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Consultation Strategy on Large Scale
or Sensitive Infrastructure Development

Introduction

Highway and railway projects are large scale infrastructure development. When their alignments near or pass through densely populated residential areas and highly patronized commercial centres, it is inevitable that the livelihood and living environment of the local community would, to a certain extent, be affected. Community relations in the course of the project implementation would have to be handled carefully and properly. Otherwise, there may be misunderstanding, grievance, complaint or even confrontation from the local community, which in turn may adversely affect the implementation programme.

2. This circular identifies elements of successful community relations handling to provide useful reference for highway and railway projects.

Background

3. At a meeting of the Mass Transit Railway (MTR) Tseung Kwan O Extension (TKE) Project Implementation Steering Committee, successful handling of community relation issues by Mass Transit Railway Corporation Limited (MTRCL) in the TKE construction in Hang Hau, Tseung Kwan O New Town was discussed. Case studies were subsequently conducted on MTRCL's community relations handling in Hang Hau, as well as in Mount Sterling Mall, Mei Foo Sun Chuen where MTRCL are undertaking construction of an interchange passenger subway linking the West Rail (Phase I) and the existing MTR Tsuen Wan Line. Findings of the case studies are attached at the Appendix A.

Elements of successful community relations

4. Based on the findings of MTRCL case studies and the experience from Kowloon Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC) railway projects and Highways Department's projects, successful handling of community relations in the course of project implementation would improve relationship with the local community and bring in tangible benefit for the smooth implementation of projects. A successful community relations handling shall commence early in the planning stage continuing in the construction stage of the project and the success is counted on the following elements:

- (a) The strategy for local consultation and liaison should be well planned and established in early stage of a project and necessary resources for its implementation should be planned and allowed for. In addition to District Councils and their sub-committees, the need of establishing communication channels with other local representatives, stakeholders, and individuals should be explored so as to effectively collect views, appraise the local community's sentiment, enhance mutual understanding, address and resolve complaints. The means of communication may include meetings, exchange of correspondence, issue of notices and press releases. The strategy of consultation and liaison should be reviewed to take account of changes in the course of project implementation. Training opportunities on public relation skills should be given to engineering professionals as far as possible.
- (b) Local consultation and liaison should commence timely so that local concerns can be collected and taken into consideration in planning and design of a project.
- (c) More participation in community activities, such as through carnival and roving exhibitions, can establish and enhance community relationship and publicise the benefit of the project. Such opportunity should be explored.
- (d) Both the community and the local living environment should be carefully considered during design development and assessment of construction method. Consideration should also be given to incorporating appropriate requirements in construction contracts to address green groups/local concerns and minimize impacts to livelihood and living environment of neighbourhood area. Close supervision of construction activities should be exercised to ensure that relevant requirements are complied with.

- (e) Frontline site staff should be well briefed on the need of good community relations and motivated to resolve issues before they develop. Complaints and claims from the local community should be handled in a sincere and responsible manner. Any promises made should be followed up to ensure its timely fulfillment so as to establish and maintain a trustful relationship. The setting up of Community Liaison Groups or Engineering Centres/Websites will be useful in enhancing the two-way communication. When considered necessary, training courses can be conducted to provide guidance to the site staff.
- (f) Hands on management on insurance administration and an open and flexible way to resolve claims expeditiously should be adopted. Proactive approach should be taken in processing of claims for damages or losses alleged to have been caused by construction. Claims should be processed timely and open and fair consideration should be given so as to maintain a peaceful relationship with the neighbourhood residents.

(Original signed)

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