

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

(Question Serial No. 0547)

Head: (60) Highways Department
Subhead (No. & title): (000) Operational expenses
Programme: (3) Railway Development
Controlling Officer: Director of Highways (YAU Kwok-ting)
Director of Bureau: Secretary for Transport and Logistics

Question:

The Highways Department (HyD) has promulgated the establishment of the Railway Checking Unit (RCU) recently in order to expedite the implementation of new railway projects. In this connection, will the Government advise this Committee on the following:

- (a) How are the responsibilities divided among the RCU, and the existing Railway Development Office (RDO) and Northern Metropolis Railway Office (NMRO) of the HyD? What are the similarities and differences in the positioning of these departments?
- (b) Over the past 3 years and projected for 2026-27, what were the respective grades, ranks, posts and salaries of the staff members, and the operating and equipment expenditures of the RDO and NMRO?
- (c) Projected for 2026-27, what are the respective grades, ranks, posts and salaries of the staff members, and the operating and equipment expenditures of the RCU ?
- (d) The Government has proposed to establish the Railway Department in order to merge the RDO and NMRO of the HyD with the Railway Branch of the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department so as to strengthen the monitoring of railway projects and safety. However, the "Expenditure Analysis by Head" in both last year's and this year's Government Budgets did not mention the "preparation for the establishment of the Railway Department" and the HyD has established the RCU. Does it mean that the Government has suspended the establishment of the Railway Department? And
- (e) Will the HyD consider to include staff members, such as electrical and mechanical engineers in the RCU to lay a solid foundation in construction stage for future railway operational safety?

Asked by: Hon LAM Wai-kong (LegCo internal reference no.: 37)

Reply:

- (a) The Railway Development Office (RDO) and the Northern Metropolis Railways Office (NMRO) of the Highways Department (HyD) are responsible for the planning of Hong Kong's railway development and overseeing the implementation of new railway projects, of which the RDO is responsible for carrying out studies and formulating plans for future development programme of Hong Kong's railway network, as well as the coordination and implementation of railway projects outside the Northern Metropolis. The NMRO is responsible for the coordination and implementation of the railway projects related to the Northern Metropolis.

In addition, the HyD established the Railway Checking Unit (RCU) by redeploying internal resources to effectively implement the Hong Kong Railway Standards. This dedicated unit is responsible for handling the approval for building plans of new railway projects, conducting centralised and efficient plan processing in line with project schedules, thereby enhancing administrative efficiency. The RCU is under the headquarters of the HyD and works separately from teams implementing railway projects (i.e. the RDO and NMRO) in order to maintain its independence.

- (b) The manpower establishment of the RDO and NMRO over the past 3 years and the projection for 2026-27 are as follows:

Year	Grade	No. of posts	Salary expenditures (\$ million) ^[Note]
2026-27 (projected)	Directorate	10	23.30
	Professional	138	161.60
	Technical	31	17.70
	General	34	17.20
2025-26	Directorate	10	23.30
	Professional	141	165.10
	Technical	31	17.70
	General	34	17.20
2024-25	Directorate	11	25.40
	Professional	128	149.70
	Technical	31	17.70
	General	35	17.50
2023-24	Directorate	11	24.00
	Professional	126	138.50
	Technical	31	16.40
	General	35	16.50

Note in terms of notional annual mid-point salary value.

The HyD does not maintain breakdown figures of other daily operational expenses for the RDO and NMRO.

- (c) The establishment of the RCU under the headquarters of the HyD in 2026-27 is shown in the table below. The figures are preliminary establishment of the RCU. The HyD would review and adjust the relevant establishment as necessary in response to the implementation progress of different railway projects.

Grade	No. of post	Salary Expenditures (\$ million) ^[Note]
Professional Grade	8	6.78
Technical Grade	2	0.65
General Grade	1	0.32

Note in terms of notional annual mid-point salary value.

The HyD does not maintain breakdown figures of other daily operational expenditures for the RCU.

- (d) The RCU is responsible for approving building plans of new railway projects. The Government previously proposed establishing the Railways Department to integrate the existing NMRO and RDO under the HyD, as well as the Railways Branch under the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD). The original proposal does not include the roles of approving building plans of railway projects, i.e. the roles of the RCU.

Since the establishment of a new department involves additional recurring manpower and resource requirements, the Government, under the direction of prudent control of operating expenditures, considers it necessary to reconsider the appropriate timing for establishing the Railways Department.

- (e) The RCU is specifically responsible for handling the approval for building plans of new railway projects. Its members include professionals related to construction engineering, such as building surveyors, structural engineers, civil engineers, etc. The RCU collaborates with relevant departments, including the EMSD, to ensure that building plans meet the safety operational needs of buildings and railway systems.

Besides, the EMSD will implement the Project Safety Review process for new railway projects, which involves conducting systematic assessments of long-term operational safety of new railway projects during various stages of projects, such as design, construction, installation, testing, etc. The aim is to identify potential safety hazards in major buildings and electrical and mechanical equipment at an early stage and give comments, enabling timely follow-up actions by the project teams and ensuring the long-term safety of railway operations.

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