

Case Study 1 - Tseung Kwan O Extension
Construction in Hang Hau, Tseung Kwan O New Town

Hang Hau is a densely populated area and high-rise residential blocks are situated in close vicinity to the TKE Hang Hau Station and railway tunnels. The area is reclaimed land and there has been pre-existing unusual ground settlement recorded in the neighbourhood of the railway site, including the adjoining On Ning Garden where settlement problem has been a major concern over the past 10 years.

When the TKE scheme was gazetted under the Railways Ordinance in September 1997, objections were lodged by the Incorporated Owners of On Ning Garden, the then Sai Kung Provisional District Board and a PDB member. The ground of all the objections was on possible environmental and traffic impacts arising from a proposed temporary use of an area adjoining On Ning Garden as a works area for the railway construction, and on delay to developing the area as a public park. In spite of all efforts to explain the temporary land use and assurance to alleviate their concerns, the objections were not withdrawn. Finally, the Chief Executive in Council overruled the objections under the Railways Ordinance and the use of the temporary works area was proceeded as gazetted. In the course of the gazettal and PDB consultation, there were no objections or concerns raised by the local community concerning ground settlement in the area.

In view of the historical problem of unusual ground settlement and the objections to the railway scheme, MTRCL anticipated that major community relations issues would arise in Hang Hau area and decided to enhance the community relations handling. To start with, MTRCL organised a Fun Day in Hang Hau to establish and reinforce the confidence of the community on the TKE works. On the other hand, MTRCL set up a PR team comprising a resident senior coordination engineer and other staff in the PR section. One of the PR tasks undertaken by the PR team was to increase visibility and clarify misunderstanding of the TKE project and on this, more than 25 roving exhibitions have been arranged in commercial complexes, housing estates and schools in Tseung Kwan O area.

Due consideration of the unusual ground settlement has also been taken into consideration by MTRCL in the design and contract documentation for the Hang Hau Station and railway tunnels.

Comprehensive survey of the adjoining area, including On Ning Garden, was conducted by MTRCL to establish the pre-existing condition for reference in design and construction of the railway works. To avoid causing undue ground movement, MTRCL adopted the use of steel sheet-pile walls for underground excavation for the railway station and tunnels. When the construction contract was out for tendering, MTRCL identified that the prospective contractor had the technique and resources for concrete diaphragm wall, which is an even more robust retaining structure, and top down construction. Although the primary reason for considering an alternative design of diaphragm wall construction was on programming advantage, the construction method could further reduce ground movement and noise impact in the neighbourhood area. After negotiation, the alternative design was adopted and incorporated in the construction contract by MTRCL.

The construction contract has also included stringent requirements for monitoring and control of those construction works which may cause ground movement. Monitoring markers were installed in the neighbourhood area, including the carpark area and building blocks of On Ning Garden. Any movement was closely monitored and in areas sensitive to settlement, the monitoring was conducted on a daily basis. The underground railway works have all been completed and the monitoring record indicates that all measurements are within acceptable limits and comply with the requirements of the Building Authority.

Since the commencement of the railway construction in April 1999, there have been complaints and claims for damages to properties alleged to have been caused by ground movement arising from the railway works. Majority of the complaints came from On Ning Garden. To resolve the complaints, MTRCL have striven to maintain continual dialogue with the Incorporated Owners of On Ning Garden, including attending meetings and by correspondence. Through the dialogue, MTRCL hoped to maintain an effective communication channel to apprise the views of the residents in respect of the railway construction, explain to them the findings of independent investigations on the cause of ground settlement and building damages and resolve conflicting views. It was however noticed by MTRCL in the course of communication that the Incorporated Owners was dominated by a few core members and there were difficulties encountered in discussion with the Incorporated Owners and disseminating messages and information to the residents at large fully and timely. To improve

the situation, whilst maintaining the dialogue with the Incorporated Owners, MTRCL also issued notices to individual residents and provided press releases to clarify the situation, and this has been successful in breaking the barrier in communication.

In processing of claims for damages to properties alleged to have been caused by the railway construction, MTRCL have taken a proactive and balance approach with a view to maintaining a peaceful relationship with the neighbourhood residents. For straightforward cases, MTRCL have successfully managed the insurer and its loss adjuster to process and settle the claims promptly by making monetary compensation and commitment to carry out repair works. For cases where the causes of damage were not conclusive, MTRCL have made financial agreements with the insurer on how the residents were to be compensated to show a gesture of goodwill. This approach has proved successful in avoiding potential confrontation with the residents.

The successful processing of claims by MTRCL is enabled by their insurance arrangement and the hands on management throughout the process. The third party liability insurance for the TKE works was procured direct by MTRCL as a joint insurer with their contractors. With this arrangement, MTRCL can have full visibility on risk coverage and manage the claims processing proactively. Regular communications between MTRCL and the insurance company and its loss adjuster have helped to promote an open and flexible way to resolve claims.

The pre-construction condition survey and historical data search, early appointment of the international independent investigating consultant on the cause of the settlement, upfront financial injection to payment fund and the willingness of MTRCL's contractor to carry out emergency and essential repairs have worked out a win-win solution to settle the claims expeditiously. Up to May 2001, over 90% of the claims lodged by the residents of On Ning Garden have been settled and there are only four outstanding claims to be resolved by negotiation.

Case Study 2 - West Rail (Phase I)
Construction in Mount Sterling Mall, Mei Foo Sun Chuen

Mount Sterling Mall is a popular amenity area in the densely

populated Mei Foo Sun Chuen. The Mall is also an important thoroughfare for access to adjacent residential blocks, surrounding shops, a nearby bus terminus, and the underlying MTR Mei Foo Station. The initial scheme of the KCRC West Rail (Phase I) for the Urban and Western Section proposed to raise the ground level of the Mall by 1.8m so as to accommodate a passenger subway to the existing MTR station. Under an agreement between KCRC and MTRCL, MTRCL undertook the detailed design and construction of the subway.

Upon the gazettal of the initial scheme, there were twelve objections against the proposed subway as the objectors perceived that the harmonious setting of the Mall would be seriously impacted. In response to the objections, the design was amended so that the existing ground level of the Mall would be raised by only 0.5m instead of 1.8m. The amended scheme was gazetted in April 1998 and there was no further objection against the proposed subway. Most of the objections, however, remained unwithdrawn as the affected members of the public still had concerns about the possible construction nuisance and the final design of the Mall.

MTRCL, KCRC and the Government perceived that the Mall would be one of the political focuses of the West Rail project requiring special attention. With the support of the MTRCL and KCRC, the Transport Bureau set up a Political and Public Relation Task Group (P&PRTG) in November 1998 shortly after the authorization of the railway scheme for providing policy guidance to the Railway Corporations for major political and public relation issues. The Group is attended by the engineering and PR teams of the Railway Corporations, representatives from various Government Departments including District Offices, Lands Department and Highways Department. The Group serves as a useful forum for discussion as to how to handle sensitive political matters.

Under the direction of the P&PRTG, a Construction and Community Liaison Group (CCLG) was formed in January 1999. The objective of the CCLG is to maintain dialogue with the affected parties during the construction stage so as to promote community relation at the work front. Core members of the CCLG include KCRC, MTRCL, District Councilors concerned, resident representatives and the Chairman of the shops' commercial association. To avoid possible open accusations and debate in the CCLG meeting, MTRCL have organised separate informal forum with the local residents' and commercial

association's representatives and effectively dissolve the hostility of the local parties.

The construction works in Mount Sterling Mall would necessitate the removal of quite a number of mature trees. In order to win PR mileage, MTRCL adopted the P&PRTG's suggestion to temporarily transplant some of the affected trees. The decision was conveyed to the then SSP Provisional District Board and the CCLG. The treatment of the existing mature trees was described and the transplanting proposal was well received.

Stringent control on the construction works to ensure timely completion of the works in a tidy manner was also an important factor in achieving good community relation in the Mei Foo case. To begin with the transplanting works, MTRCL selected an experienced contractor. They also explained the work procedures to the CCLG and the local parties. A leaflet was issued to inform all adjacent shops and residential units of the forthcoming events. Upon collection of views, they reduced the number of the affected trees, showing responsive feedback to the consultation. The concerned DC members and local residents' representatives were also invited to inspect the transplanted trees. The works were successfully completed, marking a good beginning for the construction phase.

Due consideration on mitigation of construction nuisance was taken into account in deciding on the method of construction of the subway. In order to reduce nuisance to the surroundings, MTRCL proposed a temporary steel enclosure to be built first at the Mall to enable the subway works to be carried out inside it. MTRCL successfully convinced the CCLG members that the proposed method was the only practicable solution to resolve the severe constraints. They also promised that an at-least 3m wide passageway would be maintained in front of the shops and every effort would be made to minimize the impact on adjacent shops and residential premises.

MTRCL have deployed sufficient experienced site staff to supervise the works where they and the contractor were well briefed of the local concerns and the public relations techniques. The erection of the temporary enclosure thus progressed satisfactorily under MTRCL's close site supervision. The site works were stringently controlled according to the contractual provisions, which included the various requirements to meet the local concerns identified during

the consultation stage. For example, percussion sheet-piles were not permitted so as to keep the operation as quiet as possible. Furthermore, sufficient contingency resources were allowed to cope with any community requests cropping up during the course of the works. As the works were well planned, and unforeseen difficulties were rapidly resolved, the enclosure was completed on schedule in a smooth manner. Now the subway works are being carried out inside the enclosure with little disturbance to the adjacent livelihood.

Efficient communication is also an important step in maintaining good community relation in this case. In pace with the works progress, MTRCL kept close and regular liaisons with the local parties and reported to them the latest position of the works. They also issued leaflets to bring adjacent shop operators and residents updated on the work progress. Furthermore, MTRCL set up a PR counter inside the existing Mei Foo Station to provide a convenient facility for public enquiry and display of photographs/posters to promote the image of the subway project. Complaints can be put to the counter or via a telephone hotline.

MTRCL have also succeeded in demonstrating that they take an open and sympathetic attitude in attending to local's views and in adopting reasonable suggestions whenever possible. Amendment of the design of a new entrance from a single-end access to two-end access; provision of decent signage to guide pedestrians to shops; mounting paintings to beautify the steel enclosure and reduction of the number of affected trees are some examples.