

LCQ8: Developing Mainland and international flights

Following is a question by the Hon Benson Luk and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Liu Chun-san, in the Legislative Council today (June 5):

Question:

The country has earlier on further extended the Individual Visit Scheme (IVS) to cover Qingdao, Xi'an and eight provincial capital cities, increasing the applicable cities of IVS to 59. There are views that as local airlines have substantial room for developing direct flights to those cities and new destinations, while Hong Kong's positioning as an international aviation hub has clearly been affirmed in the National 14th Five-Year Plan, Hong Kong should proactively develop more Mainland and international routes. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of daily average visitor arrivals from Qingdao and Xi'an before and after the extension of IVS to cover the two cities, together with a breakdown by travel pattern (e.g. individual visits or tour groups) and transport mode to Hong Kong (e.g. flight or the Express Rail Link) of visitors;

(2) whether it has compiled statistics on the numbers of new routes and new destinations (including international and Mainland routes) developed by Hong Kong in the past five years; if so, of the details (including the origin and destination of specific routes); if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether it knows the launch of new routes plying to and from Hong Kong being planned and discussed by airlines; whether the Government has devised strategic goals for developing new routes (e.g. encouraging airlines to prioritise the development of routes between Hong Kong and second and third tier cities of the Mainland or the applicable cities of IVS, the Belt and Road countries and countries in the Middle East); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) whether, in the long run, the Government has plans and policy measures (e.g. training local aviation personnel, including pilots, aircraft maintenance staff, airport ground crews and various service staff, as well as providing airlines with loans and subsidies for fleet expansion) to help airlines grow in scale and strength for the development of more new international and Mainland routes; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with, the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau, the Security Bureau, the Civil Aviation Department (CAD) and the Immigration Department (ImmD), the consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Luk is as follows:

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government is sincerely grateful to the Central Government for announcing enhancements of the Individual Visit Scheme (IVS) twice on February 23 and May 11, 2024 respectively, allowing residents of 10 additional cities to explore Hong Kong's unique appeals as a tourism destination more flexibly and conveniently. Since May 27, IVS has covered 59 cities, including all provincial capitals, which will boost local tourism and other related sectors.

(1) The table below sets out the daily average visitor arrivals from Qingdao and Xi'an by types of exit endorsement and control points (CPs) before and after the expansion of IVS to these two cities on March 6, 2024:

	Before the expansion of IVS (February 21, 2024 to March 5, 2024)		After the expansion of IVS (March 6, 2024 to June 2, 2024)	
	Qingdao	Xi'an	Qingdao	Xi'an
Daily average visitor arrivals	243	327	339	420
By types of exit endorsement (Note 1):				
Individual visit	0	0	90	128
Group visit	189	269	139	241
Business visit	4	4	3	3
Others (e.g. visiting relatives)	51	55	106	48
By arrivals at CPs (Note 2):				
Land CPs (Note 3)	74%	83%	74%	87%
Port CPs (Note 4)	5%	5%	3%	4%
Airport	21%	12%	23%	9%

Note 1: Individual items may not add up to the total due to rounding

Note 2: ImmD does not keep the relevant figures by transport mode to Hong Kong, and hence a breakdown by arrivals at different CPs is provided

Note 3: Including Lo Wu, Lok Ma Chau Spur Line, West Kowloon Station of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link, Lok Ma Chau, Shenzhen Bay, Man Kam To, Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge and Heung Yuen Wai

Note 4: Including China Ferry Terminal, Hong Kong – Macau Ferry Terminal and Kai Tak Cruise Terminal

(2) At present, there are about 120 airlines operating passenger and cargo flights between Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) and some 180

destinations worldwide, including more than 30 Mainland destinations. The daily passenger throughput has recovered up to about 80 per cent of the pre-pandemic level, with 40 million passengers handled in 2023. As for cargo, HKIA handled 4.3 million tonnes of cargo in 2023, maintaining its position as the world's busiest cargo airport.

According to the data provided by the CAD, comparing the passenger and cargo figures in 2018 with those in 2023/2024 (May 2023 to April 2024), the number of new destinations (excluding new destinations added during the period and subsequently ceased operation) for Hong Kong is 22 (Note 5) (see the table below).

Place	Number of New Destinations
Mainland China	9
The United Kingdom	1
Japan	1
The United States of America	1
Malaysia	1
The Philippines	1
Mexico	1
Vietnam	1
Mongolia	1
Türkiye	1
Brazil	1
Kazakhstan	1
The Netherlands	1
Indonesia	1
Total	22

Note 5: Not including destinations which were served in 2018 but are yet to be resumed

(3) The HKSAR Government has been making good use of Hong Kong's unique civil aviation status under "One Country, Two Systems" to conduct air services negotiations with our aviation partners in order to meet the demand for passenger and air cargo services. We have signed air services agreements with 67 aviation partners covering more than 700 destinations worldwide, and memorandums of understanding with nine other jurisdictions on related air services arrangements to enable airlines of both sides to operate scheduled flights. We also have relevant air services arrangements with the Mainland, Macao and Taiwan. Under the air services arrangements between the Mainland and the HKSAR, a total of 70 destinations are opened for flights to/from Hong Kong.

We have been committed to strengthening and expanding Hong Kong's aviation network. For example, we renewed/expanded our air services

arrangements with the Mainland, Germany, the United Arab Emirates and Myanmar in 2023, and with Luxembourg and Qatar this year.

Leveraging the opportunities brought by the Three-Runway System and our country's support of the "Air Silk Road", the HKSAR Government will focus on the current major routes and routes along the Belt-and-Road with potential, including destinations in Europe, Africa, South America and Asia, negotiate and enhance air services agreements and strengthen aviation services between Hong Kong and these regions.

In terms of air services, while actively resuming services, local airlines are launching new routes, including the passenger services to/from Riyadh to be commenced in the fourth quarter of this year. At present, passenger services between the Mainland and Hong Kong already cover most of the Mainland cities outside Guangdong Province under IVS. In response to the Central Government's support for the HKSAR and to provide travellers with the most convenient and accessible air services, we have been actively encouraging airlines of Hong Kong to launch services between Hong Kong and the Mainland cities newly included under IVS. We note that local airlines have enhanced their services to/from Xi'an and Qingdao, and are actively exploring and planning to launch flights between Hong Kong and the eight additional Mainland cities under IVS. The Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK) is also actively encouraging Mainland airlines to launch and enhance their services, including introducing direct flights between Hong Kong and Harbin, which have just commenced on June 2.

The Transport and Logistics Bureau will continue to encourage local airlines to enhance their services in response to market demand and in line with our country's development strategies. The AAHK will continue to attract and encourage airlines to launch and increase flights to and from Hong Kong through various measures, as well as work with relevant parties to step up publicity efforts so as to boost the demand for travel to Hong Kong for leisure and business purposes.

(4) The HKSAR Government established the Maritime and Aviation Training Fund in 2014 to sustain and enhance the HKSAR Government's support for the manpower development of, amongst others, the aviation industry, encourage more industry practitioners to participate in the relevant technical training or study professional courses, and attract new blood to join the industry. In addition, the HKSAR Government also supported the AAHK to set up the Hong Kong International Aviation Academy (HKIAA) in 2016 to train local and regional air transport talents. The HKIAA launched a cadet pilot programme in September 2023, and introduced in collaboration with Hong Kong Metropolitan University Hong Kong's first Bachelor of Business Administration degree programme with pilot training, thereby nurturing more quality local pilots for Hong Kong's aviation industry.

On the other hand, the HKSAR Government encourages local airlines to implement initiatives on the localisation of pilots and personnel, and is supportive of their enhanced collaboration with local educational institutes on the training of pilots. The CAD has optimised the personnel training requirements and approval procedures through measures such as processes of

continuous evaluation, such that local airlines may refine and implement the reactivation and revalidation processes for pilots and other technical personnel returning to service in a more timely and effective manner.

In respect of aircraft maintenance personnel, apart from providing relevant training in conjunction with local educational institutions and maintenance organisations, the CAD also provides facilitation for the conversion of overseas professional licences into Hong Kong licences. The signing of the Joint Maintenance Management Cooperation Arrangement with the civil aviation authorities of the Mainland and Macao in 2021 has facilitated eligible holders of aircraft maintenance licences issued by the Mainland, Hong Kong and Macao to work in the aircraft maintenance organisations located in the three places. This does not only enable Hong Kong aircraft maintenance organisations to tap into a wider aircraft maintenance talent pool, but also offers more career opportunities to Hong Kong aircraft maintenance license holders, thereby attracting more people to work in the aircraft maintenance industry and further consolidating Hong Kong's status as an international aviation hub.

Hong Kong is an international financial centre with diversified financing channels. Airlines will finance their fleet expansion based on their commercial considerations and operational needs, and the HKSAR Government does not have to intervene in the commercial operation of airlines. The Air Transport Licensing Authority will continue to regulate local airlines in accordance with the Air Transport (Licensing of Air Services) Regulations, including regular review of airlines' financial position.