

PRESS STATEMENT

15 October 2019

MTR Clarifies Various Allegations

In response to recent queries raised by some quarters on whether damages on railway facilities in the MTR network are really done by protestors, MTR Corporation would like to give a response and set the record straight on false claims and other unfounded allegations. As a matter of fact, the public have clearly seen how the rioters stormed MTR stations and Light Rail stops at many occasions to inflict damages on railway facilities through TV live broadcasts. They maliciously damaged entry/exit gates, ticket issuing machines and CCTV cameras with metal objects, as well as turned on fire equipment to let water out to soak station facilities. They even set fire to stations and hurled petrol bombs into stations. These malicious acts which pose deadly threats to the safety of passengers, MTR staff as well as railway facilities, are apparent to everyone. The allegation about MTR and some people disguising as protestors conspiring to vandalise railway facilities is absolutely groundless and illogical, as the Corporation needs to deploy a tremendous amount of manpower and additional expenses in carrying out the repair works. We express indignation against those making false and irresponsible allegations, misrepresenting the facts and what is right or wrong. Such unfounded allegations are also very unfair to MTR maintenance staff who worked very hard to recover the damaged facilities in order to serve the travelling public.

The following are some clarifications of unfounded allegations:

1. There are news reports and online comments alleging that some of the facilities at MTR stations which are labeled as damaged in fact can function normally. We would like to point out that a large number of MTR stations have been repeatedly attacked by rioters. As of 7 October, 85 Heavy Rail stations and 53 Light Rail stops have been vandalised, with a large number of facilities damaged to varying degrees, e.g. the functionality of certain damaged equipment has been affected; some facilities were soaked, resulting in malfunctioning or the equipment only being able to function partially. There were allegations online saying that an Add-value Machine labeled as damaged actually functioned normally. The machine concerned was in fact vandalised with its display screen broken. As the machine had yet to be repaired and passengers might get hurt if they touch the display screen, a notice saying “not in service” was posted on the machine. In addition, it was alleged that some facilities such as entry/exit gates labelled as not in service actually function normally. While these machines may look intact, they suffered damages to varying degrees with some of the components broken, so much so that they may not be able to function stably and consistently. Unstable operation of equipment may cause inconvenience to passengers.

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Taking the aforementioned factors into consideration, notices were put up to inform passengers that the facilities are out of service. We will resume the service of the machines as soon as possible upon the completion of repair works and relevant tests.

2. There are also unfounded accusations that the Corporation intentionally suspends the service of station facilities, such as escalators, during peak hours in order to create inconvenience and even chaos in order to put the blame on protestors. The Corporation would like to point out once again that extensive damages were caused by vandalism during recent unrests and some of the facilities therefore could not be used. Some escalators, for example, were soaked and flooded maliciously by rioters and it may be difficult for passengers to see, on the surface, the damage caused to the inner components and such damages require longer time to repair. The maintenance team needs to dry the equipment before carrying out inspections and repair works. A number of tests will be followed to ensure safety before the escalators can resume service. Due to the heavy passenger flow at stations during peak hours, crowd control measures have been implemented where necessary based on the actual circumstances. Additional manpower was also deployed to assist passengers on site.
3. There are queries on whether the Corporation is indeed running out of some of the spare parts. The Corporation has been striving to provide service to passengers under safe and feasible conditions. During the initial phase of the public activities, damages were not too serious and the maintenance team could still complete the repair works after service hours and resume service on the following day. However, violence has been escalating with the vandalism getting more extensive and severe. Despite stop gap measures such as flexible deployment of equipment or spare parts at different stations to facilitate the repair works, some spare parts for fare related equipment have been exhausted and damaged parts cannot be replaced. New spare parts were ordered. Although some of the spare parts have gradually arrived, it takes some time for all of them to be delivered. The maintenance team is making best endeavors, for example by trying to repair damaged parts for reuse or deploying intact equipment from other stations to the vandalised stations to maintain the basic level of service or limited service to passengers as far as practicable.
4. It was alleged that the damages at certain stations after they were closed were done by the police or MTR staff. Members of the public may have seen in live TV broadcast that some people damaged the roller shutters at station entrances and broke into the stations after they were closed to vandalise facilities and even set fire at stations. Such acts not only damage railway facilities but also posed severe threats to the staff of MTR who were still on duty at stations. Allegations of MTR staff vandalising railway facilities or allowing people in disguise of protestors to carry out such acts are false and absurd. The Corporation needs to deploy a tremendous amount of manpower and incur additional expenses in carrying out the repair works. The Corporation condemns such illegal acts and have reported the incidents to the Police. The Corporation appeals to those with evidence and information on the identity of the culprits to provide such information to assist in the investigation.

5. Regarding concerns on the presence of Police at stations which have already been closed, we stress that the Corporation is a railway operator while the responsibility for upholding law and order in the MTR network rests with the Police. Any law and order issue will be handled by the police. The Police may deploy manpower to stations to maintain law and order if the situation so requires, and if there is intelligence that there would be potential attacks at certain stations. The police will go to stations for investigation and evidence gathering if they receive reports on incidents of vandalism.
6. Collapsible gates have been recently installed at entrances/exits of certain stations to enhance security after station closure. Some concerns have been raised about the safety of the gates should they be connected to power. The Corporation reiterates that the facilities will not be powered and the gates will only be opened and closed manually in accordance with our guidelines. The supplier has submitted a safety report on the gate's design and operation to the Corporation. Relevant government departments have also been informed of the installation.

The MTR network carries nearly six million passenger journeys every day. Since many members of the public depend on railway service to go to work, to school and for conducting daily affairs, the Corporation asks everyone to treasure the public transport system of Hong Kong. We also appeal to members of public to be considerate and help protect the railway facilities and not do anything which will endanger the safety of passengers, MTR staff and railway operations.

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