

For information
on 29 October 2001

Legislative Council Panel on Economic Services

Operation of Hong Kong International Airport During and After Typhoon Utor: Improvement Measures

Introduction

At the Economic Services Panel meeting on 17 July 2001, Members discussed the operation of the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) during and shortly after Typhoon Utor and requested the Administration to report back on the improvement measures which would be put in place. This paper informs Members of the improvement measures identified and implemented by the Airport Authority (AA), concerned government departments and AA's business partners.

Background

2. Typhoon Utor had certain unusual characteristics which affected take-offs and landings at both HKIA and the airports in the region. These included -

- (a) the extraordinary persistence of Utor which took more than 40 hours to dissipate completely after landfall, breaking the record of 30 hours set by Typhoon Hope in 1979; and
- (b) the bad localised weather conditions around HKIA brought by Utor's outer rainband when it was already well inland, resulting in turbulence, windshear and microbursts at HKIA, after the Number 8 typhoon signal was lowered.

3. The Airport Meteorological Office of the Hong Kong Observatory provided continuous, accurate and detailed weather observations, forecasts and warnings which were specific to conditions at the airport. This weather information was available to pilots for them to take the

decision whether to take off. Hence, pilots were well aware of the forecast bad weather conditions; but many decided to wait to catch any momentary spell of improvement in conditions. As only a small number of aircraft eventually managed to take off, there was a huge congestion on the apron, numbering some 112 aircraft at the peak.

4. It should be emphasised that safety was our top priority and that at no time during the typhoon had the safety of the passengers and the public been compromised. However, all concerned parties recognised that there were areas in which improvements could be made, particularly in enhancing operational co-ordination, improving communication with the travellers and the public and minimising passenger discomfort.

5. After Typhoon Utor, a series of meetings were held among AA, its business partners and concerned Government departments to review typhoon emergency procedures and identify room for improvement. A number of measures have been put in place and were actually practised during Typhoon Yutu on 25 July 2001 with good results. The following sections detail the specific improvement measures in various areas.

Operational Co-ordination

6. Measures have been put in place to enhance communication among various parties. This will ensure better operational co-ordination to minimise service disruption.

- (a) The meetings that are held between AA, airlines and handling agents in the lead up to, during and after a typhoon to plan and co-ordinate necessary action will also be attended by representatives of HKO and air traffic control (ATC). This will facilitate a better understanding by operators of the severity of the typhoon and its operational impact. The AA is also planning to install video-conferencing equipment to further improve co-ordination with HKO.
- (b) A representative from ATC will be stationed at the Airport Emergency Centre (AEC) to enhance co-ordination and ensure operational efficiency during periods of flight disruptions.

- (c) In order to optimise the use of aerobridges, special attention will be paid to closely monitoring the status of each aircraft. Those identified to be inactive will be relocated. In co-ordination with ATC, there should be more effective and efficient management of aircraft flow, which should in turn maximise the availability of parking bays with aerobridge service.
- (d) Together with the ramp operators, AA has improved equipment pooling procedures during flight disruptions to ensure that essential ramp equipment is always available to facilitate relocation of aircraft at short notice.
- (e) Some AA staff in the Flight Movement Information Centre (FMIC) will be dedicated to continuous communication with airlines, ground handling agents and airline control centres. This should improve co-ordination with airlines and enhance AA's flight re-scheduling arrangements for the typhoon recovery phase.
- (f) The Airport Express will place notices at the in-town platform to advise passengers to check on their flight status before proceeding to the airport. Services will be extended whenever possible taking into account the need to perform maintenance works at required intervals.

Enhance communication with the travellers and the public

7. In order to widely disseminate timely flight and weather information to passengers in the terminal building, improvements have been introduced in the following areas -

- (a) Dedicated AA staff will be assigned to closely monitor the status of each flight. Flights without confirmed departure/arrival times will be removed from the screens of the Flight Information Display System.
- (b) Television sets have been installed at various locations in the terminal building including the check-in hall and boarding areas,

to provide waiting passengers with news and weather information from TV channels.

- (c) Airlines have reviewed their procedures for informative and timely announcements to ensure that their passengers on board aircraft and in the terminal building are better informed of the flight status.
- (d) Additional telephone contacts for all of the major airlines, handling agents and land transport companies have been included on the AA website. A pop-up page will also be available on the AA website during typhoons or flight disruptions to remind passengers to telephone their airlines to check on the latest flight status before departing for the airport.
- (e) The following arrangements will be made by AA to facilitate media coverage -
 - (i) tour of the AEC and interview with AA airport management staff prior to the facility's activation;
 - (ii) regular briefings by airport management staff;
 - (iii) regular updates on the number of flights affected;
 - (iv) opening of the press conference room in the terminal building for use by the media; and
 - (v) facilitation of live broadcast at the passenger terminal.
- (f) HKO has substantially increased the capacity of its website to facilitate public access, especially during adverse weather conditions. In addition, an increasing number of operators in the aviation sector (including the majority of airlines) are using the aviation specific real-time weather information service provided by HKO.

Passenger Comfort

8. A Passenger Service Task Force has been set up by AA together with their business partners and it has adopted a number of measures to improve passenger comfort.

- (a) Airlines will make better use of specific real-time weather information from HKO to plan their operations to minimise passengers' waiting time on board aircraft, at the check-in area or at the boarding gates.
- (b) New coffee lounges with televisions have been set up in the terminal building. These have proved to be very popular with passengers during flight disruptions.
- (c) Catering outlets have reviewed and revised their procedures to cater for the expected increase in patronage during flight disruptions. Arrangements have also been introduced for these outlets to accept meal coupons from airlines.
- (d) There will be more frequent restocking of vending machines during periods of flight disruption.
- (e) Ad-hoc kiosks will be set up during typhoons to provide refreshments for passengers in the transfer areas on the arrivals level.
- (f) During periods of flight disruption, bottled water and blankets will be distributed to waiting passengers if needed.
- (g) A "Passenger Needs Team" comprising AA staff has been formed and will be activated to care for and provide assistance to passengers during periods of flight disruption.
- (h) AA is working with St John's Ambulance to provide first aid desks at strategic locations in the passenger terminal in case medical attention is required.

- (i) Aviation Security Company Limited have revised their procedures and should be ready to provide crowd control at hot spots at short notice if required.

Conclusion

9. Many of the measures listed in paragraphs 6 to 8 were already in place when Hong Kong came under the influence of Typhoon Yutu on 25 July 2001. They proved to be effective and were well received by passengers, the airport community and the general public.

10. Whilst AA, concerned departments and AA's business partners will keep typhoon emergency procedures at HKIA under review, it must be recognised that ultimately, the decision on whether to take off, wait or cancel a flight rests with the pilot concerned. AA and concerned government departments will ensure the provision of timely and accurate weather information, safe and orderly air traffic control and co-ordination of airport facilities to minimise service disruption. The enhanced communication procedures and improved customer service measures introduced by AA should enable the public and affected passengers to acquire a better understanding and appreciation of the circumstances leading to any flight disruption.

**Economic Services Bureau
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