

LCQ7: Operation of Ngong Ping 360

Following is a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Gregory So, to a question by the Hon Jeffrey Lam in the Legislative Council today (March 21):

Question:

The cable car system of Ngong Ping 360 (Ngong Ping 360) broke down again on the third day of the Lunar New Year this year and more than 800 visitors were stranded in midair for up to two hours. It has been reported that the incident has aroused strong dissatisfaction among tourists and affected the image of the tourism industry of Hong Kong. The Ngong Ping 360 Limited (the Company) decided to suspend services for two months for maintenance and replacement of the bearings of bullwheels. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) given that following the three service suspension incidents in December last year, the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) had instructed the Company to enhance daily routine inspection, whether the Company had noticed during routine inspections the wear on the bearing that caused the aforesaid incident; if it had, why it had not replaced the bearing and handled the problem in a timely manner; if not, of the reasons for that;

(b) whether it has assessed the losses suffered by the local tourism industry and the commercial tenants of the Ngong Ping Village due to the aforesaid service suspension; if it has, of the amount of losses; if not, the reasons for that; and

(c) given that this is the twenty third service suspension incident of Ngong Ping 360 since its commissioning in 2006, whether the Government and the Company have assessed how Ngong Ping 360 compares with the similar type of cable car systems in other regions in terms of the frequency of incidents; if they have, whether the frequency of incidents of Ngong Ping 360 is too high; and whether they have learnt from the experience of the cable car companies in other regions in operation and conduct of safety checks; if they have, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government attaches great importance to the operation and service standards of the Ngong Ping 360 ropeway. The Ngong Ping 360 Limited (the Company) must maintain a highly safe and reliable ropeway service, as well as be sensitive to visitors' needs. In the aftermath of the incident of January 25, 2012, the Government has been closely monitoring and assisting the Company in its follow-up actions, including thorough examination and tests, complete replacement of the concerned components, and improvement to the contingency and communication arrangements. We will ensure that the ropeway system is safe and reliable before allowing it to resume operation.

My reply to the three parts of the question is as follows:

(a) Following the three service suspension incidents last December, the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) instructed the Company on December 23, 2011 to step up daily routine inspections, carry out an examination of the cable car equipment and conduct a comprehensive review on its preventive maintenance work. Since then, the Company has finished the inspections and replaced the components involved in these three incidents. In addition, the Company has strengthened surveillance by operational personnel during the operation of the ropeway, as well as tightened the inspection criteria for associated components and shortened their replacement cycles.

The incident of January 25, 2012, which was caused by a worn bullwheel bearing at the Airport Island Angle Station, did not involve the faulty parts identified in the incidents in last December. The Company conducted inspection of the bullwheel bearings on a monthly basis. In the latest regular monthly inspection preceding the incident of January 25, 2012, no abnormality was detected on the bullwheel bearings. To prevent recurrence of similar incidents, the Company has arranged the manufacturer and an independent expert to conduct an in-depth investigation into the incident. The scope of the investigation covers environmental factors, repairs and maintenance work, as well as quality and installation of components concerned. The Company has also commissioned an expert consultant to conduct a comprehensive review on the current repair and maintenance programme and, where necessary, institute further refinement and enhancement. Moreover, the EMSD has undertaken an independent investigation into the cause of the incident and is reviewing the current maintenance practices of the Ngong Ping 360 ropeway with a view to further improving the maintenance and repair practices.

(b) Both the Government and the Company recognise that the suspension of ropeway service would impact on Hong Kong's tourism industry and shop tenants at the Ngong Ping Village in the short term. But we do not have data on the monetary impact. To subsidise the operation costs of the Village shops and enable them to continue normal operation during the suspension of ropeway service, the Company has already disbursed special allowances to them. It will continue to work with the shop tenants and the tourism industry on ways to promote Ngong Ping 360 to local and overseas visitors upon resumption of service.

In the meantime, promotional offers have been introduced to attract visitors to the Ngong Ping Village during the suspension of ropeway service. Visitors spending HK\$60 or more at the Ngong Ping Village can redeem, free of charge, an MTR single journey ticket for travelling from Tung Chung to MTR lines. Visitors who join arranged tours to Ngong Ping Village through tour operators or tour guides will be offered free admission to two multimedia attractions, namely "Walking with Buddha" and "Monkey's Tale Theatre".

Handling and following up the incidents prudently has demonstrated the Government and the management company's commitment to making service safety and reliability a top priority. We are making the best endeavours to ensure the reliability of the cable car system before the resumption of operation. We consider that the incidents of Ngong Ping 360 will not affect the reputation and the development of the Hong Kong's tourism industry in the long run.

(c) The Ngong Ping 360 ropeway is regulated by the Aerial Ropeways (Safety) Ordinance (Cap. 211), which stipulates the technical requirements that conform to the international standards for similar ropeway systems. The tests and daily operations of the ropeway system must be carried out by competent personnel. The Company is also required to commission independent surveyors to examine the whole ropeway system and submit examination reports to the EMSD every year.

Given the variations in the design, operating environment, speed and load of the ropeway systems around the world and the different definitions for ropeway incidents of the host countries, there is no uniform benchmark for comparing the reliability and incident frequency of the ropeway systems. Besides, with the total length of its ropeway at 5.7 km, the Ngong Ping 360 ropeway system is known to be the longest bi-cable ropeway system in Asia. Its design is unique, in that a long span of its

ropeway (1.5 km) runs across the Tung Chung Bay without an intermediate tower; and that it is provided with two angle stations. It is therefore difficult to make a direct comparison with the other ropeway systems. That said, the Company will, in its own daily operations, make reference to the operation and safety inspection experience of the ropeway operators in other regions. It has also joined the professional international ropeway organisations, including being a member of the International Organisation for Transportation by Rope as well as the China Ropeway Association, through which it exchanges experience with other ropeway operators and acquires professional information and new technologies for further improving the operation, as well as maintenance and repair works of the Ngong Ping 360 ropeway.

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