

LCQ6: Staging of Formula E motor racing championship series in Hong Kong

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Following is a reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Gregory So, to a question by the Hon Michael Tien in the Legislative Council today (January 8):

Question:

In early 2013, the Financial Secretary said in his Budget speech that in view of the fact that our neighbouring cities had organised events such as Formula 1 Races in recent years, the Government would take the initiative to seek to host more mega events. It is learnt that Hong Kong was once listed a few months ago by the organiser of Formula E motor racing championship as one of the host cities for its 2014 tentative programme, but in the official programme unveiled early last month, Hong Kong was no longer on the list. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has assessed the benefits of staging Formula E motor racing championship series (championship series) in Hong Kong on building the "Hong Kong" brand, promoting tourism, attracting more mega events to be held in Hong Kong, as well as promoting sports development; if it has assessed, of the outcome;

(2) whether, before the official programme of Formula E motor racing championship was unveiled, the Government had deployed staff to discuss with the event organiser to strive for staging the championship series in Hong Kong; if so, of the progress at that time, as well as the difficulties encountered; and

(3) as it has been reported that one of the reasons for the failure in the bid to stage the championship series in Hong Kong this time was that the races would impede the access of the Chief Executive and other officials to their offices as the proposed race track covered the vicinity of the Central Government Offices, of the details of the problem and whether it has explored the solution to the problem; if so, of the outcome?

Reply:

Acting President,

Hong Kong has been hosting a diverse variety of mega events, such as the Hong

Kong Sevens, Hong Kong Marathon, Hong Kong Wine & Dine Festival and Hong Kong Dragon Boat Carnival. These mega events not only add colour and vibrancy to our city but also enrich visitors' experience. Spectacular mega events will attract visitors to make a special trip to Hong Kong, which will in turn fuel the growth of such tourism-related sectors as hotels, air transport, catering and retail in Hong Kong, and create more jobs. Moreover, mega events often attract overseas media coverage that helps burnish our image as an international metropolis and reinforce our status as the Events Capital of Asia.

As regards the proposal of hosting the Formula E Championship Car Racing Event (the event), the Tourism Commission (TC) was informed by the Hong Kong Automobile Association (HKAA) in September 2013 that the event organiser, Formula E Holdings Limited, was interested in staging the concerned car racing event in Hong Kong in November 2014. The Government supported the proposal in principle and immediately entered into discussion with the event organiser and the HKAA to examine the feasibility of staging the event in Hong Kong. However, the timeframe for hosting the event in November 2014 was indeed extremely tight given the fact that the study on technical and engineering feasibility, financial arrangements and other issues has yet to be concluded. We did all we could to reach an agreement with the event organiser on the design of the racetrack and related issues within the extremely limited time but has not been successful. We will keep in close contact with the event organiser to explore actively the optimal solutions to the engineering works and other issues related to the race.

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

(a) Hosting significant mega events could bring significant economic and publicity benefits to Hong Kong. The Formula E Championship Car Racing Event is a novel event that will be appealing to local people and visitors alike. However, owing to the technical limitations of Formula E car racing, we understand that the event's current scale does not come close to other motor races like the Formula 1, Formula 3 or saloon car races. To date, the event organiser has yet to provide us with concrete details of the races and its associated activities such as the scale, mode of operation, financial arrangements and the number of visitors that would be attracted. As such, we are not in a position to make any realistic assessment on the actual and potential benefits these races might generate for Hong Kong at this stage. We will make reference to the experience and outcomes of the upcoming Formula E Championship Car Racing Events held in other host cities.

(b) and (c) As I mentioned just now, the TC was first informed by the HKAA in September 2013 that the event organiser was interested in staging the Formula E car racing event in Hong Kong in November 2014. The event organiser had not consulted TC beforehand. Upon receipt of the message relayed by the HKAA, under the coordination of the TC, relevant departments and organisation, including Transport Department, Highways Department, Hong Kong Police Force, Home Affairs Bureau and the Hong Kong Tourism Board, immediately touched base with the HKAA and the event organiser to examine the feasibility of staging the races in Hong Kong. The focus was on racetrack design, requisite road works in preparing the racetrack and the technical specifications for the safety installments to be provided along the whole length of the racetrack.

As Formula E Championship Car Racing Events are to be held on the streets, the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile has prescribed requirements for the racetrack in order to protect race drivers and to ensure the races' attractiveness to spectators. On the other hand, roads in Hong Kong must conform to the established technical specifications and requirements, in order to meet the over-riding objective of safeguarding the safety of road users. The event organiser's preferred race route is set along the Central harbourfront, which is the transportation node of the Hong Kong Island and carries heavy traffic. As such, we need to carefully scrutinise the design, safety requirements and works schedule of the racetrack so as to minimise the impact on drivers and the general public as far as possible. If there would be a genuine need for the racetrack to pass by the Central Government Offices, we are prepared to provide necessary assistance as appropriate. In fact, the relevant departments have joined the event organiser to conduct a site visit to various road sections of the proposed racetrack and put forward detailed comments and suggestions on racetrack design in the light of the actual road and traffic situation of Hong Kong. The work in this respect is on-going. We will keep in close contact with the event organiser to look into an appropriate race route.

Thank you, Acting President.

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