

LCQ3:Ngong Ping cable car operational problem

Following is the question by the Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung and a written reply by the Secretary for Economic Development and Labour, Mr Stephen Ip, in the Legislative Council today (October 25):

Question:

During a trial run of the Ngong Ping 360 cable car system in June this year, many people were trapped in the cable cars as a result of a suspension of operation due to strong wind. Moreover, a number of problems were also identified. The commissioning of the system was consequently postponed. Since its commissioning in September, the operation of the cable car system has been suspended on a number of occasions due to strong wind, and cracks were also found on the crossbeam of the lowest level of Tung Chung Station and at Nei Lak Shan Angle Station. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council whether:

(a) it has conducted an investigation to ascertain if a faulty design of the cable car system has necessitated the suspension of the system in strong wind conditions; if so, of the investigation results, as well as the improvement measures to ensure the safe operation of the cable car system in strong wind conditions (except when a tropical cyclone warning signal No. 3 or above is in force);

(b) it has looked into the causes of the above cracks, and come up with the remedial measures; and

(c) it has assessed the losses suffered by the operator of the cable car system, shop operators at Ngong Ping Village and the tourism industry as a result of the suspension of operation and discovery of cracks; if so, of the amount of losses; and

(d) it knows if the authorities concerned have conducted an investigation to establish if the cracks were caused by the negligence of the contractor; if such negligence of the contractor has been established, whether compensation will be sought from the contractor; if so, whether the amount of compensation to be sought will cover the various losses mentioned in (c) above?

Reply

Madam President,

(a) According to the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, wind speed limit is an integral part of the design of a cable car system as cable cars operate in an outdoor and exposed environment. The Ngong Ping 360 cable car system is no exception. Whenever the wind speed approaches the threshold (not only in case of Typhoon Signal No. 3 or above), the Ngong Ping 360 cable car system will issue a warning signal which requires the cable cars to decelerate or cease service. It is necessary for the cable cars to suspend operation or delay boarding under strong winds for the sake of passengers' safety and comfort. This practice does not involve any design or safety issues of the cable car system. Temporary suspension of cable car service under adverse weather conditions is common in other places.

(b) As regards the cracks on a crossbeam of the Tung Chung Skyrail Terminal, the MTRCL informed the Buildings Department

(BD) of the incident on 20 September 2006. The BD carried out promptly an inspection of the entire Tung Chung Skyrail Terminal Building on 21 September 2006. The BD considers that as temporary support was erected under the crossbeam and no other cracks or structural damage was found, the Terminal Building is structurally safe and the incident will not have any impact on the safety and operation of the cable car system.

In early October, the MTRCL, the Authorised Person, the Registered Structural Engineer and the Registered General Building Contractor submitted reports on the incident to explain the causes of the cracks.

As for the cracks identified in the Nei Lak Shan Angle Station, the BD is of the view that the cracks are not structural ones after investigation. They will not give rise to any structural safety problems. The MTRCL has commenced repair works.

(c) The Ngong Ping 360 cable car system has commenced operation for one month only. Skyrail would improve its workflow and enhance staff training so as to upgrade their service. The MTRCL and Skyrail have also pledged to enhance transparency in the operation of the cable car system and to improve their notification mechanism so as to lessen the impact on passengers. While there is still room for improvement in its operation, the incidents of stoppages and cracks would not affect Hong Kong's tourism industry. As indicated by the MTRCL, Ngong Ping 360 has received 190,000 visitors from its opening to 23 October. During the National Day Golden Week, Ngong Ping 360 attracted some 60,000 visitors. The Skyrail-ITM (Hong Kong) Limited (Skyrail), which manages and operates the Ngong Ping 360 cable car system, will continue to liaise with the shop tenants at Ngong Ping Village and the tourism industry, and enhance visitors' awareness of and interest in the cable car ride, the Ngong Ping Village and other tourist attractions at Ngong Ping.

(d) The BD considers that the cracks found in the Nei Lak Shan Angle Station are not structural ones and are caused by normal concrete shrinkage during the construction period. There is no contravention of the provisions of the Buildings Ordinance. As for the cracks found on one of the crossbeams at the Tung Chung Terminal Building, the BD is examining its causes and will follow up as necessary. The MTRCL has applied to the BD for installation of extra permanent support to the crossbeam. The BD is processing the application. The MTRCL will commence the enhancement works once approval has been granted. The enhancement works will take four to six weeks, and are expected to be completed by mid-December 2006.

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