

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

TLB225

(Question Serial No. 3475)

Head: (60) Highways Department

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

Programme: (1) Capital Projects

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

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Transport and Logistics

Question:

Since the “Universal Accessibility” (UA) Programme has been launched in 2012, the Government has expanded the scope of the Programme in order to cover more walkways. In this connection, will the Government inform this Committee on the following:

- 1) Please provide the progress of works, the situation of cost overrun and the data of public's satisfaction regarding the UA Programme over the past three years.
- 2) What was the proportion of maintenance expenditures of facilities to the total amount of provision over the past three years? In the coming five years, will the Government allocate budget specifically to cope with the demand for maintaining the facilities that are ageing gradually. If yes, what are the details? If not, what are the reasons?
- 3) Please provide the details of budget allocation, the estimated and actual expenditures, and the proportion of completed works of various sub-items (such as the addition of lifts, barrier-free access and cover retrofitting works) for the coming three years. Please also state whether the criteria of resource allocation to different districts are based on the indicators of objective demands (such as the proportion of the aging population and the proportion of people with disabilities).
- 4) Given the tight financial resources at present, did the Government evaluate the suspension of part of the works (such as the items which are too costly, with relatively lower demand or are technically complicated)? If yes, please list in details the names of the suspended works, the districts, the reasons for suspension and the estimated amount of expenditures saved. Please also state how the Government prevent the rights of socially disadvantaged groups from being damaged. If not, what are the reasons?
- 5) Regarding some items that are more costly, did the Government re-evaluate the financial feasibilities of the items and consider adopting other alternative design schemes to reduce costs? If yes, what is the anticipated time frame to make public the relevant evaluation reports? If not, what are the reasons?

Asked by: Hon LEUNG Hei, Edward (LegCo internal reference no.: 68)

Reply:

1. The Highways Department (HyD) completed a total of 59 items under the “Universal Accessibility” (UA) Programme over the past three years (as at end February 2025), with another 138 items under construction and 5 items under planning.

The actual expenditures did not exceed the estimates since the UA Programme was implemented by the HyD in 2012. The HyD has been liaising with relevant stakeholders, including District Councils (DCs) and their committees, nearby residents, and representatives of non-governmental organisations, to listen to the views of the public. Over the past three years, the HyD has received more than 25 letters of commendation on the UA Programme from members of the Legislative Council and DCs, as well as nearby residents, which include commendations for the department’s efforts in minimising nuisance to residents during the works period and the adoption of innovative technologies, etc. Furthermore, the HyD has conducted more than 160 site visits with various stakeholders to listen to their views and receive feedback, including concerns about the works progress, and ancillary facilities to the lifts (e.g. proposals for the installation of touchless buttons and reflective panels, etc.). Since the implementation of the UA Programme, various stakeholders have generally expressed support and appreciation for the programme.

2. The recurrent expenditure for each lift under the UA Programme, including electricity charges, the necessary maintenance costs and other relevant expenses, varies depending on the design of each lift (including capacity, size specifications, other ancillary facilities, service age, usage conditions etc.) and is estimated to be on average around \$370,000 per lift per annum. The HyD does not maintain breakdown figures of maintenance expenditures of the facilities.

Through the “Service Level Agreement” signed with the Electrical and Mechanical Services Trading Fund, the HyD has entrusted the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) to carry out the maintenance of the electrical and mechanical equipment of the ancillary facilities such as lifts and escalators of highway structures under its ambit, including the lifts installed under the UA Programme. Since the “Service Level Agreement” covers the maintenance costs of the electrical and mechanical equipment of the ancillary facilities such as lifts and escalators of all highway structures under the ambit of the HyD, the HyD does not maintain separate statistics that only cover the maintenance expenditures on the lifts installed under the UA Programme. The HyD would review the “Service Level Agreement” with the EMSD every year, and make necessary adjustments to the estimates of the “Service Level Agreement” based on the conditions of the ancillary facilities of highway structures under its ambit to ensure that the relevant facilities are maintained properly, including replacement of the parts of aging facilities, etc. The relevant estimates of expenses are included in the departmental expenditure estimates of the HyD.

3. The HyD anticipates that 118 lift retrofitting items will be completed in phases under the UA Programme in the coming three years. The total expenditure involved is

approximately \$2.76 billion. There is no sub-item, such as the retrofitting of barrier-free ramps or covers of walkways, under the UA Programme in the coming three years.

When implementing items of the “Original Programme” under the UA Programme, the Government aimed at providing lifts or standard ramps to public walkways which were not equipped with standard barrier-free access (BFA) facilities and did not have alternatives to BFA facilities within a distance of about 100 metres in order to respond to the recommendations of the Equal Opportunities Commission. The reasons for retrofitting lifts to these walkways are to facilitate people in need to have equal opportunities to use the public walkways in the territory and for their easy access. Therefore, it is necessary to proceed with the relevant works. In order to benefit more people, the Government subsequently implemented the “Expanded Programme”, “Second Phase” and “Third Phase” to expand the UA Programme to cover existing walkways which already have standard ramps, provided that certain criteria are met to ensure the proper use of public funds. When implementing the aforesaid programmes other than the “Original Programme”, the Government invited the DCs of 18 districts to prioritise the new items in the district that were proposed by the public. Each of the DCs selected three public walkways for priority implementation. The Government then implemented the “Special Scheme” in 2019 to retrofit lifts at footbridges, subways and elevated walkways of the housing estates under the Hong Kong Housing Authority, namely estates under the Tenants Purchase Scheme, the Buy or Rent Option Scheme and public rental housing estates with properties divested, provided that certain criteria are met. To assist the DCs in prioritising the implementation items, the Government provided various DCs with relevant information for each walkway concerned, including pedestrian flow, number of suggestions received, plan showing the proposed lift locations and photos, availability of ramps, facilities nearby for use by the elderly or those in need, alternative at-grade crossing facilities within a distance of about 100 metres and other lifts nearby, etc. This is to facilitate the DCs in considering the implementation priority thoroughly. The Government respects the decision made by various DCs upon thorough discussions based on the circumstances of the districts and will implement the relevant retrofitting items.

4. No items under the UA Programme were suspended as a result of the financial situation. The HyD will continue to implement incomplete items to ensure that the items under the UA Programme will be completed as scheduled for the convenience of the public.
5. The “Original Programme” under the UA Programme aims at facilitating people in need to have equal opportunities to use the public walkways in the territory and for their easy access. Thus, financial feasibility is not the major factor of consideration. When the Programme was subsequently expanded to “Expanded Programme”, “Second Phase”, “Third Phase” and “Special Scheme”, the Government also provided the information of each walkway, such as the preliminary estimated construction costs, etc., to the relevant DCs for consideration. The HyD would only commence the detailed design works subject to the technical feasibility of the scheme and the DCs’ support. When implementing the UA items, the Government will take forward the items selected by the DCs in a cost-effective manner through established tendering and project management systems. For example, the HyD would ascertain the actual locations and conditions of the underground utilities as early as possible during the design stage in order to optimise

the design of the lift tower so as to reduce the costs required for the re-provision of the relevant underground utilities.

Furthermore, the HyD has also adopted a series of measures to expedite the progress of the items and enhance the efficiency, with a view to enhancing the cost-effectiveness of the items. The measures include awarding works contracts in batches in accordance with the investigation and design progress of the items; adopting a new works contracts model with “Early Contractor Involvement” to allow contractors to participate in the design at the early stage of the project for enhancing the buildability of the design and shorten the construction time; and adopting the “Modular Integrated Construction” method under which the lift tower/lift components are installed in the factories before delivery to the sites for final assembly in order to expedite the construction and enhance the cost-effectiveness of the items. The HyD would also strictly supervise the quality of works, so as to ensure proper use of public funds whilst fully taking care of the needs of all stakeholders.

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