(ACE Paper 15/2003)

For advice

Report on the 78th Environmental Impact Assessment Subcommittee Meeting

Introduction

At its meeting held on 29 April 2003, the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Subcommittee considered the EIA report on the Tung Chung Cable Car project.

Advice Sought

2. Members are requested to advise whether the EIA report on the Tung Chung Cable Car project should be endorsed or not.

Views of the Subcommittee

Tung Chung Cable Car

(ACE-EIA Paper 3/2003)

Need for the project

3. The Tung Chung Cable Car projects aims to enhance tourism in Ngong Ping on Lantau Island. The project proposal was first included in the North Lantau Development Study in 1992 and was further developed through the Visitor and Tourism Study for Hong Kong which was commissioned by the Hong Kong Tourist Association and the Planning Department in 1995.

Description of the project

4. The Cable Car system will connect Tung Chung and Ngong Ping on Lantau Island and consist of twoterminals, two angle stations for turning directions and eight supporting towers spreading over a length of 5.7 km. The Nei Lak Shan angle

station and five supporting towers will fall within the Lantau North Country Park and its proposed extension.

5. The project is a designated project under item Q1, Schedule 2 of the EIA Ordinance. Construction of the project will start in 2003 and will be completed in 2005.

Views and recommendations of EIA Subcommittee

6. Members' discussion at the meeting focused on the cumulative impacts on Ngong Ping, disturbance on the ecology of Ngong Ping caused by the tourists, the constructive method and hours of work; construction work impacts; plant surveys; compensatory planting; operational risks; renewable energy; waste management; impacts on stream courses; rescue trail; reuse of treated effluent and continuous pubic involvement in the EIA process.

Cumulative impacts on Ngong Ping

7. A Member expressed concerns on the overall cumulative impacts of various development projects on Ngong Ping which was an ecologically important area. There was concern that the project proponent had considered the impacts of major projects in Lantau Island such as Improvements to Tung Chung Road and the Theme Park in Penny Bay but had neglected minor projects such as car parks, helipads, etc which were more adjacent to the proposed project in Ngong Ping.

8. The project proponent team explained that assessments on the cumulative impacts were carried out in accordance with the study brief and all the requirements had been complied with. Initial assessments on impacts of construction activities in respect of noise, dust, etc. were conducted and the potential sensitive receivers identified. Details assessments were then made on the cumulative effects of those impacts on Ngong Ping. The project proponent was also aware of other planned projects in Ngong Ping such as the Sewage Treatment Works and had considered its impacts together with the impacts of the present project in terms of protection measures and with regard to the precautionary principle. The cumulative noise impact assessments were given in Table 4-9 of the EIA report. The cumulative impacts on the landscape and ecology of Ngong Ping had also been considered and a series of mitigation measures to address the impacts would be in place. As regards minor projects mentioned, the project proponent clarified that no multi-storey car park would be built for the Cable Car System. The proposed car park would mainly involve the formation of flat land. The same would apply to the helipad if one were to be built. In view of its dual role as the project

proponent as well as the operator of the Cable Car System for the next 30 years, the MTRC would try its best to maintain the existing ecology of the project area as far as practicable and make the built environment more conductive to wildlife.

9. The representative of EPD also explained that compared to other new development areas, the planned developments in Ngong Ping area were more definitive, and the EIA report for the Ngong Ping Sewage Treatment Work had already been approved and made available to the public.

Disturbance by tourists

10. A Member expressed concerns about the impacts on the ecology of Ngong Ping caused by the increasing number of tourists going there. The project proponent pointed out that at present there were about 1.2 million of visitors traveling to Ngong Ping by bus each year. The figure would be expected to increase to 1.4 million in five years' time. There would not be significant increase in the number of tourists and increased disturbance to the ecology of Ngong Ping due to the visitors was not expected. The project proponent was very conscious about excessive development in Ngong Ping and had in fact turned down a request of the Tourism Commission to examine the feasibility of a mountain bike path through the country park.

Construction method and hours of work

11. On the issue of construction methods, the project proponent confirmed that they would use helicopters instead of material ropeway to deliver construction materials to the sites to reduce temporary loss of habitats that might be brought by the latter method. As regards the possible long hours of work (from 7 hours to 2300 hours) in certain work sites as mentioned in the EIA report, the project proponent clarified that the report identified the hours of work permitted but they had no intention of carrying out work up to 2300 hours.

Construction work impacts

12. On how construction work was designed to reduce adverse impacts on the environment, the project proponent pointed out that in the first place, they would use the bi-cable system which required less number of supporting towers compared with another cable system namely the Funitel system used in the Ocean Park. While the Funitel system would have required about 20 supporting towers, the bi-cable system would require only eight. On site management, the project proponent pointed out that

the contractors which were appointed on target cost basis would work out the detailed plans together with the design team to reduce safety risks as well as risks to the environment. An ecologist and an engineer would be on site several times a week. The site staff would be trained and information on monitoring and auditing work would be uploaded on the Internet for public viewing. Furthermore, the size of each construction work site would be strictly controlled and only five m. in excess of the length and width of the actual footprint of the towers would be allowed. For example, if the footprint of the tower were 30m x 30m, the site area would be 35m x 35m. Construction work would be confined to only two sites at a time and once a site was finished, replanting would start immediately.

Plant surveys

13. On the rare plant species identified by the public under the alignment of the Cable Car project, the project proponent indicated that the plant surveys were carried out according to the requirements of the study brief using methodology accepted by the authority. The surveys were carried out at areas near the terminal buildings and the pylons, along the emergency rescue trail, and 50m on either side of the alignment. A number of rare species were identified in the surveys but there were not going to be impacted either directly or indirectly during construction phase.

14. Furthermore, a botanist and an ecologist would be part of the implementation team during the construction phase so that any species of interest could be identified and remedial actions could be taken if required. It was agreed that information about the location of the rare plant species could be passed to the project proponent for necessary protection measures.

Compensatory planting

15. On compensatory planting, the project proponent advised that in consultation with experts and the Kadoorie Farm, plant species that would attract wild life such as butterflies and other types of fauna would be planted. The location of the two sites for compensatory planting was chosen based on expert advice and the availability of the sites.

Operational risks

16. On operational risks posted by plantations, the project proponent advised that plantations underneath the alignment would be trimmed regular to ensure that there

would always be a headroom of 10m between the top of the plants and the bottom of the cable cars. The Cable Car system would cease operation when typhoon no. 3 or above is hoisted and if the wind speed exceeds the safety limit.

Renewable energy

17. On the use of renewable energy, the project proponent advised that the energy that was required to operate the Cable Car system could not be generated by the sun or wind. It had to come from the electricity mains.

Waste management

18. On waste management, the project proponent advised that a detailed waste management plan would be worked out according to the study brief with special regards to the protection of the country parks. Also, the project proponent planned to make use of the excavated soils for the construction of the emergency rescue trail.

Impacts on stream courses

19. On the impacts on stream courses, the project proponent team pointed out that the supporting towers would be located away from stream courses. Other precautionary and protection measures would be in place such as the installation of chemical toilets for the work sites and no discharge and uncontrolled runoff would be allowed on work sites.

Rescue trail

20. On the management of the rescue trail, the project proponent confirmed that the trail had to be managed by the MTRC in the capacity as the operator of the Cable Car System. The trail would be open to the public.

Reuse of the treated effluent

21. On the reuse of the effluent treated by the Ngong Ping Sewage Treatment Plant, the project proponent confirmed that the use of more treated effluent than currently planned might not be possible.

Continuous pubic involvement

22. The Subcommittee noted that the project proponent had involved the stakeholders as well as the green groups at very early stages of the EIA process of the project and thus benefited a lot from the continuous public involvement process promoted by EPD.

Conclusion

23. The Subcommittee agreed that it would recommend the EIA report to the full Council for endorsement without conditions.

EIA Subcommittee Secretariat
May 2003