

**Information paper
on 28 July 2001**

**LegCo Panel on Security
Immigration Clearance Arrangements at Control Points**

Introduction

This paper informs Members of the existing immigration clearance arrangements for visitors at immigration control points, including the possibility of introducing a serpentine queuing arrangement at the Airport.

Existing Immigration Clearance Arrangements for Visitors

The Airport

2. At the Airport, immigration clearance services are provided on two separate levels in the Passenger Terminal Building. There are two separate arrival halls, each consisting of 59 clearance counters. Holders of Hong Kong Permanent Identity Card, Hong Kong residents/holders of Travel Pass and APEC Business Travel Card, and visitors (including holders of Two-way Permit) are cleared at separate counters. There are two separate departure halls as well, each consisting of 44 clearance counters. The setting of clearance counters is similar to that in the arrival halls with designated counters for residents and visitors respectively. Passengers presenting for immigration clearance queue up in front of individual counters.

3. The flight schedule, parking location of flights and bunching of group tours during the peak seasons and long holidays all affect passenger volume in different arrival or departure halls. A flexible manpower deployment system is in place to cope with the changing passenger volume. To ensure efficient and effective passenger clearance and smooth passenger flow at the counters, non-routine cases are handled away from the counters.

The Macau and China Ferry Terminals

4. At the Macau Ferry Terminal and the China Ferry Terminal, immigration clearance services for arrival and departing passengers are provided on two separate levels of the ferry terminal buildings. Residents and visitors are cleared at separate counters. The number of counters deployed for each type of passengers is contingent on the actual demand as well as the composition of the passengers. The two ferry terminals also adopt the system of queuing in front of individual counters.

Land Boundary Control Points

5. There are five land boundary control points at Hung Hom, Lok Ma Chau, Man Kam To, Sha Tau Kok and Lo Wu. At Hung Hom and Lok Ma Chau, residents and visitors are cleared at separate counters. At Man Kam To and Sha Tau Kok where passenger traffics are relatively less hectic, all counters are open to both residents and visitors.

6. At Lo Wu, in order to cope with the very heavy passenger traffic, there are three passenger clearance halls on three different levels of the Lo Wu Terminal Building, i.e. the Departure Hall, the Visitor Arrival Hall and the Resident Arrival Hall. In the Departure Hall, designated counters are provided for the clearance of visitors. Same as other control points, flexible deployment of counters is always exercised to cope with the changing demand and to ensure optimal usage of staff resources. At the Visitor Arrival Hall, a mini-serpentine queuing arrangement is already in place for different categories of visitors, for example, foreign visitors, PRC passport holders and Two Way Permit visitors.

Statistics on the Waiting Time for Immigration Clearance

7. The Immigration Department has fulfilled its performance pledge to clear 92% of passengers within 30 minutes in case of travelling by land or by sea, and within 15 minutes in case of travelling by air. In the past three years, less than 2% of all passengers were not cleared within 30 minutes. Statistics on the average waiting time for immigration clearance at the eight control points for 1998 - 2000 are set out at Annex.

Measures to Shorten Immigration Clearance Time

8. In order to maintain the standard of performance in face of ever-increasing passenger traffics, the Immigration Department has taken or planned a number of measures to minimise the clearance time for visitors.

Streamlining of Clearance Procedures

9. To facilitate visitors and to ensure speedy processing of non-problematic cases, immigration clearance procedures for the following categories of passengers have been streamlined -

- (a) Passengers unlikely to pose immigration threat to Hong Kong: counter officers may do away with the checking of the validity of the passport, returnability, means of support and return bookings. They may also dispense with enquiries about the passengers' length of stay and purpose of visit if they appear to be genuine holiday-makers;
- (b) Mainland group tours: passengers are pre-checked so that upon arrival, the counter officers can simply retrieve the data from the computer system for speedy clearance;
- (c) Two-way Permit holders: the stamping of conditions of stay has been simplified; and
- (d) Passengers who have no intention to enter Hong Kong but are compelled to present for landing due to unforeseen circumstances such as bad weather and cancellation of flights: simplified procedures are in place to enable them to leave the Airport under the guarantee of the responsible airlines.

Flexible Manpower Deployment

10. When passenger traffic is very heavy, immigration staff performing administrative and supportive duties are deployed to perform counter clearance duties. During festive periods and long holidays, staff are not normally allowed to take vacation leaves or are required to work overtime in order to maintain the maximum level of manpower resources. In addition, additional staff are provided where necessary.

Use of Modern Technology

11. We plan to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the operation of immigration control points by replacing the existing Immigration Control Automation System which is aging. Besides, the introduction of the smart identity card in 2003 will provide the infrastructure for the Immigration Department to consider the introduction of an automated passenger clearance system at control points.

Implications of the Serpentine Queuing Arrangement on Waiting Time

12. The serpentine queuing arrangement is more appropriate for control points with spacious passenger clearance halls. Amongst the eight control points, only the Airport has spacious clearance halls which are conducive to the operation of a serpentine queuing arrangement.

13. The Immigration Department did carry out trial runs of serpentine queuing at the Chek Lap Kok Airport in 1998. It was observed that passengers had to walk a longer distance in the zig-zag serpentine and there were longer time gaps between clearance of individual passengers because of the longer walking distance from the head of the serpentine queue to the immigration counters. The conclusion reached at that time was that the operation of a serpentine queue might not necessarily result in a better service level as required by our performance pledge, i.e. clearing 92% of arriving passengers within 15 minutes waiting time

14. In view of the increasing passenger traffic, the Immigration Department is prepared to revisit such a serpentine queuing arrangement. It has liaised with the Airport Authority to start a trial run on 1 August 2001 with a view to identifying the best arrangements for implementation.

Security Bureau
28 July 2001

Average Waiting Time of Passengers for Immigration Clearance (in Percentage)
(from 1998 to 2000)

Control Point	1998				1999				2000			
	0 to 15 minutes	16 to 30 minutes	31 to 45 minutes	46 to 60 minutes	0 to 15 minutes	16 to 30 minutes	31 to 45 minutes	46 to 60 minutes	0 to 15 minutes	16 to 30 minutes	31 to 45 minutes	46 to 60 minutes
Airport	97.33	2.57 (99.90) ¹	0.10 (100.00)	0 (100.00)	98.12	1.79 (99.91)	0.09 (100.00)	0 (100.00)	98.95	1.04 (99.99)	0.01 (100.00)	0 (100.00)
Lo Wu	83.13	13.48 (96.61)	3.03 (99.64)	0.36 (100.00)	84.32	12.55 (96.87)	2.91 (99.78)	0.22 (100.00)	83.46	13.37 (96.83)	3.07 (99.90)	0.10 (100.00)
Hung Hom	96.63	3.37 (100.00)	0 (100.00)	0 (100.00)	89.37	10.14 (99.51)	0.47 (99.98)	0.02 (100.00)	90.31	9.10 (99.41)	0.57 (99.98)	0.02 (100.00)
Man Kam To	100.00	0 (100.00)	0 (100.00)	0 (100.00)	100.00	0 (100.00)	0 (100.00)	0 (100.00)	100.00	0 (100.00)	0 (100.00)	0 (100.00)
Lok Ma Chau	70.29	26.32 (96.61)	3.39 (100.00)	0 (100.00)	63.43	32.77 (96.20)	3.80 (100.00)	0 (100.00)	66.54	29.78 (96.32)	3.66 (99.98)	0.02 (100.00)
Sha Tau Kok	100.00	0 (100.00)	0 (100.00)	0 (100.00)	100.00	0 (100.00)	0 (100.00)	0 (100.00)	100.00	0 (100.00)	0 (100.00)	0 (100.00)
Macau Ferry Terminal	78.45	19.52 (97.97)	2.03 (100.00)	0 (100.00)	88.96	9.82 (98.78)	1.22 (100.00)	0 (100.00)	88.14	10.46 (98.60)	1.40 (100.00)	0 (100.00)
China Ferry Terminal	86.15	12.27 (98.42)	1.55 (99.97)	0.03 (100.00)	84.97	13.35 (98.32)	1.55 (99.87)	0.13 (100.00)	81.24	17.14 (98.38)	1.49 (99.87)	0.13 (100.00)
Average	89.00	9.69 (98.69)	1.26 (99.95)	0.05 (100.00)	88.65	10.05 (98.70)	1.25 (99.95)	0.05 (100.00)	88.58	10.11 (98.69)	1.28 (99.97)	0.03 (100.00)

¹ Figures in brackets denote aggregated percentage.