

LCQ5: Ngong Ping 360 cable car system

Following is a question by the Hon Lau Kong-wah and a reply by the Secretary for Economic Development and Labour, Mr Stephen Ip, in the Legislative Council today (October 18):

Question:

Regarding the Ngong Ping 360 cable car system, which was commissioned last month, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of incidents in which cable car service was suspended due to system failures or weather conditions since the commissioning of the system, and the details of each incident;

(2) whether it has looked into the reasons for the frequent failures of the cable car system within a short period from commissioning; and

(3) whether the operator of the cable car system has immediately reported to the relevant authorities on each of the system failures, and whether the existing notification mechanism requires a public announcement to be made immediately in the event of any accident or system failure?

Reply:

Madam President,

(1) Since the commissioning of Ngong Ping cable car system on September 18 this year (up to October 16), the operator Skyrail-ITM (Hong Kong) Ltd. (Skyrail) has suspended the cable car services three times due to weather conditions and four times due to system and mechanical failure. Details are as follows:

(a) on September 23, 24 and 30, the cable car services were suspended due to strong winds, with a period of suspension ranging from 15 minutes to 39 minutes, to ensure passengers' safety and comfort;

(b) on September 30, the cable car service was suspended for 38 minutes due to technical problems associated with the adjustor device in adjusting the spacing between cabins in Tung Chung Skyrail Terminal. On October 8, the cable car stopped for 33 minutes, triggered by a signal from the safety system. On October 15, the commencement of the cable car service was delayed for 59 minutes in the morning because Skyrail took time to adjust the spacing between cabins. On the same day from 6.05 pm to 7 pm, the cable car service intermittently stopped also because of the signal from the safety system. Under the Aerial Ropeways (Safety) Ordinance, Skyrail has to submit a report to the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) on any failure of the cable car system. Skyrail has already submitted reports on the incidents on September 30, October 8 and October 15 to the EMSD.

(2) The September 30 incident was attributable to technical problems associated with the adjustor device in adjusting the spacing between cabins. Skyrail fine-tuned its staff's code of practice immediately after the incident.

As indicated in Skyrail's report, the incident on October 8 was triggered by a signal from the safety system to suspend operation. In accordance with the safety measures, the cable car system should not resume service until it had been inspected by operational staff to make sure everything was in order. On the

day Skyrail, following the code of practice, immediately deployed its staff to check the related equipment at various terminals and aerial towers to ensure that the cable car system was safe before it resumed operation. After investigation, the EMSD believed the safety system was over sensitive and had therefore requested the Mass Transit Railway Corporation (MTRC) and Skyrail to make improvements.

Turning to the delay in cable car service on October 15, the cause of the incident was the over close spacing between cabins as a result of the maintenance carried out on the night of October 14. To ensure safety, Skyrail had to adjust the spacing between cabins on October 15 morning before activating the system and therefore boarding was delayed. As regards the intermittent stoppages that afternoon, they were triggered by the technical problems with the sensors at Lei Nak Shan Angle Station. Skyrail immediately deployed its staff to the Angle Station to make emergency repairs.

The design, construction, operation and maintenance of Ngong Ping cable car system are under the supervision of the EMSD in compliance with the Aerial Ropeways (Safety) Ordinance. The Department has been closely monitoring the operation and maintenance of the cable car system before and after its commissioning. The Department considers that both the design and construction of the cable car system meet the safety requirements.

(3) Skyrail has put in place a notification mechanism whereby the departments concerned will be informed in the light of different situations. For instance, any failure in the cable car system with passengers on board has to be reported immediately to the EMSD; any requirement for special traffic arrangements arising from an incident has to be reported to the Transport Department. If an incident will give rise to other problems, Skyrail may need to report to the Hong Kong Police Force and the Fire Services Department depending on the nature of the problems.

For each suspension of the cable car service, the MTRC and Skyrail have undertaken to inform the public through placards, notices and announcements in the MTR stations on the Tung Chung Line and the Tung Chung and Ngong Ping Skyrail Terminals. Skyrail has also promised to deploy its staff to explain the situation to visitors on site and notify the tour groups that have made advance bookings to ensure that the affected visitors are aware of the situation on the spot as soon as possible.

The recent incidents on suspension of service reflect that there is still room for Skyrail to improve its notification mechanism. We have already asked the MTRC and Skyrail to enhance transparency in their operation and improve the notification mechanism to minimise inconvenience to visitors.

Ends/Wednesday, October 18, 2006
Issued at HKT 13:06

NNNN