

LCQ7: Operation of West Kowloon Station of Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Hoey Simon Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (October 18):

Question:

There are views pointing out that the West Kowloon Station (WKS) of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) is plagued with problems such as excessively long clearance time, lack of shops and insufficient seats in the waiting hall for departing passengers, as well as holiday crowds causing passengers to miss their trains. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as it has been reported that at present, the shortest time for XRL passengers to complete immigration clearance at WKS is about 10 minutes, but the journey time from WKS to Futian Station is only 14 minutes, whether the Government will consider optimizing the layout of WKS, in particular shortening the distance between the boundary control points, so that passengers can complete immigration clearance more quickly; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether the Government will, by drawing reference from the design of the airport restricted area, examine afresh the design of the waiting hall for departing passengers at WKS, as well as introducing different types of shops and increasing the number of seats in the waiting hall; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether the Government will discuss with the MTR Corporation Limited the provision of additional manpower or adoption of other measures to facilitate crowd control at WKS during long holidays; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

â€‹The Hong Kong Section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) was commissioned on September 23, 2018, connecting with the over 40 000 kilometers long national high speed rail network. It is a key component of the highly accessible transport network and economic circle of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. The co-location arrangement at the XRL West Kowloon Station (WKS) enables passengers to complete clearance procedures of both Hong Kong and the Mainland in one go, bringing the strengths of the XRL in providing convenient, fast and efficient services

into full play and further facilitating the flow of people between the two places.

In consultation with the Security Bureau and the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), my reply to the question raised by Dr the Hon Hoey Simon Lee is as follows:

(1) The WKS control point implements the co-location arrangement. Such idea has been incorporated in the design stage of the station, such that designated areas have been set aside for the establishment of the Hong Kong Port Area and the Mainland Port Area, where law enforcement personnel from both sides would conduct their respective clearance procedures for passengers. The existing customs and immigration facilities of the Hong Kong and Mainland Port Area at the WKS have been set up by the respective government based on the above co-location principle, and after deliberation having regard to various aspects such as practical operation of the station, immigration clearance procedures and travel facilitation.

The Immigration Department (ImmD) has been utilising innovative technologies to enhance the clearance capacity of various control points, including the WKS. In order to provide 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 takes only around seven seconds. At the end of April this year, the ImmD also lowered 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 persons aged 11 or above coming to Hong Kong to study, foreign domestic helpers and imported workers. This new initiative has further enhanced the clearance efficiency and overall handling capacity of various control points, thereby facilitating cross-boundary travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland while promoting the connectivity between the two places.

(2) The XRL Hong Kong Section has been operating smoothly since its service resumption on January 15, 2023. The average daily patronage exceeded 70 000 passenger trips during the 2023 summer holiday peak season. The single-day patronage hit a record high of over 100 000 passenger trips on September 30, 2023 during the National Day and Mid-Autumn Festival long holiday, the highest ever recorded since the commissioning of the XRL Hong Kong Section.

The MTRCL has been proactively monitoring the station operation and passenger demand, so as to enhance station facilities and the XRL services as necessary. In particular, the MTRCL will provide about 300 additional seats in the waiting hall by this year, bringing the total to approximately 1 200 seats for passengers' use. There are a variety of shops at the WKS to meet the needs of passengers, including a food court, fast food shops, coffee shop, money exchange, banks and convenience stores, while duty-free shops are

available in both the departure and arrival concourses.

(3) The Government has all along been urging the MTRCL to provide safe, reliable and smooth railway services to passengers. To maintain smooth train operations and station order at the WKS at peak hours, especially during the festive holidays and other peak passenger traffic periods, the MTRCL has taken multi-pronged measures on station facilities and layout as well as passenger flow management to facilitate passengers and enhance their travelling experience.

On station facilities and layout, as paper tickets have been replaced by e-tickets following the service resumption of the XRL Hong Kong Section this year, gates at the WKS have been upgraded and the layout of the ticketing and baggage screening halls on the B1 departure level have also been reconfigured. Ten self-service gates and six staff assistance channels have been set up, and new screening machines for large baggage have been added. The new station layout enables more passengers to be served at the same time, facilitating a smoother boarding process. To achieve smart mobility, the MTRCL has introduced a self-service taxi ticket system in the Taxi Stand at the WKS. Passengers can access real-time queuing information by scanning the QR code on their tickets without having to wait at a particular location.

On passenger flow management, the MTRCL will, on the eve of festive holidays and peak passenger traffic periods, provide data on ticket pre-sale for reference by relevant authorities (including control point authorities of Hong Kong and the Mainland) in jointly discussing and formulating the passenger flow management measures on station operation and clearance at boundary control points. The MTRCL and relevant authorities will also strengthen manpower to assist passengers during the peak periods with a view to facilitating passengers' clearance and enjoyment of the fast and convenient XRL services in a safe and comfortable environment.