

Remarks by CE at media session before ExCo (with video)

Following are the remarks by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, at a media session before the Executive Council meeting today (June 3):

Reporter: Good morning, Mr Lee. Some English questions. First, can you tell us more about the way forward between your administration and the Beijing's liaison office with the new appointment of Mr Zhou Ji? And the second question, how will the Government proceed with a review on tunnel tolls after taking back the Tai Lam Tunnel, and will that have any implication on new infrastructure, such as the Central Kowloon Route? Thank you.

Chief Executive: The work of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government (LOCPG) in the Hong Kong SAR (Special Administrative Region) is to facilitate exchanges and co-operation between Hong Kong and the Mainland, enhancing interactions between the two places. I think good communication and understanding with the LOCPG will be beneficial to both the governance of the Hong Kong Government and also in assisting the Central Government in designing policies for Hong Kong. I think communication and understanding are important, so that the actual situation of Hong Kong is correctly reflected, and the aspirations and requests of the Hong Kong Government can also be duly reflected.

I respect Director Zhou because he has a humble personality and a pragmatic character. In my dealing with him while he was working in the Hong Kong and Macao Work Office (of the CPC Central Committee) in the last two years, my communication with him was very good, and it was always a pleasant experience. He has a lot of local administration experience, and he takes the interests of Hong Kong close to his heart, and he is a staunch supporter for the faithful and correct implementation of the "one country, two systems" principle, which, of course, is the cornerstone for the success and prosperity of Hong Kong. I will work my very best to ensure that my communication and understanding with Director Zhou and also with the Liaison Office as a whole will be enhanced, so that the best policies for Hong Kong will be made as a result of full and accurate reflection of the situation of Hong Kong.

I thank Director Zhou for stating categorically and publicly that he will continue to support the Chief Executive and the Hong Kong SAR Government to dutifully govern Hong Kong in accordance with the law. Good communication and liaison with the LOCPG will benefit Hong Kong as a whole; especially it is in the interest of the people of Hong Kong and the long-term stability and prosperity of Hong Kong.

As regards the Government taking over the Tai Lam Tunnel and implementing the HKetoll, we have already seen that the tolls for different kinds of vehicles have dropped significantly, and the drop ranges from about 20 per cent to 80 per cent. The drop for, for example, a private vehicle – if

we talk about the off-peak time – is something like 70 per cent, which is a reduction from \$58 to \$18. Because we have adopted HKeToll, it gives us the flexibility of fixing different charges at different times for different vehicles. The HKeToll allows us to do good rationalisation of traffic control and overall traffic enforcement. I am glad to see that now all tolled tunnels in Hong Kong have implemented the free-flow tolling service. They do not have to stop when they pay their tolls.

In assessing which tunnels will be charged, I think the Budget has already laid down a good framework for this to be tackled. The Budget has already stated very clearly that a lot of money is spent on building and also managing different tunnels and trunk roads. There are several principles I think we should adopt. First of all, "user pays", I think, is a fair policy. There is a need to have charges for particularly major tunnels and trunk roads, because there is a need for traffic management. Charges will help in managing the traffic flow, and it will also help to ensure that public transport will be given priority in the use of roads. It will also ensure that there will be maximum efficiency as a result of good traffic management. Then, of course, in assessing how much will be charged, the public's affordability will be taken into consideration. Overall, we have about 19 sets of government tunnels and trunk roads. Nine of them are tolled tunnels. We will continue to make assessment of the different tunnels and trunk roads to examine how we will go about designing the tunnel charges. Then, of course, priority will be placed on the tunnels for which the charges have remained unchanged for a long, long time; because of inflation and various factors, the charges do not actually reflect the present situation. And then, of course, another priority will be new tunnels or new trunk roads, because they will be opened up for use. We need to design the appropriate level of charging.

The Central Kowloon Route will be completed at the end of this year. Yes, we will design the appropriate charges, and we will also report to the Legislative Council's panel appropriately. Thank you.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the remarks.)