

LCQ6: Diversion of tourists entering territory through Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge

Following is a question by the Hon Andrew Wan and a reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (November 21):

Question:

It has been reported that upon the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) opening to traffic on the 24th of last month, a large number of tourists entering the territory via HZMB have flocked to Tung Chung, and the daily lives of the residents there have been greatly affected as a result. For example, daily commodities were snapped up and sold out, restaurants experienced an overflow of customers, and a large number of tourists waiting at Tung Chung Bus Terminus for buses heading for the Hong Kong Port caused obstruction to passageways and noise nuisances. Despite the introduction of a number of tourist diversion measures as announced by the Government on the 9th of this month, the situation has not been significantly improved. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has conducted an investigation into the number of tour groups entering the territory via HZMB, since HZMB opened to traffic, for which reception by a local travel agent had not been arranged; whether it has taken any law enforcement actions; if so, of the details;

(2) of the new measures to further mitigate the current situation of Tung Chung being flooded with tourists; whether it will discuss with the Mainland authorities the following proposals: (i) introducing tour groups or bus routes destined for the HZMB eastern artificial island, which is located within Mainland waters, so that those Mainland residents who merely want to visit HZMB need not enter Hong Kong, and (ii) tightening the arrangement for issuing exit endorsements for Mainland residents to visit Hong Kong; and

(3) given that the Tuen Mun-Chek Lap Kok Link (TM-CLKL) is expected to be fully operational in 2020 and by that time, it will take only about 10 minutes per trip for vehicles to commute between the Hong Kong Port and Tuen Mun, whether the authorities will, upon the commissioning of TM-CLKL, put in place appropriate measures to prevent recurrence in Tuen Mun the situation of a place being flooded with tourists; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been monitoring closely the vehicular and visitor flows crossing the border through the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) and the operation of the Hong Kong Boundary Crossing Facilities (BCF) since the commissioning of HZMB. In view of the recent situation in Tung Chung, the Government has rolled out multi-pronged measures within a short time in order to help alleviate the pressure of the BCF and its nearby areas, improving the relevant situation.

Having consulted relevant bureaux and departments, my consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Andrew Wan is as follows:

(1) According to present laws and regulations, Mainland inbound tour groups without being received by Hong Kong travel agents might not contravene the laws and regulations. Travel agents outside Hong Kong are free to organise group tours to Hong Kong, but the key is that they are not permitted to conduct travel businesses, such as obtaining for others accommodation, transport and sightseeing services, in Hong Kong.

The Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC), which is responsible for regulation of the trade, has clear guidelines and directives requiring that travel agents in Hong Kong should, whenever receiving Mainland inbound tour groups, register with and provide to TIC the relevant information of such tour groups in advance.

Of course, the Government has all along encouraged and facilitated Mainland inbound travel agents to establish collaboration with Hong Kong receiving agents. In the past four weeks, the number of registered tour groups visiting Hong Kong through the HZMB increased from around 70 groups in the first week to over 700 groups in the week just passed. TIC also deployed manpower to conduct spot checks last weekend. Survey results show that, amongst all Mainland inbound tour groups visiting Hong Kong through the HZMB, around 70 per cent were accompanied by Hong Kong tourist guides, indicating a gradual improvement in the arrangement of receiving agents.

As I said during my media stand-up in Shanghai earlier this month, all inbound tour groups must abide by the Hong Kong law. As regards tour groups suspected of violating relevant laws, the Tourism Commission (TC) has already reported the incident to the Guangdong Province Culture and Tourism Unit (the Unit) in early November. The Unit attached great importance to the incident, and has issued notices to various municipal tourism authorities in the province, urging them to strengthen market regulation and request the tourism operators in various cities to strictly abide by the laws and regulations in Hong Kong and Macao. The Travel Agents Registry under TC has also reported suspected illegal cases to the Police and the Immigration Department (ImmD) once the Registry is aware of such. The Police and ImmD are now investigating the incident, and no one has been arrested thus far.

(2) In view of the recent situation in Tung Chung, the Government has called various inter-departmental meetings to tackle the matter.

Based on the experience gained from the past few weekends, around one-

fifth of visitors arriving at Hong Kong through the HZMB BCF did not leave the BCF to visit other districts in Hong Kong by taking local public transportation. This indicates that many of the visitors arriving at Hong Kong through the HZMB BCF mainly intended to visit the HZMB itself and might not be keen to enter Hong Kong. The Government is exploring with relevant Mainland authorities the opening of the HZMB's East Artificial Island to the aforementioned group tourists, so as to allow such tourists to visit the HZMB and return to Zhuhai or Macao from the East Artificial Island without crossing the border of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

In addition, the Government is arranging for the setting up of temporary small-scale shops or booths in the HZMB's BCF to allow travellers to buy souvenirs therein. We are also exploring the introduction of food trucks to serve travellers near the BCF and in Sunny Bay.

On the other hand, the Transport Department (TD) has implemented new measures concerning the operating arrangements of domestic tour coaches at the BCF today (November 21). Under the new measures, registered coach operators could enter the BCF pick-up area to pick up passengers on any day provided that they had submitted an application and completed certain simple procedures via TD's online system by 9pm the prior day. This arrangement will help Hong Kong receiving travel agents and Mainland inbound travel agents establish co-operation, so as to reduce the influx of visitors into Tung Chung through the flexible deployment of tour coaches.

Furthermore, shuttle bus operators are working full steam ahead to prepare and test the online pre-booking system in the hope of implementing it from this Friday (November 23), such that travel agents or organisers of tour groups could, through the online system, purchase shuttle bus tickets (including return tickets in one single operation) for designated dates and time slots from the next day (November 24) onwards. The new arrangement will help manage and regulate visitor flows at all time slots, thereby preventing group visitors from entering and leaving Hong Kong at the same time, as well as reducing the waiting time of visitors. The shuttle bus operator will announce relevant details within this week.

TC has assisted in co-ordinating the local trade to smooth the visitor flow near the BCF, including requesting the local trade to arrange travellers to use other means of transport as far as practicable. TC also encourages the trade, including tourist attractions, to launch travel itineraries and products such as half-day tours, so as to help divert travellers.

In addition, the Police will continue to closely monitor the situation of Mainland tour groups visiting Hong Kong, and deploy additional manpower from time to time to maintain public order and public safety on site.

(3) Upon the commissioning of the Tuen Mun-Chek Lap Kok Link (TM-CLKL), there will be a new alternative route to divert travellers, alleviating the pressure borne by the Tsing Ma Bridge. TD and relevant public transport operators will devise plans having regard to relevant transport demand and traffic flows, and consult relevant District Councils and stakeholders.

Upon the full commissioning of the TM-CLKL, TD will also, depending on the demand, adjust public transport services in a timely manner to accommodate passengers' need.