

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): It is now 8.51 pm. Since I think that we can finish all items on the Agenda before midnight today, we shall now continue with the meeting.

Third motion: Expeditiously improving the traffic arrangements in the western and northwestern parts of the New Territories.

EXPEDITIOUSLY IMPROVING THE TRAFFIC ARRANGEMENTS IN THE WESTERN AND NORTHWESTERN PARTS OF THE NEW TERRITORIES

MRS SELINA CHOW (in Cantonese): President, in early January, some members of the Legislative Council Panel on Transport paid a visit to the Hong Kong section of the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Corridor (HK-SWC) and the Deep Bay Link (DBL) to inspect the progress of works. Witnessing that this largest ever co-operation project between Hong Kong and the Mainland was near completion, I was filled with both elation and worries. I am elated because, very soon, there will be a fourth land crossing between Hong Kong and Guangdong, thus facilitating the exchanges between the two places. I am at the same time extremely worried because the inauguration of the new boundary control point may exert unbearable pressure on the traffic in Northwest New Territories, especially Tuen Mun. Unfortunately, however, one can describe the attitude of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) towards this formidable traffic challenge as "lacking in vigilance and unrealistic". I shall offer my justifications in detail and propose some solutions in the rest of my speech.

According to the findings of the Northwest New Territories Traffic and Infrastructure Review, which were submitted to the Legislative Council in March last year, the authorities forecast that in the short term (around 2011) and the medium term (around 2016), the existing overall strategic Base Network of the Northwestern New Territories, including Tuen Mun Road and Route 3 (Country Park Section), will still be able to cope with the extra traffic flow brought about by the inauguration of the HK-SWC and DBL. It is therefore concluded that there will be no need to construct any additional large-scale transport infrastructure before 2016. And, it is also considered that the current improvement works for the existing roads in Northwest New Territories will also be able to cope with the additional traffic flow in the future. The authorities also forecast that in the initial period following the inauguration of the HK-SWC

and DBL, the daily traffic flow will be roughly 31 000 vehicle trips, most of which being concentrated on Route 3. This volume of traffic will just be 6 000 vehicle trips more than the volume recorded in 2004. The impact will therefore be very small.

However, like many members of the Panel on Transport, I am extremely skeptical of the various forecasts of the Government. Tuen Mun Road is toll-free and closer to the urban areas. For these reasons, and also because the DBL interchange will be located at Lam Tei, we can imagine that a good part of the traffic from the HK-SWC will most likely head for Tuen Mun Road, instead of Route 3, which involves a longer travelling distance, greater fuel expenses and exorbitant tolls. Currently, the daily traffic throughput between Hong Kong and the Mainland is as many as 43 700 vehicle trips. The throughput at Lo Ma Chau Control Point alone is already 33 000 vehicle trips. Following the inauguration of the HK-SWC, the passenger and freight transport between the two places will only become busier. I think Members can all project such a situation and anyone with common sense will also make the same projection. There is simply no chance that the extra traffic heading for Tuen Mun Road will just be 6 000 vehicle trips as forecast by the Government.

The Government also says that since the drivers of cross-boundary container trucks generally want to unload at the Kwai Chung Container Terminal as quickly as possible and then return to the Mainland for another load again, they will definitely avoid the frequently congested Tuen Mun Road and try to save time by choosing Route 3 instead. Besides, since the vehicles currently using Tuen Mun Road and the extra vehicles from the HK-SWC in the future will use Tuen Mun Road at different peak periods, they will presumably not flock to Tuen Mun Road during the same periods of time. The authorities are much too cocksure. Do they really think that the Chief Executive can even dictate the schedules and routes for motorists in Northwest New Territories? But one should not be surprised at all because the mentality of government bureaucrats has always been that since it is impossible to satisfy all, people must make do with the roads available and be "smart".

Since the Finance Committee approved the funding application connected with the HK-SWC and DBL in March 2002, the Transport Panel of this Council has met eight times to discuss the impacts of these two projects on the traffic situation in Northwest New Territories. Representatives of the Tuen Mun District Council have also expressed their views to the Legislative Council for

seven times. And, when I visited Tuen Mun, local figures even got hold of me, complaining about the "couldn't care less" of the Government. All these frequent discussions can show us that the various sectors are extremely worried and concerned about the traffic problems in Northwest New Territories. The relevant records of meetings indicate that all those present were unanimous in their conclusion that the forecasts of the Government were over-optimistic and highly questionable. Members are also worried that the already congested Tuen Mun Road and the road section in Tuen Mun town centre will become even more congested after the opening of the HK-SWC.

Since the Government's traffic forecasts have all the time been inaccurate, and also since the flows of goods and people between Hong Kong and the Mainland will become much busier due to the economic integration of the two places, I am worried that the inaccuracy of the authorities' traffic forecasts for Northwest New Territories will be much too wide of the mark.

Local figures are of the view that the optimistic forecasts of the authorities can hold true only when one precondition is met: the total traffic throughput of the area in the future can really be shared by Tuen Mun Road, Castle Peak Road and Route 3. However, it seems that the authorities have failed to admit one fact. Although some vehicles have indeed been diverted to Route 3 from Tuen Mun Road, there is still a huge discrepancy between the two trunk routes in terms of throughput. Most vehicles still prefer Tuen Mun Road, which is why its traffic load is over 80% while that of Route 3 with a similar capacity is just less than 40%. The reason for this is very simple. Most vehicle owners and drivers, especially owners and drivers of container trucks, do not want to use Route 3, which costs \$25 to \$40 per trip. Since they do not want to use Route 3 now, I just wonder why the Government should think that they will do so later.

Even the authorities themselves also admit that their medium- and long-term traffic forecasts are just rough ones. But, on the sole basis of these forecasts, the Government still insists that Tuen Mun Road can cope for 10 more years, so how can it convince us at all? As a matter of fact, during our discussions with the relevant industries, their representatives invariably told us that they would choose the toll-free Tuen Mun Road instead of the toll-charging Route 3.

Actually, if we look at the Government's forecasts once again, we will see that although the authorities claim that they are only rough ones, there are still

many contradictions. For example, when the Government lobbied support for Route 10 (Northern Section) in January 2002, it pointed out that the capacity of the key section of Tuen Mun Road, that is, the Sham Tseng section, would be overloaded in 2011, and the throughput would be 1.27 times to 1.31 times the capacity. But according to government standards, "1.2 times" is already the acceptable upper limit. It was also claimed that the capacity of Route 3 would likewise be overloaded in 2016, and the throughput would be 1.26 times the capacity. However, last year, the authorities suddenly claimed that these two roads would still be able to cope before 2016 and their throughput would remain below capacity in the interim. In other words, the Government started to say something different at that time. Likewise, in June 2004, the Government projected that the throughput of Tuen Mun Road and Route 3 would reach 203 500 vehicle trips by 2011. But in her written reply last week, Secretary Dr Sarah LIAO said that the throughput in 2016 would just be 188 000 vehicle trips. Why has the projected throughput become smaller and smaller? Besides, in January 2002, the authorities forecast that only one third of the vehicles would head for Tuen Mun Road in the initial period following the inauguration of the HK-SWC. But in October last year, it changed the forecast to one fifth. We can thus see that the figures provided by the authorities are forever changing. That being the case, which figures should we believe? Because of all these examples, I really suspect that the authorities will often juggle their statistics for the purpose of selling their policies, meaning that the actual situation is never depicted.

I am of the view that there is in fact a ready solution that can prevent the occurrence of any future traffic standstill in Northwest New Territories: the effective diversion of traffic from Tuen Mun Road to the "roomy" Route 3.

But since Route 3 is not toll-free, most motorists are unwilling to use it, which explains its being left largely idle now. I would therefore like to propose an ultimate solution here. The authorities can negotiate with the operator and offer to purchase Route 3 at a reasonable price. Afterwards, the trunk route should be opened to motorists free of charge. What is more, in order to achieve effective traffic diversion, the Government should construct the Easterly Link Road as soon as possible, so as to divert vehicles from the HK-SWC to Route 3. I know that even now, some Members still insist that we should spend \$22 billion on constructing Route 10. The construction cost of Route 3 was \$7 billion and I suppose the purchasing price should be more or less the same. Should we spend billions of dollars on a new trunk route (The construction cost may well

exceed \$22 billion now after a lapse of several years)? Should we spend \$22 billion on constructing a new trunk route with probably no sure date of completion (because the progress of government projects has never been very fast), the function of which will duplicate that of the existing Route 3? Or, will it be more economical to purchase an existing road at a much lower cost? What appears to be a stupid thing to do is in fact not, and the resultant benefits can be easily computed.

In regard to the proposed Easterly Link Road, I can remember that at the Finance Committee meeting in March 2002, the Liberal Party supported the funding application in relation to the design of the HK-SWC and DBL mainly because the authorities agreed to accept members' request for including the design of such a link road in the DBL funding application.

However, soon afterwards, the Government went back on its words, saying that unless there could be some progress in the negotiations on reducing the tolls of Route 3, it would not be advisable to construct the proposed Easterly Link Road. In February 2003, Secretary Dr Sarah LIAO said clearly that she hoped to complete the negotiations within 12 months. But three years have passed and we have never heard of any negotiation outcome. Was the Government's promise of constructing the Easterly Link Road simply a "trick" to induce Members to support the funding application connected with the HK-SWC and DBL? Members must think about this question and the Government must also give an account. The Government now insists that unless the tolls of Route 3 are reduced, the Easterly Link Road will not be constructed. What is more, it also refuses to set down a timetable for the negotiations and disclose the actual progress. All this is really unacceptable. The authorities must make some adjustments and seek to solve the problem once and for all for the benefit of the public. This is the only way to truly attain the Chief Executive's objective of "strong governance for the people".

In fact, Northwest New Territories plays a significant strategic role in the flow of goods and transportation between Hong Kong and the Mainland. If the authorities can do a good job in transportation arrangements, more goods from the Mainland will be transported to Hong Kong for handling, thus consolidating Hong Kong's status as the freight and logistics hub in South China. On the other hand, if the authorities fail to protect Hong Kong's competitiveness in terms of road circulation and tolls, our logistics, transport and shipping industries will be

adversely affected. I shall leave Mr Andrew LEUNG and Mr Jeffrey LAM to give a further analysis of the related consequences later on at this meeting.

Thank you, President.

Mrs Selina CHOW moved the following motion: (Translation)

"That, given the impending commissioning of the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Corridor at the end of this year, which will substantially increase the traffic load in the western and northwestern parts of the New Territories, this Council urges the Government to formulate as early as possible corresponding strategies, including buying out the ownership of Route 3 at a reasonable price and opening it up for use by motorists, as well as constructing the Easterly Link Road that connects the Deep Bay Link and Route 3, so as to divert the traffic flow from Tuen Mun Road, thereby alleviating the deteriorating traffic congestion in that district and avoiding causing great nuisance or inconvenience to local residents."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mrs Selina CHOW be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr WONG Kwok-hing, Mr CHEUNG Hok-ming and Mr Albert HO will move amendments to this motion respectively. Mr Andrew CHENG will move an amendment to Mr WONG Kwok-hing's amendment. Mr Albert CHAN and Mr LEE Wing-tat each will move an amendment to Mr CHEUNG Hok-ming's amendment. The motion and the six amendments will now be debated together in a joint debate.

I will call upon Mr WONG Kwok-hing to speak first, to be followed by Mr CHEUNG Hok-ming, Mr Albert HO, Mr Andrew CHENG, Mr Albert CHAN and Mr LEE Wing-tat; but no amendments are to be moved at this stage.

MR WONG KWOK-HING (in Cantonese): Madam President, the moving of this motion on expeditiously improving the traffic arrangements in Northwest New Territories is prompted precisely by two significant factors, namely, the