

LCQ14: Facilitating development of 5G mobile communications and technology

Following is a question by the Hon Charles Mok and a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (June 10):

Question:

On facilitating the development of the fifth generation (5G) mobile communications and technology, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) launched the "Subsidy Scheme for Encouraging Early Deployment of 5G" under the Anti-epidemic Fund last month to encourage the various sectors to deploy 5G technology to foster innovation and smart city applications, of the respective to-date numbers of applications from enterprises received, approved and rejected by OFCA; a breakdown of the number of enterprises whose applications were approved by type of business or mode of operation, as well as a breakdown of the rejected cases (if any) by reason for the rejection;

(2) given that OFCA launched a pilot scheme in March last year to proactively open up more than 1 000 suitable government premises for the installation of radio base stations by mobile network operators (MNOs), supplemented by streamlined application processes, to facilitate MNOs in laying 5G networks, of the respective to-date numbers of applications received and approved by OFCA, and set out, by name of MNOs, (i) the number of applications approved, and (ii) the number of radio base stations involved and their locations; the average time taken for vetting and approval of each approved application;

(3) of the current coverage and coverage rate of the local 5G mobile networks; the Government's plans in the next two years to increase the coverage rate; and

(4) given that the Government is proactively exploring with satellite operators the feasibility of relocating the satellite earth stations from Tai Po to Chung Hom Kok Teleport, and that the relocation plan involves land allocation as well as complex engineering and technical issues which will take years to handle, of the costs involved in the relocation plan as envisaged by the Government?

Reply:

President,

Our reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) The Subsidy Scheme for Encouraging Early Deployment of 5G has been open

for application since May 5, 2020. As at end-May, the Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) received a total of 50 applications from sectors including project management, maintenance services and logistics management, etc. Among the applications, 22 were not considered due to the lack of actual deployment of 5G technology/service for improving operational efficiency and service quality of the companies/organisations concerned, while two applications were withdrawn by the applicants during the vetting process. The OFCA is processing the remaining 26 applications. It is expected that the first batch of subsidy will be granted by end-June.

(2) to (3) Mobile network operators (MNOs) in Hong Kong launched 5G services in the second quarter of 2020. The strategies and timetables for the rollout of 5G networks are commercial decisions of the MNOs. Experience shows that in developing a new generation of mobile services, MNOs generally adopt a gradual and orderly approach in rolling out networks, usually with coverage first provided to hotspots with high pedestrian flow or high usage and then gradually extended to other locations in the territory.

In order to facilitate MNOs in establishing 5G networks, the Government has launched a Pilot Scheme to open up more than 1 000 suitable government premises for MNOs to install radio base stations (RBSs). We also adopt a "demand-led" model in order to open up more suitable government premises, sheltered bus stops and public payphone kiosks for MNOs to apply for the installation of 5G RBSs with streamlined application processes.

As at end-May 2020, a total of 110 applications were received under the Pilot Scheme, involving venues of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the Government Property Agency throughout the 18 districts in Hong Kong. With the co-ordination of the OFCA, 15 applications have been approved, with average processing time of 98 working days. Moreover, in recent months, an operator has indicated to the Government its interest in applying for the installation of RBSs at over 450 government venues. The OFCA will examine its formal applications as soon as possible upon receipt. With the further expansion of 5G services, we anticipate that the number of applications will gradually increase later this year.

(4) To resolve the issue of the 5G restriction zone in Tai Po in the long run, the Government is proactively discussing with the related satellite operators about the relocation of their satellite earth stations from Tai Po to Chung Hom Kok. Since the relocation costs, involving site formation, construction works and establishment of another set of satellite antennae, will be borne by the operators, the Government does not have the relevant information.