

DON'T ALL RUSH TO BE FIRST ON NEW MTR LINE

Michael Shum

The first phase of the Tuen Ma Line involving one expanded and two new stations will open tomorrow and is estimated to carry 80,000 passengers daily while boasting new anti-vandalism features.

MTR Corp general manager for special duties, Alan Cheng Kwan-hing, called on railway enthusiasts to avoid rushing to take the debut train in view of the coronavirus outbreak.

The long-awaited Tuen Ma Line extends the Ma On Shan Line from Tai Wai station toward Kowloon East, with two new stations – Hin Keng and Kai Tak – and an expanded Diamond Hill station.

“The Tuen Ma Line hopes to divert passengers that wish to travel to the eastern part of the city from the East Rail Line, to relieve the congestion on the critical link between Tai Wai and Kowloon Tong,” Cheng said.

With the new service, the journey from Tai Wai to Diamond Hill has been halved to nine minutes. The interchange from the East Rail Line to the Kwun Tong Line will also be cut short to around one to two minutes’ walk, compared to around three minutes at Kowloon Tong station, Cheng said.

He said the new extension would not add to the burden of the Kwun Tong Line. “The busiest section of the Kwun Tong Line would be between Shek Kip Mei and Prince Edward during rush hour, while we expect more passengers to use the new Tuen Ma Line to head toward the east of the city.”

The mass transit operator said it expects 70,000 to 80,000 commuters to use the Tuen Ma Line daily, diverting a few thousand rush-hour commuters from the East Rail Line.

But Cheng also acknowledged the current adverse situation and said: “The patronage figures of the new

Tuen Ma Line will be affected by the epidemic, while it also takes time for commuters to change their habits... the figures might not be entirely realistic when the service starts, as passengers have to try our new service out before starting to use the Tuen Ma Line regularly.”

For the line’s opening tomorrow, the MTRC has announced special arrangements. The new Kai Tak station will open at 5.20am for people to visit and a special debut train will leave at 5.45am – half an hour earlier than its normal service.

Though transport chief Frank Chan Fan previously teased about a “surprise” for the Valentine’s Day launch, passengers will have to wait for it to be unveiled tomorrow as the rail company kept its lips sealed on what it could be.

Meanwhile, the two new stations, Hin Keng and Kai Tak, also feature a “smart” customer service center to replace the originally staff-stationed centers.

“There is a tablet installed for passengers to search for

information around the station, and another monitor for passengers to contact our staff via a video call for general inquiries,” Cheng said.

An MTRC spokesman added that a mobile service team will roam around the station to provide assistance to passengers.

The team will be equipped with a mobile device to tackle customer service needs, such as issues related to Octopus cards. “This would allow more flexibility in providing timely and proactive assistance to passengers,” the spokesman said.

Several hundred workers will be deployed to assist passengers at the start of the new service.

In view of recent events, Cheng said the new stations have protective measures to safeguard passengers’ safety, including plastic panels to protect facilities from vandalism and arson.

michael.shum@singtaonewscorp.com



The Kai Tak and Hin Keng stations are shown off as journalists try out the trains. SING TAO



Public estate residents voice out pipe fears

Sophie Hui

More than 120 public estate residents in Fan Ling are worried about their sewage system and have urged the Housing Authority to fix it.

This came after three relatives of an infected woman living in public housing estate Hong Mei House in Tsing Yi had been confirmed with Covid-19 and almost 200 residents from 34 units in the building had to be evacuated and quarantined.

Experts worry that the virus might have spread through pipes connecting the units as the preliminary investigation found that the toilet of the woman’s unit had been altered and the vent pipe connecting the toilet bowl was not completely sealed.

It is suspected that waste gas carrying the virus may have leaked into other units through the vent pipe.

North District councillor Chan Yuk-ming of Democratic Party said he had received inquiries from more than 120 residents in Cheung Wah Estate about their sewage system.

After inspection, at least 10 households said the vent pipe of their toilets were cut off when they bought the premises as the contractor from the Housing Authority told them the vent pipe was “useless.”

Other residents said the authority did not help them change their pipes and were worried that the pipes could spread the virus.

Apart from Y2 type public housing like Hong Mei House, Chan said H type public housing like Cheung Wah Estate also faced similar risks. He said the government must explain any risks to the people living in other types of public housing.

Public estate residents are worried the virus may spread through bad pipes. SING TAO

A resident of Cheung Shun House for over 30 years, Ms Chan, said the contractor had removed the vent pipe when she moved in. “They only sealed it with paper towels and mud,” she said.

Meanwhile, Kenny Tse Chi-kin, former head of the Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors’ building surveying division, said not every renovation worker had sufficient pipe design expertise, leading to modification issues.

Speaking on radio, Tse said modifications in the drainage systems of many units were substandard.

He said the vent pipe will fail to function if it has been cut and the virus could spread into the room. Tse added that the drainage systems for subdivided units were subpar and could increase health risks.

sophie.hui@singtaonewscorp.com

Lifts infection suspected in Guangzhou cases

Charlotte Luo

All residents of a Guangzhou building have been evacuated as authorities suspect coronavirus infection via the lifts or sewage system.

Six residents, living in three flats in No 18 building, were confirmed to have the virus, officially named Covid-19, between January 29 and February 11.

The building is located at a high-end estate, Poly Tianyue, in Pazhou of Haizhu district.

All the patients are in quarantine and their close contacts are under medical observation, a notice from the district government said.

“Ever since the first case appeared, the entire building was being put under quarantine, with 212 residents and property management workers tested once,” the notice said.

All residents were transferred to Jiangyue Hotel and Vienna Hotel for a 14-day concentrated medical observation.

Guangzhou Daily quoted experts as

saying the building might have unknown transmission sources and they did not rule out the possibility of the virus spreading through the elevators or sewage system. One of the residents, a 33-year-old man surnamed Yu, was confirmed to have the virus on January 31. On February 4, the police bureau in Haizhu established a case against Yu for allegedly hindering prevention of infectious diseases.

The bureau said preliminary research suggested Yu’s wife had had a cough and fever on January 23, but still drove with her parents from Hubei to her home in No 18 building.

Yu and his wife visited a doctor between January 27 and 31 and both were confirmed to have the virus.

However, they lied about their previous whereabouts and refused to say who they had been in contact with since they returned to Guangzhou.

In another district in the city, nine cases were reported at Clifford Estates, a residential estate with a large number of Hong Kong residents. All nine had visited Hubei recently.

The National Health Commission said 2,015 new cases had been reported on Tuesday. The total number of cases in the mainland reached 44,653. The death toll rose to 1,113, with two people dying elsewhere – one in Hong Kong and one in the Philippines.

In Hong Kong, several pro-democracy groups protested outside the liaison office to mark the seventh day after the death of doctor Li Wenliang. They pasted a petition outside the gate of the building.

Li was among the first people who drew attention to the virus, but was accused of spreading rumors on the internet.

Civic Party lawmaker Kwok Ka-ki, a doctor, said Li’s death made Chinese people realize the importance of free speech.

Kwok said the Communist Party is again hiding things about the disease as it did during the SARS outbreak in 2003.

“We must thank Li Wenliang’s brave words on that day, and support the late-comers in the mainland who have joined [the camp] to defend freedom of speech,” he said.

charlotte.luo@singtaonewscorp.com



Activists mark the seventh day after the death of mainland doctor Li Wenliang.