

Railways play a vital role in serving the transport needs of Hong Kong. They account for about 42 per cent of domestic public transport and some 55 per cent of the land-based cross-boundary passenger trips by end 2017. 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 over 230 kilometres (track length of 675 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 lines, including Kwun Tong Line, Tsuen Wan Line, Island Line, South Island Line, Tung Chung Line, Tseung Kwan O Line, Disneyland Resort Line, East Rail Line, Ma On Shan Line and West Rail Line. The East Rail Line was commissioned in 1910. The first passenger train of the 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 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 interchanging 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) and South Island Line (December 2016). The total route length is about 187 km with 93 stations. By end 2017, the network carries about 4.81 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. The AEL carries about 45 500 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 68 stops. It carries about 489 000 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.

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 172 000 by end 2017.

Railway Projects under Implementation: After the commissioning of the Kwun Tong Line Extension in October 2016 and South Island Line (East) in December 2016, there are two new railway projects under construction, namely the Hong Kong Section of Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) and the Shatin to Central Link (SCL).

XRL: The XRL is a 26-km long underground rail corridor, which will run from the West Kowloon to Shenzhen for connection with the Mainland section. Construction commenced in January 2010 and major works were completed in March 2018. The XRL is expected to commission in September 2018.

SCL: The SCL, with a total length of 17km, consists of the Tai Wai to Hung Hom section and the Hung Hom to Admiralty section. Construction commenced in July 2012 and is in progress.

Railway Projects under Planning: The Government announced the Railway Development Strategy 2014 in September 2014. Having regard to transport demand, cost-effectiveness and the development needs of New Development Areas, the Strategy recommends that seven new railway projects be completed in the planning horizon up to 2031, including the Northern Link (and Kwun Tong Station), the Tuen Mun South Extension, the East Kowloon Line, the Tung Chung West Extension (and Tung Chung East Station), Hung Shui Kiu Station, the South Island Line (West) and the North Island Line. When all the new projects recommended are completed, the total length of the railways will lengthen from 270 km in 2021 to over 300 km by 2031.