

LCQ18: Cross-boundary transport services during major festivals

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Dennis Lam and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (January 31):

Question:

According to the Government's statistics, 195 000 Mainland visitors came to Hong Kong on December 31 last year. It has been reported that due to insufficient cross-boundary transport services, a large number of Mainland visitors were stranded in Hong Kong in the early hours of the following day after watching the fireworks display, and some visitors had to wait for hours at a terminus for cross-boundary coach service to the Huanggang Port as they were unable to display the QR code tickets for All China Express service on their mobile phones due to suspected telecommunications network problems. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the numbers of Mainland visitors to Hong Kong on major festivals (such as New Year's Day, the Lunar New Year, Labour Day and National Day) in each of the past three years;

(2) whether it will consider setting up high capacity government Wi-Fi hotspots near the All China Express cross-boundary coach service terminus at Arran Street, Mong Kok, so as to facilitate visitors purchasing tickets through the Internet and displaying the QR code tickets; and

(3) as the Government has indicated that it will discuss with the Mainland authorities about increasing the number of boundary control points (BCPs) with 24-hour clearance, of the latest progress of the relevant work; whether it will first extend the opening hours of some BCPs to 3am on major festivals before the introduction of the relevant measures?

Reply:

President,

Since the full resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland in February 2023, all boundary control points (BCPs) have been in full operation to enable normal cross-boundary travel by people of Hong Kong and Shenzhen. Currently, all land BCPs are equipped with comprehensive and advanced clearance facilities for relevant departments of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government to provide quality and efficient clearance services to cross-boundary passengers and vehicles.

Anticipating that a considerable number of visitors would use the Lok Ma Chau/Huanggang Control Point to return to the Mainland after the 2023 New Year's Eve fireworks event, the Transport Department had liaised with the service operators of cross-boundary coaches and Lok Ma Chau-Huanggang cross-

boundary shuttle bus (Yellow Bus) in advance and requested to increase the headway. The number of vehicles deployed for service operation was already double of that of weekdays, so that more visitors could take cross-boundary coaches or Yellow Bus to return to the Mainland via the BCP. Nevertheless, as there were over 1 200 private cars concentrated to cross at the Lok Ma Chau/Huanggang Control Point in a short time, even though eight private car clearance kiosks at the BCP were all in operation and three goods vehicle clearance kiosks were re-deployed for private car clearance, the total number of vehicles to be processed had exceeded the handling capacity of the BCP, resulting in traffic congestion where many cross-boundary coaches and Yellow Bus could not return to terminus in time to pick up visitors.

In consultation with the Transport and Logistics Bureau and the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO), my reply to the question raised by Dr the Hon Dennis Lam is as follows:

(1) Passenger traffic of Mainland visitors during major festive periods in the past three years is set out at Annex.

(2) At present, for visitors taking cross-boundary coach of the Lok Ma Chau/Huanggang Control Point to travel to the Mainland at Arran Street in Mong Kok as indicated in the question, apart from purchasing tickets at the cross-boundary coach terminus, they may also pre-order coach tickets on the website of relevant cross-boundary coach operator, or through mobile applications such as WeChat and Alipay. To avoid passengers from failing to show their ticket QR code due to telecommunications network issues at the boarding point, passengers may capture the mobile phone screenshot of the ticket QR code after purchasing the ticket, and show it for ticket verification while boarding. On the 2023 New Year's Eve, the operator had also arranged passengers to go to the ticketing booths next to the terminus to purchase tickets by cash, Octopus Card or WeChat/Alipay. Passengers were also allowed to show their payment records instead of QR code to board the coach.

The Transport Department has all along been maintaining close liaison with the cross-boundary coach trade and urged the trade to further enhance the use of social media of the Mainland to disseminate information on the operation and ticketing in relation to cross-boundary coach services, including reminding passengers through its ticketing system on the points to note when using ticket QR code.

In addition, according to the OGCIO, free Wi-Fi service is currently provided for local residents and visitors near Arran Street in Mong Kok by a telecommunication operator under the public-private collaboration arrangement of Wi-Fi.HK. In view of the special needs at this location, the Government is setting up an additional Wi-Fi.HK hotspot at a government venue near the cross boundary coach terminus at Arran Street in Mong Kok to further strengthen the Wi-Fi service in the vicinity. Relevant installation works are in progress so that it could be launched before the Lunar New Year.

(3) In view of the resumption of normal travel between the Mainland and Hong Kong since early February last year, the HKSAR Government has been closely

monitoring 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, the HKSAR Government will liaise with the Mainland authorities on extending the operating hours of the passenger clearance service at respective BCPs as and when necessary to further facilitate the flow of people between the two sides.

Lunar New Year will be the next peak travel periods for Hong Kong residents and Mainland visitors. To facilitate diversion of cross-boundary passenger and vehicular movements during the holidays, a consensus was reached between the HKSAR Government and the relevant departments of the Mainland to make the following special arrangements:

(i) Passenger and passenger vehicle clearance services at the Shenzhen Bay Control Point, which usually close at 12 midnight, will operate overnight, providing round-the-clock services, from February 9 to 13; and

(ii) Passenger clearance service at the Lo Wu Control Point, which usually closes at 12 midnight, will be extended on February 9 and 11 to 2am the next day. The operating hours of the MTR East Rail Line will also be extended correspondingly.

The round-the-clock services at the Shenzhen Bay Control Point can provide an option for cross-boundary passenger vehicles in the small hours, so as to avoid congestions caused by concentrated traffic at the Lok Ma Chau/Huanggang Control Point. It is believed that the extension of operation hours of the Lo Wu Control Point can attract some of the cross-boundary visitors taking passenger vehicles to switch to taking trains, thereby relieving the pressure on land BCPs through the use of mass transit system.

Regarding the extension of operating hours of land BCPs during major festive periods in future, the HKSAR Government will continue to closely monitor visitors' demand for clearance services at various land BCPs and maintain close liaison with relevant Mainland authorities.