

## LCQ6: Immigration and customs clearance measures that facilitate inbound tourism

Following is a question by the Hon Yiu Pak-leung and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Ms Mable Chan, in the Legislative Council today (March 19):

Question:

There are views pointing out that enhancement of the immigration arrangements for visitors is crucial to attracting more high value-added and high-end visitors to Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as there are quite a number of views that it will further promote inbound travel of high-end visitors if the co-location or other innovative immigration and customs clearance arrangements are adopted for private jet and cross-boundary helicopter passengers, whether the authorities have initiated discussions with the relevant Mainland departments in this regard; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as there are views pointing out that the large-scale arts, cultural and sports events to be held at the Kai Tak Sports Park will attract internationally renowned superstars and high-end visitors to come to Hong Kong and drive up the demand for helicopter services, whether the authorities have considered opening up the heliport of the Government Flying Service Kai Tak Division for operating the relevant cross-boundary flights as well as flights within Hong Kong; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as it is learnt that there are often long queues of people at the immigration counters of the Hong Kong International Airport during peak hours, which brings negative impact on the experience of visitors, of the authorities' specific plans in place to expedite the adoption of automated systems using innovative technologies to enhance the efficiency of passenger clearance, and whether the authorities will consider providing fast tracks for business travellers, with a view to offering more expeditious immigration services?

Reply:

President,

In recent years, the market landscape for cross-boundary helicopter services has been evolving. With the rapid development of road, rail and maritime networks connecting cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, continuous increase in cross-boundary passenger flow, as well as

the emergence of new technologies (e.g. Advanced Air Mobility), the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) is keeping a close watch on the development trend and market demand for local and cross-boundary helicopter services, and will review the development of related facilities continuously, taking into account the views of the industry and the utilisation of existing heliports.

In consultation with the Security Bureau, the reply to the Hon Yiu's question is as follows:

(1) The Memorandum of Understanding under the Air Services Arrangement between the Mainland and the HKSAR was expanded in 2019 to enhance cross-boundary helicopter services between Hong Kong and eligible take-off/landing points within the whole Guangdong Province, thereby greatly enhancing the choice of potential take-off/landing points and the flexibility of services. At present, helicopter take-off/landing points in Hong Kong and the Guangdong Province that fulfill the relevant customs, immigration and quarantine (CIQ) arrangements include Shenzhen Bao'an International Airport, Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport, Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) and the cross-boundary heliport at the rooftop of the Hong Kong-Macau Ferry Terminal in Sheung Wan.

The HKSAR Government will continue to work closely with the Mainland authorities to facilitate the development of cross-boundary commercial helicopter services, including studying the feasibility of setting up more take-off/landing points that fulfill relevant arrangements. To support the said development, the two governments may also explore the adoption of convenient and efficient clearance modes, with a view to enhancing passenger clearance efficiency.

The Hong Kong Business Aviation Centre at HKIA is equipped with security and CIQ facilities. To enhance the transit convenience for business jet and cross-boundary helicopter passengers, HKIA launched the Business Jet & Commercial Flight Wing-to-Wing Transfer Service in March last year, which allows relevant passengers arriving at HKIA to directly proceed to transfer to commercial flights, and vice versa. As the service can save about one-third of the transit time for travellers, it will help promote their use of business jet and cross-boundary helicopter services and transit through Hong Kong. The HKSAR Government and the Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK) will continue to closely monitor the market demand and the operation of relevant facilities.

Since 2019, several Mainland helicopter operators in the market conducted trial flights between Hong Kong and Shenzhen/Guangzhou. For example, in September last year, the first cross-boundary helicopter flight between Guangzhou and Hong Kong took place. The HKSAR Government will continue to facilitate trial flight activities, with a view to implementing cross-boundary helicopter services between Hong Kong and Guangdong as soon as possible.

(2) Regarding the "heliport" site at the end of the former Kai Tak runway, when seeking funding approval from the Legislative Council for the works

project of the Kai Tak Division of the Government Flying Service in 2018, the HKSAR Government has indicated that it will reserve the flexibility to co-locate cross-boundary helicopter service facilities at the site in future, if necessary. The Division has been designed to ensure that necessary equipment can be provided to support the future co-location of the site with the cross-boundary heliport.

As mentioned above, the HKSAR Government is closely monitoring the development trend and market demand for helicopter services, and will review the development of related facilities in a timely manner.

(3) The Immigration Department (ImmD) has been striving for innovation in enhancing the clearance efficiency of e-Channels and expanding the service target group in order to provide immigration services of the highest quality to members of the public and visitors.

Firstly, Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation Business Travel Card holders and eligible frequent visitors can choose to enroll for the e-Channel service and perform self-service immigration clearance. The ImmD has also launched the Smart Departure service, which uses facial recognition technology to verify the identity of passengers, allowing eligible visitors to use the self-service departure service at HKIA and various ports.

For visitors from the Mainland and Macao, the ImmD lowered the eligible age of holders of the Mainland's electronic Exit-Entry Permits for travelling to and from Hong Kong and Macao to use the e-Channel service from 16 years old or above to 11 years old or above in April 2023. The ImmD also launched the Mutual Use of QR Code between HKSAR and Macao SAR Clearance Service jointly with the Macao authorities in July last year, allowing eligible residents of both places to use QR Codes to pass through the automated clearance channels.

The ImmD will also flexibly deploy manpower, operate additional counters and channels during peak hours to ensure smooth passenger flow at HKIA. Looking ahead, the ImmD will continue to use innovative technologies to enhance the level of clearance facilitation.

At the same time, the AAHK is committed to enhancing passenger experience and operational efficiency, including –

(i) introducing the facial recognition technology-based application Flight Token in October 2022 to speed up the whole departure process. Coupled with the concurrent launch of Flight Token e-Channels by the ImmD, Flight Token allows registered passengers of designated airlines to show their faces for identity verification without the need to repeatedly present their travel documents and boarding passes throughout the departure process;

(ii) introducing a new smart security screening system in July 2024, which obviates the need for passengers to take out liquids, aerosols or gels, and electronic devices such as laptops from their carry-on luggage during security screening, thereby further enhancing the overall efficiency of security screening; and

(iii) HKIA provides Courtesy Channel in the Arrival Halls and Departure Halls to facilitate security screening and immigration clearance for visitors invited by the AAHK or the airlines.

We will continue to closely monitor the market demand and the operation of relevant facilities, with a view to continuously maximising the convenience for visitors. Thank you, President.