

7 May 2009

Dear Editor,

“Highways to hell”

We refer to the article by Christine Loh Kung-wai (*Highways to hell, 30 April 2009*). Ms Loh referred to the recent ICAC investigation involving 5 staff members of Highways Department (HyD) and expressed concerns on the administration and implementation of projects relevant to HyD. We wish to respond to her concerns below.

The Government attaches great importance to the implementation of public infrastructure projects through its well-established Capital Works Programme. It ensures effective use of public funds to provide the facilities needed in a timely manner. The Administration scrutinizes the need for the projects and their benefits, and prioritizes their funding allocations and programmes. Through public consultation and engagement, we gather views of the public and stakeholders and take them into account in our projects as far as practicable. Through completion of relevant statutory procedures, we firm up the project plans before seeking funding approval from the Legislative Council.

HyD adheres to the above practice in its implementation of transport infrastructure projects. The Stonecutters Bridge which Ms Loh mentioned in her article forms part of Route 8 which provides a strategic link between North East New Territories and Lantau. The Route also has convenient connections with the Kwai Chung Container Terminal and will, apart from providing direct access between the terminals and major expressways, relieve anticipated traffic congestion on Kwai Tsing Highway, Tsing Yi Road and the roads in the Container Port areas. Route 8 will bring greater travelling convenience to the general public, and the Stonecutters Bridge in particular will play a key role in supporting Hong Kong's port and logistics industry.

Likewise, implementation of the Central-Wan Chai Bypass project aims to relieve traffic congestion already experienced along the Connaught Road Central/Harcourt Road/Gloucester Road Corridor. The Expert Panel for Sustainable Transport Planning and Central-Wan Chai Bypass has confirmed its urgent need. There is strong public support for the early implementation of the project. On the other hand, we are mindful of the need for interface with the Shatin to Central Link. Close coordination between the two projects are in hand, which aims at minimizing reclamation as well as disruption to the users of the Causeway Bay Typhoon Shelter. HyD and the MTRCL have been and will remain in close touch on this matter.

Our infrastructure works are mostly completed or maintained through contracts tendered. For HyD maintenance contracts, the tender documents are vetted by legal advisers before tendering. The tender assessment and selection are subject to the scrutiny and approval of the Central Tender Board. After award of contracts, we conduct regular road inspections to work out the maintenance schedules. Works instructions and orders issued to and executed by the contractors have to be fully justified and are recorded. They are subject to independent audits by separate teams of staff. Our contractors and staff are accountable for their non-compliance with contract requirements and contract administration procedures.

Despite availability of a comprehensive administrative and contractual control mechanism, HyD understands also the importance of maintaining the quality and integrity of its staff. We have therefore established the Integrity Management Committee to oversee implementation of Integrity Management Plans, which provide regular trainings to staff on prevention of misconduct and on enhancement of ethical standards. Last year, we held six workshops and two thematic talks with the assistance of ICAC. Besides, HyD and ICAC meets regularly to discuss and identify study areas on anti-corruption. Completed studies with recommended measures being implemented include “*Administration of Road Maintenance Works*”, “*Control of Road Resurfacing*”, etc. We will continue to work with ICAC on improvement of existing procedures.

HyD is very serious about the ICAC investigation mentioned in the article. We have been rendering full co-operation to ICAC and will not tolerate any malversation by our staff. Any staff member who is convicted of such offences will be subject to disciplinary proceedings, which may include the termination of employment.

Thank you for your attention.

Wai Chi-sing
Director of Highways