LCQ7: Managing passenger flows at land boundary control points

Following is a question by Professor the Hon William Wong and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Ms Mable Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 21):

Question:

It has been reported that during the Labour Day Golden Week holiday on May 2 when a large number of Mainland tourists visited Hong Kong, the mobile network and Wi-Fi system at MTR Lok Ma Chau Station were overwhelmed as a large number of passengers simultaneously used their mobile phones to scan QR code tickets to enter and leave via turnstiles, and thus a significant number of passengers were stranded. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has compiled statistics on the number of passengers stranded at Lok Ma Chau Station on May 2 due to the failure of the mobile network and station Wi-Fi system;

(2) as passengers were being stranded at Lok Ma Chau Station on May 2, whether the Government has communicated with relevant Mainland authorities to notify passengers who intended to enter Hong Kong via the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point that they should use alternative boundary control points (BCPs); given that Shenzhen Metro Line 4 is operated by the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), whether the Government has urged MTRCL on the same day to immediately notify passengers travelling on Line 4 of the passenger stranding situation at Lok Ma Chau Station and called on them to cross the border via alternative BCPs;

(3) whether the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has conducted drills with relevant Mainland authorities regarding unexpected incidents at BCPs and formulated various contingency plans; and

(4) whether simulation tests have been conducted at all BCPs to establish co-ordination mechanisms and joint response measures between the Mainland and Hong Kong for handling peak passenger flows and potential unexpected incidents (including emergency situations such as malfunctions of immigration systems, baggage and security screening system failures, and railway service disruptions); if so, of the time when such tests were conducted; if not, whether such tests will be conducted in the future?

Reply:

President,

The Golden Week holiday is the peak period of Mainland visitors visiting Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government has been maintaining close liaison with relevant organisations and parties to

prepare well for arrangements of boundary control points (BCPs), public transportation, crowd management, etc, with a view to ensuring the smooth operation of various aspects in receiving visitors and offering a high-quality experience to them. In view of this year's Labour Day Golden Week holiday, the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) had made advance preparations by enhancing the train services for cross-boundary railways (including Lo Wu and Lok Ma Chau Stations of the East Rail Line, and the Hong Kong West Kowloon High Speed Rail Station), as well as deploying additional staff and strengthening information dissemination. Meanwhile, the MTRCL maintained close liaison with relevant departments at the BCPs, so as to adjust train services in a timely manner according to the situation at the BCPs, and provide visitors with safe, reliable and convenient railway services.

In consultation with the Security Bureau, the Transport Department (TD) and the MTRCL, my consolidated reply to the question raised by Professor the Hon William Wong is as follows:

(1) As observed by the MTRCL, during this year's Labour Day Golden Week holiday, the number of visitors arriving in or exiting from Hong Kong via the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point using the MTR East Rail Line and the total patronage were slightly higher than those of the same period last year. On May 2 (Friday) this year, the peak arrival and departure periods for Mainland visitors were in the morning and evening respectively, during which an average of approximately 7 500 visitors entered and exited Lok Ma Chau Station per hour.

During the peak departure period in the evening, a relatively large number of passengers used their phones at the same time to activate QR codes at ticket gates, resulting in a sudden surge in mobile data demand within a short period of time; the pressure on the mobile network providers' provision of mobile data also intensified the passengers' demand for Wi-Fi capacity at the station. As a result of the overall overloading of mobile data and Wi-Fi networks, passengers needed longer time for connection to the network to retrieve the QR codes, leading to a higher passenger flow at the stations' entry/exit gates and concourse at certain periods of time. The MTRCL immediately took contingency measures in response to the actual situation, such as diverting passenger queues before the gates, adjusting the operation of individual escalators as appropriate to control the passenger flow, and intermittently allowing passengers to exit the gates without having to tap their cards from approximately 9.45pm to 10.30pm to divert passenger flow. Throughout this period, the Transport and Logistics Bureau (TLB) and the TD maintained close communication with the MTRCL and promptly urged the MTRCL to enhance services in all aspects to ensure the smooth and safe operation of the station in face of the large patronage.

To cope with the peak travelling period for visitors during the Labour Day Golden Week this year, the MTRCL anticipated that there would be an increase in demand for network data capacity by passengers. As such, arrangements were made before the Golden Week to increase the in-station Wi-Fi capacity for supplementary purpose to cater for the needs of passengers who require internet access but do not have mobile network data. In light of the situation that occurred on the evening of May 2, the MTRCL promptly

contacted mobile network providers in that same evening to immediately upgrade the mobile data capacity near BCPs as well as further increase the Wi-Fi capacity at Lok Ma Chau Station so as to facilitate the use of QR codes for passengers to take trains.

In response to the aforementioned situation, the TLB has requested the MTRCL to review its arrangements for future visitor peak periods based on the experience gained this time. The MTRCL will also enhance its publicity efforts on Mainland social media platforms to remind visitors to activate their QR codes for payment in advance, thereby reducing the time spent at the gates. In addition, the MTRCL will promote the use of mobile Octopus for tourists as another payment option that does not require internet connection. The MTRCL will further discuss with relevant parties on how to manage passenger flow more effectively and plan ahead to ensure that the peak passenger flow can be handled more smoothly in future.

(2) The Inter-departmental Joint Command Centre, comprising the Police, the Immigration Department, the Customs and Excise Department and relevant parties (including the MTRCL), was activated during the Labour Day Golden Week (i.e. from May 1 to 5, 2025) to monitor the real-time situations at various BCPs. The Joint Command Centre maintained close liaison with the Mainland port authorities through the established port hotlines and real-time notification mechanisms, and took timely contingency actions as necessary to ensure the smooth operation of the land control points.

In addition, relevant departments at BCPs continuously monitored real-time situations at the control points and maintained liaison with the corresponding Mainland port authorities, including immediate mutual notification of the passenger flow situation upon learning about the heavy network traffic at the MTR Lok Ma Chau Station on May 2 this year as well as implementation of appropriate crowd control and diversion measures to facilitate passenger flow and maintain order at the BCP.

(3) and (4) The HKSAR Government and relevant Mainland authorities have conducted incident drills at various BCPs from time to time, simulating emergencies such as fires, power supply failures, immigration system malfunctions and infectious disease incidents. These drills aim to formulate and practise contingency plans, strengthen co-ordination between departments and various parties and enhance overall response capabilities, thereby ensuring safety and order at BCPs in the event of unexpected incidents. Recent joint exercises include the flooding evacuation drill at the Express Rail Link West Kowloon Control Point in March 2025 and the joint exercise at the Lo Wu Control Point in October 2024 to simulate scenarios of power supply and system network incidents at the Hong Kong Port and contingency measures taken by relevant parties.