Railways play a vital role in serving the transport needs of Hong Kong. They account for about 41 per cent of domestic public transport and some 54 per cent of the land-based cross-boundary passenger trips by end 2019. Being high speed off-road mass carriers, railways provide fast, reliable and comfortable services, reduce the pressure on the road network, and avoid many of the environmental problems associated with road traffic. They are therefore the backbone of our public transport network.

Existing Network: The existing railway network in Hong Kong has a total route length of about 263 kilometres. The Legislative Council passed in June 2007 the Rail Merger Ordinance which provides the legal framework for the post-merger corporation to operate both the Mass Transit Railway (MTR) system and Kowloon-Canton Railway (KCR) system. The post-merger Corporation, i.e. the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) has been granted a 50-year franchise to operate the MTR and KCR systems with effect from December 2, 2007. Other fixed track systems include the Tramway and the Peak Tram.

MTR: MTR is a heavily patronized railway network consisting of 10 heavy rail lines, Airport Express and the Hong Kong Section of Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL). The heavy rail lines include Kwun Tong Line, Tsuen Wan Line, Island Line, Tseung Kwan O Line, South Island Line, Tung Chung Line, Disneyland Resort Line, East Rail Line, West Rail Line and Tuen Ma Line Phase 1. The East Rail Line was commissioned in 1910. The first passenger train of Kwun Tong Line started operation in late 1979, followed by the subsequent expansion of the network to include Tsuen Wan Line (1982), Island Line (1985), the Eastern Harbour Crossing connecting Lam Tin to Quarry Bay (1989), Tung Chung Line (1998), Tseung Kwan O Line (2002), West Rail Line (2003), Ma On Shan Line (2004), Disneyland Resort Line (2005), bifurcation of East Rail Line to boundary crossing at Lok Ma Chau (2007), bifurcation of Tseung Kwan O Line to LOHAS Park Station (July 2009), extension of West Rail Line to Hung Hom Station also with East Rail Line (August 2009), extension of Island Line to Kennedy Town Station (December 2014), extension of Kwun Tong Line to Whampoa Station (October 2016), South Island Line (December 2016) and Tuen Ma Line Phase 1 (February 2020). The network currently has 96 stations. By end 2019, the heavy rail lines carry an average of about 4.68 million passenger trips per day.

Airport Express (AEL): The AEL, which came into service in 1998, provides services to the Hong Kong International Airport and also in-town check-in facilities in some stations. The AEL has a route length of 35.2 km and a maximum speed of 135 km per hour. An average journey between the Airport Station and the Hong Kong Station takes about 24 minutes. In end 2005, the AEL was further extended to an in-venue station in the AsiaWorld-Expo located at the northeast corner of the Airport. By end 2019, the AEL carries about 43 200 passenger trips per day.

Light Rail: Light Rail is a local transportation network which started operation in 1988 to meet the transport needs of the residents in the northwest New Territories. It now has a route length of about 36 km with 88 stops. By end 2019, it carries an average of about 427 100 passenger trips every day. It has four interchange stations in Yuen Long, Tin Shui Wai, Siu Hong and Tuen Mun to facilitate passenger interchange between the Light Rail and West Rail Line networks.

Hong Kong Section of Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL): The XRL, commissioned in September 2018, is a 26-km long underground rail corridor connecting Hong Kong with the national high-speed rail network. Direct trains run between the Hong Kong West Kowloon Station and six short-haul destinations (Futian, Shenzhen, Guangmingcheng, Humen, Qingsheng and Guangzhou) as well as 52 long-haul destinations including Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Chongqing, Changsha, Fuzhou, Guiyang, Hangzhou, Kunming, Nanchang, Nanning, Shijiazhuang, Wuhan, Zhengzhou, Xiamen, Shantou and Zhaoqing. In 2019, the XRL carries an average of about 46 000 passenger trips per day.

Tramway: Electric trams have been operating on Hong Kong Island since 1904. The tramway operates seven routes on 16 km of tram track. Its average daily passenger trips are about 150 000 by end 2019.

Railway Projects under Implementation: The Shatin to Central Link is a 17-km long railway project consisting of the “Tai Wai to Hung Hom Section” and the “Hung Hom to Admiralty Section”. Tuen Ma Line Phase 1 was commissioned in February 2020. The remaining works of the Shatin to Central Link is in full swing. The “Tai Wai to Hung Hom Section” and “Hung Hom to Admiralty Section” are expected to commission by the end of 2021 and the first quarter of 2022 respectively.

Railway Projects under Planning: Having regard to transport demand, cost-effectiveness and the development needs of new development areas and other new development projects, as well as the potential housing supply that may be brought about by railway development, the Government will implement the new railway projects recommended in the Railway Development Strategy 2014 in a timely manner. The railway network is targeted to serve areas inhabited by about 75 per cent of the local population and about 85 per cent of job opportunities.