

LCQ3: Measures to facilitate flow of people between Shenzhen and Hong Kong

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Yuet-ming and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (October 18):

Question:

It is learnt that the Guangdong Province and the Shenzhen Municipality have incorporated the Shenzhen-Hong Kong Boundary Control Points Economic Belt into their major development plans. Moreover, the Office of Port of Entry and Exit of the Shenzhen Municipal People's Government has recently announced the introduction of a number of measures to optimise the clearance environment. Regarding the measures to further facilitate the flow of people between Shenzhen and Hong Kong, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will, by drawing reference from the measures recently introduced by the Shenzhen Municipality, introduce more facilitative clearance policies or arrangements for people who frequently commute between Shenzhen and Hong Kong, including but not limited to businessmen, cross-boundary students and travellers; if so, of the specific implementation details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as the Mainland has already connected the seven Shenzhen-Hong Kong land boundary control points (BCPs) to the railway network, while some of the land BCPs in Hong Kong do not have the relevant planning support, whether the Government will progressively connect such land BCPs to the railway system; if so, of the implementation details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as there are views that the existing high fares for cross-boundary journeys on the MTR East Rail Line have hindered the flow of people between Shenzhen and Hong Kong, whether the Government will introduce improvement measures; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Security Bureau, my reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Yuet-ming is as follows:

(1) The Immigration Department (ImmD) has been utilising innovative technologies to enhance the clearance capacity of control points. In order to provide more convenient and speedy automated immigration clearance services to Hong Kong residents, the ImmD introduced the "Contactless e-Channel" service in December 2021 which uses facial recognition technology to allow enrolled Hong Kong residents to perform self-service immigration clearance with encrypted QR codes. The whole process only takes around seven seconds. At the end of April this year, the ImmD also adjusted the eligible

age for holders of the Mainland's electronic Exit-Entry Permits for travelling to and from Hong Kong and Macao (e-EEP) for using the e-Channel service from 16 years old or above to 11 years old or above, so that more inbound visitors from the Mainland can use the speedy e-Channel service. In July this year, the ImmD further extended the e-Channel service to cover students aged 11 or above coming to Hong Kong to study, foreign domestic helpers and imported workers. The above new initiatives have further enhanced the clearance efficiency and overall handling capacity of various control points, thereby facilitating cross-boundary travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland. In respect of cross-boundary students (CBS), the ImmD currently implements various measures to provide them with speedy and safe clearance services, including making use of information technology to implement Simplified Clearance Procedure for CBS and the provision of On Board Clearance Service for CBS at individual control points.

In addition, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has been in close contact with the Mainland on the facilitation measures to promote "southbound and northbound" flow of high-end talents within the Greater Bay Area (GBA). The "southbound" GBA exit endorsement for talents was implemented in February this year by the Mainland. Holders of this exit endorsement may stay in Hong Kong for up to 30 days on each visit, which is longer than the usual seven-day period for the exit endorsement for business visits. If holders of the exit endorsement for talents also meet the criteria for the Pilot Scheme on Immigration Facilitation for Visitors Participating in Short-term Activities in Designated Sectors, they may come to Hong Kong and participate in specified short-term activities as visitors and receive remunerations, without having to apply for an employment entry permit from the ImmD. The HKSAR Government will continue to maintain close liaison with the Mainland authorities to further promote talent exchange and interaction in the GBA, with a view to injecting stronger impetus to the growth for Hong Kong and the entire GBA, bringing mutual benefits.

(2) As regards transport infrastructure, the Government has always adopted the "infrastructure-led" and "capacity-creating" planning principles in taking forward transport infrastructure projects. In respect of land boundary control points between Hong Kong and Shenzhen, currently the MTR Lo Wu Station and Lok Ma Chau Station are respectively connected to the Lo Wu and Futian control points, effectively promoting economic co-operation and personnel interactions between Hong Kong and Shenzhen.

In order to further promote connectivity in the GBA, the governments of Hong Kong and Shenzhen established in 2021 the Task Force for Hong Kong-Shenzhen Co-operation on Cross-Boundary Railway Infrastructure to jointly develop the "GBA on the Rail", and take forward two cross-boundary railway projects, namely the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Rail Link (Hung Shui Kiu to Qianhai) and the Northern Link Spur Line. The Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Rail Link will connect the Hong Kong Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen New Development Area with Qianhai, thereby strengthening the connection between the Hong Kong Northern Metropolis and the Guangzhou-Shenzhen innovation and technology corridor. We are currently undertaking the second stage study of the project, which is expected to be completed in mid-2024 (i.e. next year). Meanwhile,

the proposed Northern Link Spur Line will also provide a direct railway connection between the Northern Metropolis and the new Huanggang Port in Shenzhen. Hong Kong and Shenzhen are now proactively taking forward the relevant planning work, with an aim to embarking on the detailed planning and design of the project within next year. Furthermore, we will also explore the possibility of connecting more land boundary control points to the local railway network, having regard to the Remaining Phase Development of the New Territories North – Planning and Engineering Study for New Territories North New Town and Man Kam To.

(3) Regarding fares of MTR cross-boundary journeys, the fares of the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) are basically determined according to distance, taking into account other factors such as market competitiveness, trip nature (e.g. whether cross-boundary or cross-harbour journeys are involved) and the existing overall fare structure.

The East Rail Line (ERL) is a railway line that combines domestic and cross-boundary services. Before the rail merger in 2007, its fares have been determined according to its own fare structure, which has its historical factors and special circumstances. Specifically, target passengers of cross-boundary journeys via Lo Wu Station and Lok Ma Chau Station are different from those of domestic journeys. Their fares, to a certain extent, are also subsidising those of the latter. Therefore, the fares of the ERL should not be compared directly with those of the other railway lines under the heavy rail system.

We understand the concerns of Members on cross-boundary fares. At present, the MTRCL provides various promotional offers from time to time in light of market situations. For example, between February and July this year, Fare Saver discounts of \$6 are offered for passengers taking same-day round trips between Hong Kong and Shenzhen via Lok Ma Chau Station with Adult Octopus cards and JoyYou Cards. From July 17 to August 31 this year, children under the age of 11 can redeem free cross-boundary tickets to and from Lo Wu and Lok Ma Chau stations. Cross-boundary passengers can also enjoy other MTR fare concessions, including Fare Savers, Special Fare Days, Early Bird Discount and Green Minibus Interchange Discounts. We will continue to encourage the MTRCL to suitably respond to public aspirations by offering more concessions upon balancing different considerations, including market situations, their operating and financial conditions, and passenger demand.