

Speech by STL at 22nd UITP Asia-Pacific Annual Meeting (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, at the 22nd UITP Asia-Pacific Annual Meeting today (November 2):

Chairman Yap (Chairman of UITP Asia Pacific Division and Deputy Chief Executive of Land Transport Authority of Singapore, Mr Jeremy Yap), Chairman Dr Auyeung (Chairman of the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), Dr Rex Auyeung), Permanent Secretary Dato Empaling (Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Transport Sarawak, Malaysia, Dato Ir Alice Jawan Empaling), distinguished guests, speakers, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning, and a warm welcome to all of you as we gather here in this tiny vibrant city. It is my pleasure to address you all today and discuss the integration of Hong Kong's transportation network with the Greater Bay Area. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate UITP and MTRCL for organising this significant UITP Asia-Pacific Annual Meeting, providing a valuable platform for industry experts and professionals to share knowledge and insights in the field of public transportation.

Before delving into the topic, allow me to provide some context for those who may be less familiar with the Greater Bay Area. The Greater Bay Area, or the GBA in short, encompasses two special administrative regions, namely Hong Kong and Macao, and their nine neighbouring cities in the Guangdong Province of China. With a combined population of over 86 million and a GDP (gross domestic product) comparable to some of the world's largest economies, the GBA has the potential to become a global economic powerhouse and presents significant opportunities for Hong Kong.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of connectivity and collaboration among cities. Enhanced connectivity facilitates movement of goods, services, and people, creating opportunities for resource and talent exchange, driving economic growth, and improving quality of life. Businesses can expand their operations and tap into new markets, while scholars and entrepreneurs can foster collaboration and innovation in finance, technology, and research and development. Moreover, integration promotes cultural exchanges and strengthens social ties. By integrating with surrounding metropolises, a city can unlock its true potential and contribute to the development of the entire region.

To realise the benefits of regional integration, robust transport infrastructure is a crucial prerequisite. Allow me to share the Hong Kong experience in connecting with the GBA to shed some lights on how cities can better connect and create synergies.

In the past, travelling between Hong Kong and the Mainland was not as convenient as it is today. In 1970-80s, the journey to the Mainland was very

circuitous in both the lack of decent transport infrastructure and the tedious CIQ (customs, immigration and quarantine) processes and it would take nearly a whole day to travel from Hong Kong to Guangzhou which is only 140 kilometres apart. Of course, the connectivity between Hong Kong and other GBA cities improved a lot in the past few decades following the improved road and railway network at both sides. However, it is only after the commissioning of two key cross-boundary transport infrastructures, namely the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge and the High Speed Rail, that the connectivity between Hong Kong and the cities in the GBA has improved significantly in terms of journey time and in terms of the availability of the choice of transport modes.

The 55 km-long Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, an engineering marvel, is currently the longest bridge-cum-tunnel sea crossing in the world. It plays a strategic role in facilitating the economic development in Hong Kong, Macao, and the Western Pearl River Delta.

Previously, links among these places relied mainly on waterborne traffic. With the commissioning of the Bridge five years ago, the far end of the Western Pearl River Delta is now within a reachable three-hour commuting radius of Hong Kong. The travel time between Hong Kong International Airport and our neighbouring city Zhuhai, located at the other end of the Bridge, has been reduced from around four hours to just 45 minutes, and that between our Kwai Tsing Container Terminal and Zhuhai from 3.5 hours or so to about 75 minutes, allowing goods from the Western Pearl River Delta and beyond to make better use of Hong Kong's airport and container ports and enhancing Hong Kong's position as a trade and logistics hub.

The 26-km long Hong Kong Section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong High Speed Rail, which also celebrated its fifth anniversary in September, has also played a significant role in enhancing connectivity through linking up with the extensive national high-speed rail network. In this new era of high-speed rail travels, passengers can reach Futian, the new business centre in our neighbouring city, Shenzhen, in just 14 minutes. Previously, when taking the Intercity Through Train service to Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong Province, I could comfortably rewatch the football match of my favourite team I missed the night before during the two-hour ride, even if the teams went into the penalty shoot-out stage. Now, with the journey time shortened to 47 minutes, I can only wish for shorter stoppage time so I can at least finish the first half of the game. These improvements have transformed the vision of a "one-hour living circle" within the GBA into reality.

As an engineering professional who was involved in the High Speed Rail project for over 10 years, I can attest to the challenges faced during the planning, design, construction, and operation stages. Prolonged negotiations, technological complexities, and political considerations were just a few to name. However, the benefits of these strategic infrastructure projects far outweigh the challenges. During the recent National Day and Mid-Autumn Festival long weekend last month, a record-breaking 107 000 passengers were on board the High Speed Rail trains to and from Hong Kong in one day, demonstrating the strong demand for convenient and efficient cross-boundary

travel.

We will never stay complacent. To fully leverage the potential of regional collaboration, we must continue to enhance transportation links and ensure seamless connectivity. A key aspect is to improve the last-mile connectivity within cities and across borders through providing and sustaining an efficient and well-integrated local transportation network. This includes enhancing the connectivity between different modes of transport, such as railway, buses and taxis, to facilitate smooth transfers for passengers.

The terminus of the High Speed Rail Hong Kong Section in West Kowloon serves as a prime illustration of effective last-mile connectivity. Strategically located at the heart of our bustling metropolis, the station acts as a hub that connects two domestic railway lines, provides convenient access to the Airport Express, and is adjacent to a public transport interchange offering bus, minibus, and taxi services. This graceful integration of various transport modes provides passengers with seamless travel options. The sunken road network surrounding this beautiful station also solves significantly the long-standing road traffic problem in the vicinity of our famous shopping and tourist spots in Tsim Sha Tsui. Moreover, we have also dedicated six hectares of green open space at the station, revitalising it into an urban oasis for the public to enjoy.

And there is even more. Construction of a major commercial complex with total floor area of about three million square feet at the topside of the West Kowloon Station is going full steam ahead for completion some two years later, providing high-value retail and office space at this prime location and synergising with the adjacent Union Square comprehensive development including the famous International Commerce Centre. This is but one of the many classic examples which demonstrates that a well-planned transport facility would not only provide a place for boarding and alighting, but also drive the development of neighbouring areas, creating economic and living circles centred around it.

Going forward, we aspire to build a new generation of Transport Interchange Hubs, or TIHs in short, at strategic locations based on a people-centric approach. The future Hung Shui Kiu Station is among one of the locations with great potential. Situated in the Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen New Development Area, this area is poised to become a Regional Economic and Civic Hub of our future Northern Metropolis. This new station will serve as a convergence point for multiple major railways, including the existing Tuen Ma Line, as well as the planned Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Rail Link and the Hong Kong Island West-Hung Shui Kiu Rail Link. We aim to shape the Hung Shui Kiu Station into a new generation TIH that combines cross-boundary and local public transport services. This initiative will expand the coverage of the one-hour commuting network between Hong Kong and Shenzhen, connect with the corresponding transport network in other cities of the GBA, and better integrate Hong Kong into the overall development of our country.

In addition to providing connections between different modes of transport, the new generation TIHs will prioritise the needs of people by

incorporating park-and-ride facilities and dedicated parking spaces for bicycles and electric mobility devices, embracing smart city features, as well as providing a range of options for refreshments, shopping, and other necessary services.

Exciting projects are on the horizon as well. In 2021, the governments of Hong Kong and Shenzhen established the Task Force for Hong Kong-Shenzhen Co-operation on Cross-Boundary Railway Infrastructure. This task force aims to jointly develop the concept of "GBA on the Rail" by advancing two landmark cross-boundary railway projects, namely the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Rail Link and the Northern Link Spur Line. The Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Rail Link is an 18-km railway linking up the Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen New Development Area with Qianhai in Shenzhen, strengthening the connection between the Northern Metropolis in Hong Kong and the Guangzhou-Shenzhen innovation and technology corridor. With the support of road networks, the two areas will be jointly developed into a strategic hub of a transport corridor on the east bank of the Pearl River and provide another convenient option for residents and tourists travelling to and from the GBA.

Meanwhile, the proposed Northern Link Spur Line will pass through San Tin Technopole and the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park in the Lok Ma Chau Loop and connect with the new Huanggang Port in Shenzhen. This new railway line will help strengthen the cross-boundary transport network and contribute to the collaboration between Hong Kong and Shenzhen on technology and innovation front.

In conclusion, the integration of Hong Kong's transportation network with the GBA is a critical step towards unlocking the full potential of regional collaboration and economic development. The construction of key infrastructure projects like the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge and High Speed Rail has significantly improved connectivity. Looking ahead, by focusing on the last-mile connectivity and continuing investment in new infrastructure projects, we can create a truly integrated and sustainable transport network that benefits both Hong Kong and the GBA.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you all a fruitful and engaging discussion throughout this UITP Asia-Pacific Annual Meeting. Do enjoy your stay in Hong Kong. Do grasp your time to walk around and explore this tiny but beautiful city. Thank you.