

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

DEVB(W)097

(Question Serial No. 0419)

Head: (60) Highways Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (4) Technical Services

Controlling Officer: Director of Highways (YAU Kwok-ting)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Development

Question:

The “hectares of land provided with vegetation maintenance service” from 2019 to 2024 reported by the Highways Department (HyD), have remained constant at 1 101 hectares. Meanwhile, “expenditure on vegetation maintenance for roadside slopes and expressways” increased by almost 200% from \$44 million in 2019 to \$131 million in 2024. Please advise this Committee on the following:

1. The area of land provided with vegetation maintenance services remained the same for many consecutive years. What are the reasons? Did HyD evaluate on whether there was urgency to carry out all the vegetation maintenance services? Or that some maintenance works could be postponed?
2. Regarding the “hectares of land provided with vegetation maintenance service”, what was the expenditure in each of the past 10 years?
3. What are the reasons for the significant increase of almost 200% in the “expenditure on vegetation maintenance for roadside slopes and expressways”?

Asked by: Hon LAM Siu-lo, Andrew (LegCo internal reference no.: 13)

Reply:

1. The main areas of vegetation maintenance for which the Highways Department (HyD) is responsible include vegetation within the areas of the registered slopes/retaining walls and expressways under its purview, as well as the vegetation on the landscape decks/noise enclosures on the public roads without pedestrian walkways or vehicular accesses under its purview. There are no significant changes in the relevant areas each year.

The HyD conducts at least two routine inspections and one tree risk assessment for the trees under its purview every year in order to carry out the necessary tree maintenance works on a timely basis, including pest control, pruning and removing branches or the

entire tree that pose a threat to the public safety, etc. To ensure that the trees are in good condition and at the same time, protect the public safety, vegetation maintenance works are required to be carried out regularly without any delay.

2. The expenditures on vegetation maintenance services incurred by the HyD over the past 10 years are as follows:

Year	Actual expenditures (\$ million)
2015	55.5
2016	54.8
2017	55.0
2018	52.5
2019	44.3
2020	62.6
2021	78.7
2022	83.4
2023	82.4
2024	131.0

3. The increase in the “expenditure on vegetation maintenance for roadside slopes and expressways” incurred by the HyD from 2019 to 2024 is mainly due to the constant increase in material costs and salaries, and also other reasons listed as follows:

- (i) Strengthening of vegetation maintenance works and optimisation of roadside planting areas

In respect of the high density and higher risk of failure of the Eucalyptus trees planted in early years, the HyD has included the “Eucalyptus Programme” in its regular tree maintenance works since 2019 and allocated extra resources for additional re-inspections for the Eucalyptus trees on both sides of the San Tin Highway according to plans every year, in order to identify the trees with potential risk as early as possible and arrange for risk mitigation works in time. Besides, the HyD has progressively replaced the aged shrubs along both sides of the North Lantau Highway since 2023 to optimise the planting areas on the sides of the road going to and from the Hong Kong International Airport. It is anticipated that the works will be completed in the fourth quarter of 2025.

- (ii) Cleansing and greening of the registered slopes and designated planting areas

During the COVID-19 epidemic between 2020 and 2022, the HyD was required to strengthen the cleansing and greening works of the registered slopes and designated planting areas under its purview.

- (iii) Improvement measures on tree management

The Development Bureau established the Task Force on Roadside Tree Planting and Maintenance (Task Force) in September 2022. At the end of 2022, the Task Force recommended a series of improvement measures on tree management, among which included the strengthening of risk assessment of large trees. The relevant requirement

was implemented in the “Guidelines on Tree Risk Assessment and Management Arrangement” (10th Edition) and put into effect on 1 November 2023. The improvement measures included widening the scope of the “Individual Tree Risk Assessment” under the “Tree Basis Assessment”. The HyD is required to carry out risk assessments and evaluations for more trees under its purview, as well as adopt risk mitigation measures on a timely basis to protect public safety.

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