Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (February 25):

Question:

The vehicular traffic flow on the Shatin to Cheung Sha Wan section of Route 8 has been low since its commissioning on March 21 last year. Moreover, there are still neither franchised bus nor public light bus (PLB) routes passing through that road section at present. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the respective average daily vehicular traffic flow of Lion Rock Tunnel, Shing Mun Tunnel, and Tate's Cairn Tunnel each month since the commissioning of the aforesaid road section and their trends; whether the commissioning of the aforesaid road section has the effect of diverting traffic;

(b) of the projected increase in the average daily vehicular traffic flow on the aforesaid road section after the commissioning of the entire Route 8;

(c) whether it will consider lowering the tolls for the aforesaid road section, so as to attract more motorists to use that road section;

(d) whether it will discuss with franchised bus companies and green minibus operators the arrangement for certain existing bus and PLB routes to pass through the aforesaid road section; if so, of the routes involved, and whether it will request the franchised bus companies to offer bus-bus interchange concessions to the passengers concerned; if not, the reasons for that; and
(e) whether it knows if the franchised bus companies and green minibus operators have plans to introduce new bus and PLB routes destined for West Kowloon and the Central and Western District respectively, which pass through the aforesaid road section?

Reply:

President,

My replies to the five parts of the question are as follows:

(a) Details of the average daily vehicular traffic flow of Lion Rock Tunnel (LRT), Shing Mun Tunnel (SMT) and Tate's Cairn Tunnel (TCT) since the commissioning of the section of Route 8 between Sha Tin and Cheung Sha Wan (the Section) in March 2008 (up to January 2009) are set out in the Annex. The average daily vehicular traffic flow of the Section is also provided for reference. Since the commissioning of the Section, the LRT, SMT and TCT have seen a decrease of 6.6%, 5.5% and 11.2% respectively in their average daily vehicular traffic flow over the corresponding period in the previous year (i.e. March 2007 to January 2008). It shows that the Section has begun to provide a diversionary effect since its commissioning and has helped alleviate traffic congestion at other tunnels.

(b) The average vehicular traffic flow of the Section was around 19,400 vehicles per day in January 2009, representing an increase of about 43% over the figure at the initial stage of commissioning. Upon the commissioning of the entire Route 8 subsequent to the completion of the section between Cheung Sha Wan and Tsing Yi in late 2009, we expect a rise of about 15% to 20% in the overall vehicular traffic flow, if the overall economic condition, traffic flow to/from the airport, and the overall passenger and freight traffic are within the expected level. The Transport Department (TD) anticipates
a further increase when drivers gradually become familiar with the entire Route 8.

(c) In determining the existing toll rate of the Section (i.e. a flat toll of $8 for all vehicle types), we have taken into consideration a number of key factors including the cost, strategic position of the route, tolls of alternative routes, public acceptability and affordability, traffic implications of the toll level, as well as views and comments of the public and the Legislative Council in discussing the toll level of the Section. The current toll rate of Route 8 has taken into account public concerns about the increasing cost of living including traffic expenses, and should be largely affordable and acceptable to the general public. We do not plan to adjust the toll rate of Route 8 at this moment.

(d) TD has been exploring the possibility of diverting existing bus and minibus routes to the Section. TD notes that such diversion might affect some of the existing passengers, as the diverted routes might not cover some of the existing en-route stops. In addition, the diversion might increase the journey distance of some routes and hence the travelling time of passengers.

Taking into account the abovementioned considerations, as well as passenger demand, traffic conditions, coverage of existing public transport networks and impact on the operational efficiency of public transport networks, TD's current preliminary plan is to divert cross harbour route 373A (Wah Ming – Wan Chai (Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre)) to run the Section. Compared with diversion of other routes, the diversion of this route would have a relatively smaller impact on existing passengers and en-route stops, and is considered more practicable. TD will explore with the Traffic and Transport Committee of the North District Council the feasibility of this plan. Since this diversion plan only involves one bus route, it does not include bus-bus interchange scheme. TD has no plan to divert green minibus
routes to ply Route 8 at the current stage.

(e) At the moment, franchised bus companies do not have any plan to introduce new bus routes plying the Section to Kowloon West, or Central and Western District of Hong Kong Island.

For green minibus services, taking into account that there are adequate public transport services between Sha Tin and West Kowloon as well as Central and Western District of Hong Kong Island, TD has no plan to introduce green minibus routes plying Route 8 at the current stage.

Ends/Wednesday, February 25, 2009