

LCQ22: Diverting the flow of visitors travelling to and from land boundary control points

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (November 6):

Question:

According to government information, there were about 1.38 million inbound visitors during the National Day Golden Week this year, with the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line (LMC SL) Control Point being the boundary control point (BCP) used by the majority of Mainland visitors during the period. There are views pointing out that the BCP has become one of the most frequently used BCPs for the public and visitors, with an average number of inbound and outbound visitors comparable to that of the Lo Wu Control Point, and the MTR East Rail Line (ERL), which is connected to these two BCPs, is often overcrowded with passengers during the holiday. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that at present, the service hours of the Lo Wu Control Point are from 6.30am to 12.00 midnight, while those of the LMC SL Control Point are from 6.30am to 10.30pm, whether the Government will, in the light of visitors' demand, discuss with the relevant Mainland authorities the extension of service hours of the LMC SL Control Point; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as it is learnt that the current ratio of train frequency to MTR Lo Wu Station and to MTR Lok Ma Chau Station is 2:1, whether the Government will discuss with the MTR Corporation Limited to increase the ratio of train frequency to 1:1, so as to better meet the needs of passengers; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether the Government has compiled statistics on the patronage and occupancy rate of ERL during the peak hours (i.e. from 8am to 10am and from 5pm to 7pm) during the National Day Golden Week this year, and whether there was any overloading situation; if it has compiled such statistics, of the details;

(4) whether it will consider further enhancing the cross-boundary coach services to divert visitors on days with a higher number of visitors, including bus services plying between the LMC SL Control Point and districts such as Tsim Sha Tsui, Wan Chai and Central; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) whether the Government has plans to construct new cross-boundary railways

to connect the Man Kam To BCP, the Heung Yuen Wai BCP and the new Huanggang Port after redevelopment, etc., so as to increase the carrying capacity of the traffic to and from the land BCPs as soon as possible; if so, of the timetable, and the measures in place to expedite the implementation of the relevant plans?

Reply:

President,

With the commissioning of the East Rail Line (ERL) cross-harbour extension in 2022, passengers can travel directly from the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point to various districts in the New Territories East, Kowloon and even on Hong Kong Island by using the convenient, fast and efficient railway service. Having consulted the Security Bureau, the Transport Department (TD), and the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), the reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Hak-kan is as follows:

(1) The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government has been closely monitoring the demand for clearance services at various land boundary control points (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.

(2) The MTRCL reviews and adjusts the frequency of trains, including those of the ERL to/from Lo Wu Station and to/from Lok Ma Chau Station from time to time, in the light of the changes in passenger demand. To cope with the passenger demand for railway service to/from the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point, the MTRCL enhanced the ERL train service for two times in March and August this year respectively, by increasing the train frequencies to/from Lok Ma Chau Station during various periods on weekdays, weekends and/or public holidays. Regarding the distribution of passengers of the ERL, as the overall patronage of trains to/from Lo Wu Station is still higher than that of Lok Ma Chau Station, overall speaking, the frequency of trains travelling to/from Lo Wu Station is higher than that to/from Lok Ma Chau Station. The TD will continue to maintain close liaison with the MTRCL to review and adjust the ERL train service in a timely manner, having regard to the travel pattern and demand of passengers.

(3) To facilitate the travel of the public and visitors on the National Day, the days before and after that as well as during the Chung Yeung Festival long weekend, the MTRCL enhanced the train service of eight railway lines, including the ERL, between September 28 and October 13, 2024 with a total of about 950 train trips added. In particular, the ERL ran more frequent train trips to/from Lo Wu Station or Lok Ma Chau Station in the mornings and evenings. From the National Day Golden Week to Chung Yeung Festival, the weekday patronage was about 70 100 and loading was about 83 per cent for the critical link of the ERL (Tai Wai to Kowloon Tong) from 8am to 10am; for the

critical link (Kowloon Tong to Tai Wai) from 5pm to 7pm, the patronage was about 65 600 and the loading was about 83 per cent. As for weekends or public holidays, during which passengers travel at relatively scattered times unlike on weekdays, the loading was about 70 per cent during the peak hours for critical links, and under 70 per cent for the majority of the rest of the day. According to the MTRCL's observations, despite having a higher passenger flow on the National Day (October 1) and Chung Yeung Festival (October 11), the overall operation of the ERL was largely smooth and orderly. On the whole, train service of the ERL was able to meet passenger needs between the National Day Golden Week and Chung Yeung Festival.

(4) The Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point is a rail-based BCP. Passengers travel to and from the BCP mainly by the ERL of the MTR. During festive periods, the MTRCL will maintain close liaison with relevant departments at the BCP to flexibly adjust the ERL train service in a timely manner according to the situation at the BCP. Additional staff will also be deployed to the busier stations to facilitate passenger flow and assist passengers.

To facilitate travel for those in the New Territories West, the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point is also connected by KMB Route No. B1 to/from Yuen Long and Tin Shui Wai, providing services at a minimum frequency of eight-minute intervals during hours with high demand. In practice, during periods of particularly strong passenger demand such as weekends and public holidays, the KMB will flexibly enhance the service to operate more departures than scheduled. Apart from KMB Route No. B1, Green Minibus Route No. 75 also provides supplementary transport service between Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point and Yuen Long.

As for cross-boundary coach services, the current short-haul cross-boundary coach services through the Lok Ma Chau/Huanggang Control Point provide services for travellers to travel to/from various destinations, including Mong Kok, Yau Ma Tei, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kwun Tong, Wan Chai (via Central), Tsuen Wan, the Disneyland. The TD has worked with relevant operators to draw up plans ahead of each peak cross-boundary travel period, including issuing ad-hoc quotas and arranging stand-by coaches when necessary, with a view to facilitating the operators' arrangement for additional trips having regard to the actual situation.

(5) The Government is pressing ahead with cross-boundary railway projects to further promote close collaboration between Hong Kong and the Mainland, thereby assisting Hong Kong in seizing the opportunities and advantages arising from the development of the Greater Bay Area and the Northern Metropolis. The Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Rail Link (Hung Shui Kiu – Qianhai) (HSWRL) and the Northern Link (NOL) Spur Line projects provide direct cross-boundary railway connection to the Shenzhen Bay Port and the new Huanggang Port from the New Territories Northwest and New Territories Central respectively, thus providing additional commuting options for residents and visitors travelling to/from the Greater Bay Area. Meanwhile, residents and visitors can also travel to Man Kam To Port and Heung Yuen Wai Port by the proposed NOL Eastern Extension and Northeast New Territories Line. After the commissioning of the relevant railway lines, the number of land-based BCPs

covered by railways in the Northern Metropolis will substantially increase from two at present (i.e. Lo Wu and Lok Ma Chau) to six, which is expected to effectively divert residents and tourists to different BCPs, and promote cross-boundary integration between Hong Kong and Shenzhen.

The HKSAR Government will continue to take forward the two cross-boundary railway projects, namely the HSWRL and the NOL Spur Line, through the Task Force for Hong Kong-Shenzhen Co-operation on Cross-Boundary Railway Infrastructure. We are working to reach consensus with the Shenzhen authorities on the implementation arrangement of the NOL Spur Line within this year for the MTRCL to commence the detailed planning and design of the project early next year. Meanwhile, we are preparing for the next stage of implementation of the proposed NOL Eastern Extension and Northeast New Territories Line, including formulating the implementation approaches, financial arrangements, etc. The layout and commissioning target of the projects were holistically outlined in the Hong Kong Major Transport Infrastructure Development Blueprint promulgated at the end of last year. We will consider different implementation arrangements and explore various innovative engineering technologies based on the construction and operation details of each new railway project with a view to enhancing the cost-effectiveness and expediting the delivery of new railway projects.