

LCQ8: Opening up data of Government, public organisations and public utilities

Following is a question by the Hon Wu Chi-wai and a written reply by the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Nicholas W Yang, in the Legislative Council today (November 7):

Question:

The Chief Executive has mentioned in this year's Policy Address that the Government has firmed up the policy and measures on opening up government data, including the establishment of a mechanism that requires all government departments to publish annually their open data plans for the coming year, and the first of such plans are to be published by the end of this year. There are comments that public organisations and public utilities should also open up their data to promote the development of Hong Kong into a smart city. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the government department or committee responsible for executing the aforesaid mechanism as well as the vetting and approval of the open data plans submitted by the various departments; the number of government datasets expected to be opened up next year;

(2) whether the first open data plans to be published by the various government departments will contain implementation timetables; if so, of the details;

(3) whether the various government departments will open up more real-time data which are related to people's livelihood (e.g. data on the utilisation rates of public swimming pool complexes and study rooms);

(4) whether it will request public organisations such as the Hospital Authority and the Town Planning Board to formulate open data plans; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) whether it has formulated strategies and work plans for encouraging public utilities to open up their data, including (i) reviewing the relevant legal framework and (ii) considering the addition of provisions on opening up of data to the franchise agreements to be signed in future; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

After consulting the relevant bureaux and departments, our reply to the five parts of the question is as follows:

(1) In September 2018, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) issued guidelines to all government bureaux and departments (B/Ds) on the new open data policy and implementation measures. B/Ds are required to progressively open up their data for free use by the public under the "data.gov.hk" portal, and formulate and publish their annual open data plans on their websites every year. Their first annual open data plans should be published by the end of 2018. In addition, relevant B/Ds should explore feasible options to encourage public and private organisations to open up their data related to public facilities or with high degree of public interest, and include specific measures in this regard in their annual open data plans. The OGCIO will play a co-ordinating role to collect the annual open data plans of B/Ds, and provide a full list under the "data.gov.hk" portal for soliciting views and suggestions from the public.

Since B/Ds are currently preparing the relevant plans, at this stage we are unable to provide the number of additional datasets to be released next year.

(2) In formulating their annual open data plans, B/Ds will take into account the needs of the public and the industry in assessing the priority and the timetable of opening up different data.

(3) The data currently opened up or planned to be opened up shortly by B/Ds cover different areas, including medical and health, transport, education, commerce and economy, environment, leisure and culture, housing, land development and information relating to people's livelihood.

Currently, public libraries under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) do not have a system to collect and disseminate real-time facility utilisation data. In developing the new library system, the LCSD will actively study measures to open up more real-time data about the utilisation of library facilities, for example the usage and booking of computer workstations. As for public swimming pools, some of them display the attendance at the entrances. However, the information technology system is not equipped with a real-time attendance data transmission function, and therefore LCSD is not able to further open up such information.

(4) At present, open data collected and compiled by some public organisations (e.g. the Insurance Authority, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, the Hong Kong Housing Authority and the Hospital Authority (HA)) are already available on the "data.gov.hk" portal.

Data from the HA will form part of the Food and Health Bureau's annual open data plan. Currently, datasets from the HA which have been uploaded to the "data.gov.hk" portal include inpatient and day inpatient services throughputs, statistics on cancer, information of hospitals and clinics, etc. The HA will update the uploaded datasets regularly and will consider making available new types of data, such as waiting time for Accident & Emergency Departments and Specialist Out-patient Clinics.

The Town Planning Board (TPB) has already published information on planning applications, amendments to statutory plans, etc. via TPB's website

for public inspection. The TPB is also preparing for releasing relevant information via the "data.gov.hk" portal starting from 2019.

(5) At present, the "data.gov.hk" portal has made available information related to public utilities, including:

- (i) MTR stations and services as published by MTR Corporation Limited;
- (ii) tramways main routes and tram stops as published by Hong Kong Tramways Limited;
- (iii) location of electric vehicle charging stations as published by CLP Power Hong Kong Limited; and
- (iv) location of electric vehicle charging stations, estimated power consumption for general office appliances, and defect rectification tips for customers' electrical installations as published by The Hongkong Electric Company Limited.

The "data.gov.hk" portal has provided information on timetables and fare tables of the franchised ferry services operated by The "Star" Ferry Company, Limited since September this year.

Moreover, the Government proposes in the 2018 Policy Address to fund and develop a data collection system and a mobile application, as well as install global positioning devices on green minibuses (GMB), so as to enable passengers to get access to the real-time arrival information of GMB routes through the Transport Department (TD)'s website and "HKeMobility" mobile application. The relevant data will also be released in machine-readable format via the "data.gov.hk" portal for free use by the public. It is expected that the system will be launched officially in early 2022.

On franchised buses, all franchised bus companies currently provide passengers with real-time bus arrival information on their regular bus routes through their websites and smartphone applications. They also work with the TD in providing the real-time arrival information in the TD's "HKeMobility" mobile application and website. The six bus franchises will only expire in 2023 or later. When the bus franchises are about to expire, the Government will continue to deal with the renewal applications in accordance with the relevant legislation and the established procedures, including consideration of adding clauses to the franchise to enhance services. The Government will continue to discuss with the public transport operators, and actively encourage and facilitate the opening up of their data in machine-readable format on the "data.gov.hk" portal, in the light of the Government's open data policy.

Besides, the two power companies are planning to provide more power consumption data, having regard to relevant factors including safeguards for customers' privacy and compliance with relevant legislation.