Good afternoon, Mr Walder, Mr. Cheuk, Mr. Tang, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be here today to learn and to share with you a few observations and thoughts. The Chief Executive of the HKSAR Government has made it very clear that “people’s livelihood is no small matter”. Safety, being part and parcel of livelihood, is certainly no small matter either.

The Great Wall of China, a UNESCO World Heritage, running over 22,000km, was built since early 700 BC for military defense. In contrast, construction of Hong Kong’s railway network dates back to early 1900, for transport of passengers and goods. As at today, Hong Kong’s railway network stretches slightly less than 220km. In comparison, our railway network is modern while the Great Wall ancient. In terms of time, it is a century versus a millennium. In terms of length, it is simply beyond comparison. However, for those who stood guard at the Great Wall and those who lived within; for those who operate the railways and those who travel on board the trains, safety is a very concern in common.

With advancement in science and technology, heightened awareness and demand for better safety, our safety performance should in theory excel. Earlier this year, our deep sea submersible Jiaolong dived a record depth of 7062m into the deep blue ocean, and our Shenzhou No.9 spacecraft docked successfully with the Tiangong No.1 space station. At a time when the crew and astronauts undertaking such risky missions managed to return safe and unscathed, the number of industrial accidents in Hong Kong remains staggering. Take year 2011 as an example. There were altogether 40,578 industrial accidents in Hong Kong, resulting in 191 fatalities. That means an injury every 13 minutes and death every two days, leaving our society with many broken hearts and devastated families.

According to the International Labour Organization, about 4% of the world’s annual GDP is lost as a consequence of occupational diseases and accidents. Applying this to Hong Kong for year 2011, with a GDP of HK$1,800 billion, the economic loss could be as much as HK$72 billion, equivalent to our total budget for major infrastructural projects. With an additional HK$72 billion per annum, there is a lot we can do to improve the livelihood of Hong Kong people.
For a long time, the Great Wall has been China’s symbol of national security and safety. It is a collection of many walls of various periods and it evolved over time to safeguard the people from harm and danger. In a way, MTR has lived up to the Great Wall spirit by working over the years to design, construct, extend, operate and maintain its railway network to achieve world-class safety performance.

In year 2011, MTR’s industrial accident rate was 3.2 per 1,000 workers versus Hong Kong’s overall average of 14.6. On railway projects, a contractor accident rate of 12 per 1,000 workers versus the construction industry average of 50.9. Internationally, MTR has attained very high rankings in safety performance benchmarking exercises such as with the Community of Metros. Earlier in April this year, MTR was awarded the Best Metro in Asia Pacific.

I am also glad to note that MTR has worked an extra mile in 2012, such as hiring additional station and platform assistants, and upgrading train doors to enhance passenger safety. Light rail vehicles also saw the installation of safety belts and backing plates for wheelchair users. All these have contributed to furtherance of railway safety in Hong Kong. The care and concern for safety is very much ingrained in MTR’s culture, as reflected by what you have put up on the wall today. Safety is truly no small matter, and is more a matter of the heart and mind.

I understand that it is about time for lunch, and I would like to share with you some food for thought to whet your appetite. Sir Brian Appleton, after investigating into the explosion of the Piper Alpha oil platform at the North Sea that killed 167 persons in 1988, remarked that “Safety is not an intellectual exercise to keep us in work. It is a matter of life and death. It is the sum of our contributions to safety management that determines whether the people we work with live or die.”

Life can only be lived once. That’s why safety is of vital importance to every person. The quest for safety is a never ending journey, and I sincerely look upon everyone here in this hall and back in your organizations for your continuous commitment, dedication, persistence and perseverance in help make Hong Kong the safest cosmopolitan city on Earth.

Thank you.