

Panel on Security of the Legislative Council

Measures to Ease Passenger Congestion at Boundary Control Points

Introduction

At the LegCo Panel on Security meeting on 1 March 2001, members asked if it would be possible to enhance the service of Lok Ma Chau – Huanggang shuttle bus by increasing its frequency and to provide regular through train service between Hung Hom and Lo Wu. This paper provides a response.

Lok Ma Chau-Huanggang Shuttle Bus Service

2. At the meeting on 1 March 2001, the Administration informed Members that the Huanggang shuttle bus service would replace part of its fleet with larger vehicles before mid-2001 to cope with increasing demand. The maximum capacity of the shuttle bus service would be increased by about 18% to about 1,300 passengers per peak hour.

3. In response to Members' request, we have examined the possibility to enhance the shuttle bus service by increasing its frequency. Our assessment is that further increase in service frequency will require the support of additional shuttle buses.

4. One possible option is for the operator to retain part or all of the existing buses which are to be replaced by larger vehicles before mid 2001 as operational reserve for use when necessary to meet very high passenger demand during peak periods.

5. On the other hand, there may be other measures to increase the handling capacity of the shuttle bus fleet to enhance its service. Possible options are to replace more of the existing shuttle buses with larger vehicles, or to modify the internal layout and seating arrangement of the

buses to increase their passenger carrying capacity e.g. by providing more space for standees.

6. The Administration will explore the feasibility of these options with the shuttle bus operator. Changes to the service level or the fleet size of the shuttle bus service are subject to the mutual agreement between HKSARG and the Shenzhen Authorities. If any of the above options are considered feasible, the Administration will discuss them with the Shenzhen Authorities.

7. At present, shuttle bus passengers account for about 40% - 50% of the passengers crossing the boundary at Lok Ma Chau. While the best efforts would be made to enhance the shuttle bus service, there is a limit to which passenger flow at the Lok Ma Chau Control Point can be increased. Account has to be taken of the physical constraint in terms of the number of immigration counters that can be accommodated in the Lok Ma Chau Passenger Terminal. With the completion of Phase II expansion work at Lok Ma Chau scheduled for completion by 2003, the number of immigration counters would be increased from 28 to 38. Handling capacity will rise from a daily average of 25,000 to 35,000 passengers. Any increase in the total number of passengers beyond this level will not be conducive to the maintenance of a smooth passenger traffic unless a new mode of clearance is found. Theoretically it may be possible to have clearance by immigration officers on board but resource and operational issues will have to be further explored. It should be noted that in the foreseeable future, Lo Wu will have to remain the only major passenger crossing point.

Through Train Service between Hung Hom and Lo Wu

8. The Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC) currently operates a non-stop through train service between Hung Hom and Lo Wu ('the Lo Wu Express') as a chartered service during long holidays and festive periods. At the Hung Hom station, passengers first complete their immigration clearance for Hong Kong side before they get on the Lo Wu Express. Upon arrival at the Lo Wu Station, passengers proceed directly to the Joint Inspection Building at Shenzhen for immigration and customs clearance.

9. At present, KCRC can only allocate a limited number of slots everyday for the Lo Wu express to depart from the Hung Hom Station. Other schedules are fully taken up by the Hong Kong-Guangzhou and Hong Kong-Beijing through train service. The Lo Wu Express is less popular largely because passengers must make their way to the Hung Hom Station and the express train is less frequent when compared with the normal East Rail service which departs on average every 5 to 6 minutes for Lo Wu. To operate the Lo Wu Express service on a more regular basis, KCRC will need to assess carefully its impact on East Rail train schedules.

10. Apart from KCRC's operational constraints, this proposal may have resource implication for the Immigration Department at the Hung Hom Control Point. Besides, further discussion and cooperation with the Shenzhen authorities are required to ensure that the requisite cross-boundary immigration and customs arrangements are well coordinated on the two sides. The possibility of providing regular through train service between Hung Hom and Lo Wu is nonetheless worth exploring as a means to help relieve the congestion of Immigration counters at Lo Wu, since passengers of the through train complete Hong Kong's immigration clearance at the Hung Hom Station. We are therefore discussing the proposal with KCRC as an initial step.

Transport Bureau/Security Bureau
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