LCQ11: Crowd management at boundary control points

　　â€‹Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Security, Mr Michael Cheuk, in the Legislative Council today (May 31):

Question:

　　â€‹There are views pointing out that during the recent Easter holidays, the situation of passenger congestion occurred at a number of land boundary control points (BCPs), causing nuisance to travellers entering and leaving Hong Kong. Regarding crowd management at BCPs, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that Hong Kong residents are currently required to complete a health declaration online to obtain a QR code commonly known as "black code" before entering the Mainland, so that they can scan the code for entry when crossing the boundary, but there are views pointing out that the scanning of black code is the main cause of passenger congestion at various BCPs during long holidays, whether the Government has communicated with the relevant Mainland departments on the arrangement concerned; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as it is learnt that some BCPs operated apparently smoothly during the last two long holidays by suspending the arrangement for scanning of black code, whether the Government will consider proposing to the relevant Mainland departments to regularise the arrangement for suspending the scanning of black code during public holidays in Hong Kong and on the Mainland; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) given that there are a number of land BCPs in Hong Kong, what strategies the authorities have put in place to implement the diversion of travellers, so that the resources of various BCPs can be fully utilised, and whether they will consider making use of technology to share with travellers the information on passenger flow at various BCPs on a real time basis;

(4) of the publicity measures the authorities have put in place in respect of BCPs which are newer and have fewer passengers, so as to enable Hong Kong and Mainland residents to fully understand the relevant information on such BCPs; and

(5) whether it will consider suitably extending the opening hours of BCPs during public holidays, so as to facilitate Hong Kong residents and encourage staggered peak travel?

Reply:

President,

â€‹With the full resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland, there has been an upward trend on the number of cross-boundary passengers. During long holidays, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government would, on one hand, conduct real-time monitoring of the passenger flow at various land boundary control points (BCPs), flexibly deploy manpower according to the passenger flow, open more e-Channels and counters to facilitate passenger movement, and also make good use of technology to provide updated information to assist passengers in planning their cross-boundary trips. On the other hand, we would maintain close liaison with the Mainland frontier port authorities for taking timely contingency actions to step up traffic diversion at the relevant BCPs, with a view to providing efficient clearance services to passengers.

â€‹My reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) and (2) According to the anti-epidemic requirements of the Frontier Health and Quarantine Law of the People's Republic of China, persons on entry or exit at all frontier ports have to complete the "China Customs' Health Declaration Form" and make a health declaration to the health and quarantine offices of the China Customs. Before entering and leaving the Mainland, residents and passengers can first complete the health declaration form online to obtain a QR code commonly known as the "black code", such that they can swiftly scan the code for clearance when crossing the boundary.

â€‹At the initial stage of resumption of normal travel, the HKSAR Government noticed that some passengers might have yet to adapt to the requirements of completing health declaration and queuing up for code scanning, resulting in long queues waiting for clearance at control point areas during the peak period on weekends.

â€‹The Mainland authorities have also expressed concern and responded positively by implementing enhancement measures in phases since February this year to facilitate passengers' health declaration. For example, the option of "Are you travelling from/to Hong Kong SAR or Macao SAR" has been added to the health declaration system of the Mainland side. If the "yes" option is selected, certain required fields such as "Outbound or Inbound types of travel", "Travel history in the past 14 days" and other particulars including "Contact persons in China" (such as the contact person's name, phone number and address in China) can be skipped. This has substantially reduced the time required to fill out the declaration form. In addition, if passengers have made a health declaration before, they can simply select "automatic update" to complete the declaration procedure with the personal information previously provided when doing the next round of declaration. The process is user-friendly and quick. Thanks to the series of enhancement measures introduced by the Mainland authorities, and the fact that passengers gradually get familiarised with the health declaration arrangements, the BCPs are operating smoothly at present.

â€‹The HKSAR Government will continue to actively accommodate the

Mainland's anti-epidemic policy and maintain close communication with the Mainland authorities, especially during long holidays to closely monitor the passenger traffic at the peak hours of boundary crossing, and to take resolute emergency diversion and crowd management measures when necessary to ensure that passengers can travel between the two sides smoothly.

(3) Cross-boundary passengers mostly choose the control points for their journeys based on their needs and itineraries. To assist the passengers to plan their trips ahead so as to achieve effective passenger diversion, the HKSAR Government has made use of technology to provide information on waiting time at land BCPs through the Immigration Department Mobile Application and "Safeguard HK" mobile app. Estimated waiting time for passenger clearance will be updated around every 15 minutes such that passengers can, depending on their itineraries, choose to cross the boundary at those land BCPs with less traffic or during non-rush hours in order to minimise waiting time.

(4) To enable cross-boundary passengers to have a clear grasp of the utilisation of each control point, the Immigration Department updates the statistics of passenger traffic at all BCPs of the previous day daily on its departmental website and provides real-time updates on the actual waiting time at each control point through the mobile apps mentioned above. In addition, before major long holidays, the HKSAR Government will announce through press releases and social media apps the expected passenger flow during the holiday period, and encourage the public and passengers to plan their trips in advance and make good use of those BCPs with less passenger traffic, while appealing to Mainland travellers and Hong Kong residents planning to enter or leave Hong Kong to cross boundary during non-peak hours as far as possible, with a view to minimising the congestion at land BCPs during the peak hours in the mornings and evenings of holidays. The Hong Kong Tourism Board will also disseminate the above information on its website for the reference of inbound travellers coming to Hong Kong.

(5) In view of the resumption of normal travel between the Mainland and Hong Kong since early February this year, the Hong Kong and Shenzhen governments will closely monitor the demand for clearance services at various land BCPs. On the basis of the 24-hour passenger clearance services currently provided in Lok Ma Chau/Huanggang Control Point and Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Hong Kong Port, we may discuss with the Mainland authorities on extending the operating hours of the passenger clearance service at the Shenzhen Bay Port as and when necessary to further facilitate the flow of people between the two sides. As for the passenger clearance service at Liantang/Heung Yuen Wai Control Point commissioned since February 6 this year, it provides an additional option for passengers bound for the eastern part of Shenzhen and Guangdong East, which will be conducive to facilitating the overall passenger diversion amongst the various land BCPs.