

MTRCL's contingency plans for railway service disruptions

Purpose

The MTRCL has drawn up contingency plans for various service disruption situations specific to the needs of individual stations. They are made available to the staff assigned to contingency duties. For information that is of use to passengers, it is made available to them in stations and in the Internet. This note gives an account of the MTRCL's contingency plans for railway service disruptions.

Handling of railway service disruptions

2. When a serious incident happens and is expected to lead to a prolonged suspension of railway services for 20 minutes or more, the MTRCL will issue a "Red Alert" message to inform Government departments including the Transport Department (TD), other public transport operators and media organisations of the incident. Upon notification by the MTRCL, other public transport operators will provide appropriate supportive services as best as they can under the co-ordination of the TD. On its part, the MTRCL will suitably adjust its railway service to minimise impact and arrange free MTR shuttle buses to carry passengers from the affected stations to convenient locations, such as the nearest MTR station with railway service still in operation.

Alert System

3. "Red Alert" is defined as a signal which denotes that serious railway service disruption will continue or is expected to continue for 20 minutes or more, and emergency transport support services from other public transport operators are required. Upon being alerted, public transport operators will urgently mobilise their resources to provide

appropriate supporting services as quickly as possible.

4. Prior to the issuance of a Red Alert message, the MTRCL may issue an “Amber Alert” message. “Amber Alert” is defined as an early warning in respect of an incident which may lead to a serious disruption of service. After receiving this Alert, other public transport operators will alert their emergency unit, get prepared for possible emergency actions which may be demanded for at short notice and keep close contact with the MTRCL.

5. The MTRCL is also required to notify TD within 8 minutes on any service disruption incident which has lasted for 8 minutes or is expected to last for 8 minutes or more. Train service disruption incidents refer to those incidents that lead to a suspension or delay of service at a railway station or a Light Rail stop, or on a section of a railway line.

6. Besides, according to the Mass Transit Railway Regulations (Cap. 556A), the MTRCL shall report to the EMSD any incident that occurs at any part of the entire railway premises and which has a direct bearing on the safe operation of the railway.

Dissemination of information during incident

7. Regarding dissemination of information to passengers, the MTRCL has formulated measures to ensure effective communication with passengers during service disruption, with a view to assisting them to make appropriate alternative travel arrangements. These measures include:

- (a) broadcasting details of the service situation at stations and in trains;
- (b) providing information of alternative public transport service such as franchised bus routes, bus stop locations and free MTR shuttle bus boarding/alighting points on large information displays installed at stations;

- (c) displaying signs from concourse ceilings and at street level to mark routes to free MTR shuttle bus boarding/alighting points when free shuttle bus service is ready;
- (d) during service disruption, using LCD screens installed at visible locations near station entry gates of to provide train service information and other important notices;
- (e) posting railway service disruption message and information on free MTR shuttle bus services on the MTR website and MTR Mobile App “Traffic News”;
- (f) displaying alternative public transport information on maps in the concourse of affected stations; and
- (g) distributing “Rail Service Suspension – Passenger Guide” to passengers.

Operation of train and free MTR shuttle bus during serious railway service disruptions

8. In the event of serious service disruption, the MTRCL will endeavour to minimise the area being affected and provide train service to the farthest extent by:

- (a) reversing trains at designated track sections to maintain train service in unaffected sections;
- (b) diverting trains through supplementary track sections to bypass the affected section;
- (c) diverting trains across lines through designated track sections to reduce the impact of service disruption; and
- (d) diverting trains through spare track sections to reduce the impact of service disruption (for example, when the cross-harbour section of Tseung Kwan O Line is suspended, depending on which section is affected, cross-harbour train service can be maintained via the Service Connection Tunnel of Kwun Tong Line to provide linkage between Lam Tin Station and Quarry Bay Station).

9. The MTRCL has formulated free shuttle bus deployment plans for railway incidents and agreements have been entered into with bus operators for the provision of such services during railway incidents to take affected passengers to the nearest MTR station still under normal operation to continue their journeys.

Operation of free MTR shuttle buses

10. Free MTR shuttle bus service is a supplementary measure to assist passengers to travel to convenient locations. Given the limited carrying capacity of shuttle buses, it is not intended to be a substitute for normal train service. It brings passengers to the nearest station outside the affected section of a railway line where service is disrupted, to enable them to continue with their journeys. Shuttle buses would also stop at stations in the affected section to provide services to passengers.

Activation of free MTR shuttle bus services

11. The number of free MTR shuttle buses and the level of shuttle bus service to be deployed during a railway incident will depend on which section of the railway line is involved and the seriousness of the situation. Generally speaking, according to the agreement between the MTRCL and the Public Omnibus Operators Association (POOA)¹, when free MTR shuttle bus service is needed, the POOA will arrange about 7 buses to provide service within 30 to 45 minutes after receiving the MTRCL's notification; an additional 40 buses, if required, will be deployed within 1 to 1.5 hour; and about 100 buses in total after 2 to 2.5 hours. The actual number of buses to be deployed will depend on the extent of impact to train service and road traffic condition. Depending on the actual situation, the MTRCL may operate additional shuttle buses or modify the operating details of shuttle bus services to suit the need of the affected passengers.

¹ POOA is the confederation of non-franchised public bus operators in Hong Kong. At present, more than 200 non-franchised operators are members of the POOA, and together having a fleet of about 4 000 buses which accounts for about 60% of the total non-franchised buses operating in Hong Kong.

12. Information on the estimated arrival time, locations of and routes to boarding and alighting points of free MTR shuttle buses is included in MTRCL's "Rail Service Suspension – Passenger Guide" which is tailor-made for each station for distribution in the station. The Guide is also uploaded to MTRCL's website (http://www.mtr.com.hk/en/customer/services/needs_index.html).

13. Since the carrying capacity of shuttle buses is far below that of the railway, they can only serve as a support service to assist affected passengers to continue with their journeys. It is not possible for shuttle buses to serve as replacement for the entire railway service. Therefore, lines queuing for such bus service are expected and most passengers may have to change to other unaffected MTR lines or take alternative public transport services to travel to their destinations.

Manpower Deployment

14. In response to a service disruption incident, the MTRCL staff would be on duty at each MTR station to carry out crowd management duties, make public announcements, issue station notices and help passengers on fare matters according to the established procedures in times of incidents. The number of station staff will be increased as needed.

15. The MTRCL has also established a dedicated Customer Service Rapid Response Unit ("CSRRU") with around 90 members to provide additional support focusing on customer service on top of the manpower stationed at individual stations. The MTRCL will from time to time review the number of team members of the CSRRU as necessary.

16. Upon calling out the free MTR shuttle bus services during serious service disruption, the Operations Control Centre ("OCC") of the MTRCL will mobilise team members of CSRRU to affected stations to provide extra support on:

- setting up facilities for the implementation of free MTR shuttle bus services;

- maintaining order at affected stations and free MTR shuttle bus boarding/alighting points;
- making timely reports to the OCC during incidents to facilitate more effective co-ordination with relevant Government departments such as the Police for better crowd management;
- handling enquiries and advising passengers on alternative routes and transport choices; and
- providing guidance and assistance to passengers.

17. Upon notification of deployment, CSRRU team members will proceed to the affected stations by the best available means of transport, including taxi. The first team would likely arrive within 20 minutes in most cases according to past experience. CSRRU team members are easily identifiable in their pink vests.

Regular review and updating

18. The MTRCL will continue to regularly review and update its contingency plans for railway service disruption in consultation with relevant Government departments, in the light of operational experience gained.