

Corporate governance

The Company is committed to ensuring high standards of corporate governance in the interests of shareholders and devotes considerable effort to identifying and formalising best practices.

The overall management of the Company's business is vested in the Board of Directors. Pursuant to the Company's Articles of Association and the Protocol adopted by the Board of Directors, the Board of Directors has delegated the day-to-day management of the Company's business to the Executive Directorate, and focuses its attention on matters affecting the Company's finances and shareholders. These include financial statements, dividend policy, significant changes in accounting policy, the annual operating budget, certain material contracts, major financing arrangements and major investments, risk management strategy, treasury policies and fare structures.

The Company takes care to ensure the Board is in a position to exercise its powers in an informed manner. The Board of Directors meets regularly and members of the Board receive information between meetings about developments in the Company's business. All members of the Board of Directors have full and timely access to relevant information and may take independent professional advice if necessary. The Board of Directors held 14 meetings in 2002 and the average attendance rate was 82.06%.

As an integral part of good corporate governance, the following committees have been established. These committees comprise non-executive Directors who have been invited to serve as members. Their independent and objective views on various aspects of how MTR is governed provide proper control and ensure that we continue to achieve the high standards expected of a major listed company.

Audit Committee

The Audit Committee meets four times each year to review the completeness, accuracy and fairness of the Group's financial statements and to consider the nature and scope of internal and external audit reviews. It also assesses the effectiveness of the systems of internal control. Internal control systems have been designed to allow the Board of Directors to monitor the Company's overall financial position and to protect its assets. The purpose is to guard against material financial misstatement or loss. The Board of Directors is responsible for these systems and appropriate authorisations and guidelines are in place. The Audit Committee Chairman also prepares an annual report to the Board of Directors covering its activities for the year and highlighting issues which the Chairman deems significant.

All the members of the Audit Committee are non-executive Directors, namely T Brian Stevenson (chairman), Cheung Yau-kai and the Commissioner for Transport (Robert Charles Law Footman), two of whom are independent non-executive Directors. There were four meetings of the Audit Committee in year 2002 and the average attendance rate was 91.7%. The external auditors, the Finance Director and the Head of Internal Audit Department attended to answer questions on the reports or their work.

Remuneration Committee

The Remuneration Committee meets regularly to consider human resources issues, including the terms and conditions of employment, remuneration and retirement benefits of the Chairman and Chief Executive and members of the Executive Directorate. All the members of the Remuneration Committee are non-executive Directors, namely Raymond Ch'ien Kuo-fung (chairman), Edward Ho Sing-tin and Frederick Ma Si-hang, two of whom are independent non-executive Directors. There were three meetings of the Remuneration Committee in year 2002 and the attendance rate was 100%.

Nominations Committee

The Nominations Committee carries out the process of recommending and nominating candidates to fill vacancies on the Board of Directors. A person may be appointed as a member of the Board of Directors at any time either by the shareholders in general meeting or by the Board of Directors upon the recommendation of the Nominations Committee. Directors who are appointed by the Board of Directors must retire at the first annual general meeting after their appointment. In either case, the Directors so elected and appointed are eligible for re-election and re-appointment. At each annual general meeting of the Company, one third of the Directors (or such number as is nearest to and less than one third) are required to retire from office by rotation (excluding the Directors appointed by the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong SAR under the MTR Ordinance).

All the members of the Nominations Committee are non-executive Directors, namely David Gordon Eldon (chairman), Lo Chung-hing and the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (Dr. Sarah Liao Sau-tung), two of whom are independent non-executive Directors. There was only one meeting of the Nominations Committee in year 2002 and the attendance rate was 66.67% (due to the absence of a Director who was away from Hong Kong).

Internal Audit

The Internal Audit Department plays a major role in support of and in collaboration with the Company's management, in monitoring the internal governance of the Company. The department has unrestricted access to information that allows it to review all aspects of the Company's network of risk management, control and governance processes. On a regular basis, it conducts audits of the practices, procedures, expenditure and internal controls of all business and support units and subsidiaries. As the need arises, it also conducts ad-hoc reviews or investigations. The Internal Auditor reports directly to the Chairman of the Board of Directors and has direct access to the Audit Committee.

Code of Best Practice

The Company has complied throughout the year with the Code of Best Practice as set out in Appendix 14 of the Listing Rules except that non-executive Directors of the Company are not appointed for a specific term but are subject (save for those appointed pursuant to Section 8 of the MTR Ordinance) to retirement by rotation and re-election at the Company's annual general meetings in accordance with Articles 87 and 88 of the Company's Articles of Association.

Ethical Culture

The Company is committed to high standard of business ethics and integrity.

Following the publication of the MTR's Code of Conduct in 2002, the Company has carried out an extensive training and communication campaign to ensure all levels of staff understand the content of the Code and the philosophy behind an ethical working culture. All employees were issued a personal copy of the Code of Conduct and in addition, each manager was issued a Corporate Guidebook for Managers containing illustrative examples for better communication with employees.

To promote similar practices with contractors and make the Code available for interested shareholders, customers and other interested parties, the Company has placed the Code of Conduct on the MTR website for public access.

U.S. Sarbanes-Oxley Act 2002

This legislation which seeks to enhance the transparency and accountability of companies in the areas of corporate governance and financial reporting, was signed into law by the President of the United States on 30 July 2002.

As the Company is a SEC reporting company, it is generally bound by this new legislation.

The Company is in the process of reviewing the existing internal systems and practices and taking other steps to comply with the relevant provisions.