnels in the past three years and in the coming year (set out in a table); and

(3) of the relevant timetable and details of the Government's review of the tolls of various government tunnels and trunk roads; whether the Government will assess the impact of adopting different toll models for the aforesaid government tunnels and trunk roads on the travel habits of members of the public?

Reply:

President,

In respect of the questions raised by the Hon Chan Siu-hung, having consulted the Transport Department (TD), my consolidated reply is as follows.

(1) The average traffic flow, peak-hour traffic flow and its ratio to the daily traffic flow for government-tolled tunnels in 2024 are set out at Annex 1.

The traffic data for government toll-free tunnels are consolidated from the Annual Traffic Census (ATC). As the ATC 2024 is still being compiled, the average traffic flow, peak-hour traffic flow and its ratio to the daily traffic flow for government toll-free tunnels in 2023 are set out at Annex 2.

(2) The revenue and expenditure of government tunnels in the past three financial years are at Annex 3.

The projected revenue and expenditure of government tunnels in 2025-26 are at Annex 4.

(3) In determining the toll levels for government tunnels and trunk roads, the Government will give holistic consideration to four major principles, namely traffic management needs, "user pays", public transport first and efficiency first, as well as other factors including public affordability and the prevailing social circumstances. Among these, the Government will first consider traffic management needs and the public affordability. On the basis of "cost recovery", if toll levels are not sufficiently high enough for effective traffic management, the toll level will be further adjusted. The management and operation of tunnels require higher costs and more resources than those of ordinary roads built at ground level. For example, they require prolonged operation of the ventilation and lighting systems, more complicated structural inspections and maintenance, the engagement of operators for management. Therefore, the Government has all along adhered to the "user pays" and "cost recovery" principles and imposed reasonable tolls to ensure the financial sustainability of these transport infrastructures. For example, when the Government adjusted the tolls of the three road harbour crossings and the Tai Lam Tunnel, the aforesaid four major principles were fully taken into account. The TD has been closely monitoring the traffic conditions and the changes in traffic flow of government tunnels, so as to assess the effectiveness of traffic management under different toll models.

As the specific circumstances of each government tunnel and trunk road are different, such as geographical location, the target users, and traffic management needs, the Government needs to weigh various principles in order to set an appropriate toll level. For example, the Aberdeen Tunnel and the Shing Mun Tunnels encountered operating deficits of \$16 million and \$52 million in 2023-24 respectively. In fact, the toll levels for the two tunnels had not been adjusted for 34 years.

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The TD is conducting a review of tunnel tolls. We plan to complete the review within this year and consult the Panel on Transport of the Legislative Council.