

# **Report on Stray Dog Incident on MTR East Rail Line on 20 August 2014**

## **Executive Summary**

### **Background**

An incident occurring on the East Rail Line (“EAL”) on 20 August 2014 in which a dog was found dead on the tracks raised concerns in the community.

2. The MTR Corporation Limited (“MTRCL”) set up a Task Force comprising members from various internal MTRCL departments and staff representatives to establish the facts of the incident occurrence, review the handling of dogs intruding onto tracks and make recommendations based on the investigation results in order to prevent similar recurrence in future. The Task Force comprises Operations Manager-West Rail Line & Light Rail (Chairman), Operations Performance Services Manager, Operating Departmental Joint Consultative Committee member, Public Relations Manager - Community Programmes, Human Resources Manager – Operations and Senior Safety Advisor.

### **The Occurrence**

#### **Sheung Shui Station (“SHS”)**

3. At about 9:50am on 20 August 2014, a By-law Inspection Unit staff at the Lo Wu-bound platform of SHS spotted a dog on the tracks and immediately operated the Platform Emergency Plunger. All approaching trains within that section of tracks were stopped and held outside the station.

4. The dog lingered between the 6th and 8th car position of the platform on the Hung Hom-bound track. SHS staff on the platform tried to lure the dog up to the platform. In the process, the finger of a member of the By-law Inspection Unit was bitten by the dog when she leaned forward and tried to pull the dog up to the platform.

5. Two station staff members were then deployed to the track to guide the dog away from the track area but in vain. They then returned to the platform.

6. While the dog lingered in the area between the underside of the platform and the track, trains were instructed by the Operations Control Centre to move into the platform area at cautious speed and be ready to stop quickly. Train service gradually resumed at 9:58am.

7. While train services gradually resumed, Train Captains sounded the horn before entering into the platform area to alert passengers on the platform and to warn the dog to move away from the trains. Eventually, the dog found its way over to the Hung Hom-bound track between SHS and Fanling Station (“FAN”).

8. After performing platform duty at SHS, the Train Captain of a Hung Hom-bound train saw the dog in a bush on the trackside at a distance away from the main line.

#### Fanling Station (“FAN”)

9. At 10:08am, the dog was seen on the tracks within the platform area in FAN by a passenger on the Lo Wu-bound platform who alerted the staff at the Platform Supervisor Booth. The staff rushed out from the Platform Supervisor Booth and immediately displayed hand signal to urgently stop an approaching Intercity Mainland Through Train.

10. Upon seeing the hand signal displayed by the Platform Supervisor Booth staff, the Intercity Mainland Through Train from Tai Wo Station approaching the Lo Wu-bound platform of FAN was braked to stop at a two-car distance from the front end of the platform.

11. The Platform Supervisor Booth staff looked for the dog from the platform but could not see it. After the Intercity Mainland Through Train moved away from the platform, the dog was found dead on the track at a three-car distance from the front end of the platform. The dog carcass was subsequently removed from the track by station staff.

### **Findings, Recommendations and Enhancement Measures**

#### Access of the dog to the track

12. The boundary fencing of EAL is designed to prevent trespassers (human) from intruding onto the railway tracks. However, as the land level along EAL is uneven, there are small gaps at the bottom of the fencing which dogs can get through. During subsequent patrols, two such gaps were identified in the Lo Wu area as possible entry points for the dog.

13. The two gaps were immediately sealed up with wire fencing. A comprehensive check of the boundary fencing along EAL was conducted with around 100 narrow gaps identified (including the aforementioned two gaps) and subsequently sealed up.

14. The Task Force has recommended that the inspection and maintenance regime for fencing be enhanced to strengthen the boundary fencing so as to prevent intrusion into track area by dogs.

#### Attempted rescue of the stray dog from track

15. SHS staff had ensured passenger safety and public order on the platform during the rescue operation. In addition, they had tried every possible means to protect and guide the dog away from the track. However, the staff involved had no training in handling the intrusion by stray dogs onto tracks.

16. The Task Force has recommended that training and tools be arranged for staff for safe and effective handling of dog-on-track incidents, in accordance with expert advice from animal welfare organisations.

#### Operations Procedure for handling animal-on-track incident

17. During the review, the Task Force sought advice from the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (“AFCD”) and animal welfare organisations including Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (“SPCA”), Society for Abandoned Animals as well as Hong Kong Dog Rescue.

18. In addition, with reference to benchmarking results with other metro systems around the world, including the United States and Australia, in handling animals-on-track incidents, some railways have adopted a more prudent approach, e.g. reducing train speed during search, whilst others have no specific guidelines.

19. The Task Force has recommended a more prudent approach be adopted when arranging train movements in the affected track section where a dog is present. Cautious speed should be considered for trains in the track section such that trains can be stopped quickly if required. During the period when cautious speed is applied, staff will conduct extensive search. If the dog cannot be found or is seen to have left the track area on its own, train service will resume normal. No cautious speed is required. When the dog is located on the track, train movement within the affected section will be stopped immediately until the dog has left the track. Taking the actual circumstance into consideration, staff will also guide the dog away. The AFCD and the SPCA will be asked to provide assistance if necessary.

20. The Task Force is aware of the need to strike a balance between ensuring animal safety on track and maintaining a safe and reliable train service for the travelling public. The enhanced procedure is suggested to be put on trial for one year and then reviewed for further improvement if necessary.

21. This investigation was initiated arising from the incident in which a dog was found dead on the tracks. As such, recommendations in the investigation report focused on the future handling of dog-on-track cases. If there are other animals (such as cats) present on track areas, the Task Force is of the view that the principles and practices of handling dog-on-track cases can be drawn as a reference. The handling of such cases should maintain a certain flexibility taking into consideration of different animals and scenarios, so as to strike a balance between ensuring animal safety on track and maintaining a safe and reliable train service for the travelling public. The AFCD and the SPCA will also be asked to provide assistance if necessary.

## **Conclusion**

22. As part of the MTR railway network is located in an outdoor environment, dogs do intrude onto railway tracks from time to time. In the incident, MTR staff had tried their best to rescue and protect the dog. With limited experience in handling dogs on track, the rescue efforts were not effective. Enhancements have been identified to prevent dogs from intruding into railway track areas and to provide operations procedure, training and tools for staff to better handle dog-on-track incidents.

23. The Task Force submitted the final investigation report to the MTRCL on 11 December 2014. The recommendations and enhancement measures have been endorsed by the MTRCL's management and implemented with immediate effect. The report was also submitted to the Transport Department on the same day.

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