

Transport Department's lack of transparency in relocating toll point at

Western Harbour Crossing

Investigation Report

Between February and April 2025, the Office received three complaints against the Transport Department ("TD") for lack of transparency in relocating the toll point of HKeToll at the Western Harbour Crossing ("WHC").

The Complaints

2. According to the complainants, they drove southbound through the WHC towards Hong Kong Island during the transition time slot (i.e. between 7:30 a.m. and 8:07 a.m.) following the end of the off-peak time slot on weekdays (excluding public holidays) between February and March 2025. They noticed that the Toll Information Display at the Kowloon entrance did not show the real-time tolls, and the toll charged was slightly higher than what they understood to be the usual rate. One of the complainants called the HKeToll customer service hotline ("Hotline") to enquire about the matter, but the frontline staff was unable to provide the precise location of the toll point. The complainant criticised TD for lack of transparency and inadequate staff training. The other two complainants made enquiries in March, but TD did not offer any improvement measures in its reply. The complainants found it confusing that TD had relocated the toll point without prior notice.

Our Findings

Response from TD

3 TD has installed a primary and a backup toll point for each direction of travel at all its toll tunnels (including the WHC). When the primary toll point is suspended from service due to facility maintenance or roadworks, toll collection will be switched to the backup toll point. For identification purposes, TD activates the corresponding Toll Information Display to indicate the toll point in operation, and turns off the one at the inactive toll point.

4. TD explained that when installing toll points, the factors to be considered

include that the location should accommodate the implementation of one-tube-two-way operation in tunnels, facilitate the accurate detection of vehicles, and avoid interference from environments or facilities that can degrade detection accuracy. TD also takes into account the requirements for load-bearing capacity, clearance height and power supply of overhead gantries or other structures, and allows for safe and efficient maintenance in future. Upon review, TD confirmed that on the southbound lane of WHC only two locations (at the Kowloon entrance and the Hong Kong Island exit respectively) were suitable for installing toll points. The two locations are approximately two kilometres apart, a distance greater than the typical 200-metre separation between primary and backup toll points at other tunnels. As a result, there is a noticeable interval between the times private cars and motorcycles (including motor tricycles) passing through the two toll points on the southbound lane of WHC. Given that toll rates change every two minutes during the transition time slot, the toll charged for these vehicles can be affected.

5. TD confirmed that due to roadworks between 21 January and 26 March 2025, toll collection was switched to the backup toll point at the Hong Kong Island exit on the southbound lane of WHC, while the primary toll point at the Kowloon entrance was deactivated. TD explained that Hotline staff were unfamiliar with the locations of the toll points and thus unable to respond to enquiries properly.

Improvement Measures

6. Following the launch of our full investigation into this case, TD has reviewed and introduced measures to improve information dissemination when the toll point on the southbound lane of WHC is relocated:

- (1) If relocation is required for scheduled maintenance or roadworks and the transition time slot is involved, TD will, on the day prior to the relocation:
 - (a) give advance notice of the relocation by displaying a conspicuous banner on the HKeToll website and mobile app, and via TD's website and the HKeMobility mobile app;
 - (b) notify the public of the relocation by disseminating information on variable message signs along relevant road sections leading to the WHC towards Hong Kong Island;
 - (c) modify the current practice of turning off the Toll Information

Display at the inactive toll point, but rather keeping it on to show a message about the relocation of toll point; and

- (2) In the event of an emergency relocation of toll point, TD will disseminate information as soon as possible based on actual circumstances via the HKeToll website and mobile app, TD's website and the HKeMobility mobile app.

7. TD is currently following up on the implementation of these improvement measures and coordinating with relevant departments and contractors to carry out system enhancement works, which are expected to be completed in early 2026.

8. TD acknowledged that a comprehensive mechanism for information dissemination is essential for any digitalised services introduced by the Government to respond effectively to public concerns and enhance user experience, thereby improving service efficiency and public satisfaction.

9. Regarding the Hotline staff's failure to respond properly to enquiries, TD has drawn on the experience and instructed the management of the relevant toll service provider to strengthen staff training and provide staff with more comprehensive information. Staff are also required to follow up on user complaints attentively and offer timely and appropriate assistance. TD will continue to monitor the service provider's performance.

Our Comments

10. It is understandable that relocation of toll point is required for operational needs. However, TD would merely turn off the Toll Information Display to indicate that a toll point is inactive (see **para. 3**), we consider this practice unsatisfactory as it has led to public queries about toll rates. There is clearly room for improvement in information dissemination to enhance transparency.

11. Furthermore, nearly a month after the toll collection had been switched to the backup toll point on the southbound lane of WHC, the Hotline staff was still unclear about its location and could not properly respond to the complainant's enquiry (see **paras. 2 and 5**). This reflected that TD had not been mindful of the different configurations of entrance and exit between the WHC on its southbound lane and other tunnels, resulting in a lack of thorough planning for the toll point relocation. TD had

not provided Hotline staff with essential and most updated information in advance to address potential enquiries, nor had it attached importance to training. Consequently, Hotline staff were unable to handle enquiries properly, and their performance was unsatisfactory.

12. Based on the analysis above, The Ombudsman considers the complaint **partially substantiated**.

13. We are pleased to note that following the launch of our investigation, TD has responded positively and started to improve information dissemination regarding the relocation of toll point (see **paras. 6 to 8**) to enhance transparency. We are also pleased that TD has instructed the toll service provider to strengthen the training of Hotline staff and ensure proper response to public enquiries (see **para. 9**).

Recommendations

14. The Ombudsman recommends that TD:

- (1) closely follow up on the system enhancement works for improvement of information dissemination, and strengthen supervision of the progress of contractors for expedited completion of relevant works;
- (2) conduct timely review of the effectiveness and operation of the improvement measures;
- (3) further consider and explore more effective ways to disseminate information about toll point relocation, such as television or radio broadcasts of traffic news bulletin prior to peak hours, so that motorists who have not downloaded the HKeToll or HKeMobility mobile apps are also informed of the arrangements;
- (4) consider liaising closely with other government departments (such as the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department) to facilitate communication regarding the system enhancement works;
- (5) step up monitoring the performance of the HKeToll hotline service provider;

- (6) urge the service provider from time to time to conduct internal training for Hotline staff to enhance their communication skills and ensure proper and effective response to public enquiries;
 - (7) draw lessons from this case to deliver better HKeToll service and improve user satisfaction, thereby raising the overall standard of TD's public services;
 - (8) clearly set out in operational guidelines the arrangements for the day prior to toll point relocation for compliance by staff; and
 - (9) strengthen staff training to improve their ability and efficiency in responding to public concerns.
15. TD has accepted and implemented all of our recommendations in **paragraph 14.**

Office of The Ombudsman

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