

Following is a question by the Hon Wong Yung-kan and a reply by the Secretary for Economic Development and Labour, Mr Stephen Ip, in the Legislative Council today (November 15):

Question:

Recently, incidents and chaos occurred during the initial operation of some newly developed major tourism facilities in Hong Kong such as the Ngong Ping 360 cable car system (NP 360) and the Hong Kong Disneyland. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the operator of NP 360 has announced earlier that the media and the public will be informed immediately of any expected delay or suspension of cable car service for 30 minutes or more, whether the Administration has conducted any study to see if the 30 minutes specified in the notification mechanism is a reasonable period; whether such arrangement can enhance the transparency of the operation of the company; whether it is reasonable that failures of the conveyor rail system occurred a little more than a month after commencement of its operation, and whether the above incidents are detrimental to the confidence of tourists and the public; if it has, of the results;

(2) whether it has conducted any study on the causes of the chaos and unsatisfactory operation of the newly developed tourism projects such as NP 360 and the Hong Kong Disneyland, and how the Government should modify its role in the development of these projects; if it has, of the results; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will conduct any study on how the Government can strengthen its regulation on and increase its support to the operators of major tourism facilities so as to enhance the competitiveness of Hong Kong's tourism industry and promote its long-term development; if it has, of the details of the study?

Reply:

Madam President,

(1) Under the current notification mechanism of Ngong Ping 360, Skyrail (the operator) will inform the public through the electronic media once the cable car service is expected to be delayed or suspended for 30 minutes or more, instead of 30 minutes after occurrence of the incident. Under this arrangement, Skyrail will assess as soon as the incident has occurred whether the delay will last for 30 minutes or more, and decide whether it is necessary to activate the notification procedure immediately.

Moreover, immediately after the incident, Skyrail will deploy its staff to explain the situation to visitors on site, inform the passengers of the latest situation through the announcement system, and notify the tour groups that have made bookings to ensure that visitors affected are aware of the latest situation as soon as possible. The MTRCL will also convey the messages through broadcast at the MTR Hong Kong Station, Lai King Station and Tung Chung Station, as well as notices in various MTR stations. We consider that the arrangements under the current notification mechanism are reasonable and have enhanced the transparency of Skyrail's operation.

(2) & (3) The Hong Kong Disneyland is an important part of our tourism infrastructure. It helps promote Hong Kong as the premier destination for family tourists in the region. Since its opening in September 2005, the Hong Kong Disneyland has adjusted its operation and fine-tuned its marketing strategy in the light of market demand in Hong Kong and the Mainland and its operation experience. The Park will continue to step up promotion overseas and in the Mainland to attract more visitors to the Park. As shown by the Park's visitor survey, about 80% of the respondents indicated that they would visit the Hong Kong Disneyland again, while over 90% of its hotel guests were satisfied with the services. The survey results show that visitors find the park performance satisfactory. In addition, for the first half of 2006, overnight family visitors grew by 24% over the same period last year. 36% of our overnight family visitors have brought along their children (compared to 20% over the same period in 2005). The Government will continue to monitor the performance of the Hongkong International Theme Parks Limited through its Board of Directors. Ngong Ping 360 has just opened for two months. Skyrail will fine-tune its operational process in the light of experience with a view to enhancing its standard of service. Since its commissioning, the patronage of Ngong Ping 360 has exceeded 320,000. According to a survey conducted by Skyrail, 99% of visitors are satisfied with their cable car experience. Both the MTRCL and Skyrail understand the public expectation, and will continue to strive for further improvement in the cable car operation to make Ngong Ping 360 more popular to the tourists.

In respect of Government's monitoring of major tourism infrastructure facilities, take Ngong Ping 360 as an example, the Government granted the Mass Transit Railway Corporation Limited (MTRCL) a 30-year franchise based on a Build-Operate-Transfer model to finance, design, construct, operate and maintain Ngong Ping 360, and required the MTRCL to manage the project under the Tung Chung Cable Car Ordinance and Project Agreement. Moreover, the design, construction, installation, operation and maintenance of Ngong Ping cable car system are under the supervision of the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) in compliance with the Aerial Ropeways (Safety) Ordinance. On this basis, the Government has been closely liaising with the MTRCL and Skyrail before and after the commissioning of the cable car system to monitor its safe operation, advise on its operation, and provide assistance and support, such as crowd control, traffic management, etc., as and when necessary. Skyrail is required to submit quarterly inspection reports on the cable car system to the EMSD, and commission an independent surveyor to inspect the entire cable car system with a report submitted to the EMSD annually. The EMSD will from time to time monitor the operation and maintenance of the cable cars on site.

The Government will continue its efforts in maintaining close liaison with the operators of these tourism facilities to ensure their smooth operation. Skyrail, Hong Kong Disneyland, etc are working with the Hong Kong Tourism Board and the travel trade to actively promote among the source markets with a view to promoting the visitors' awareness of and interest in these facilities. This will in turn boost the long-term tourism development of Hong Kong.

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