

For information
25 June 2004

Legislative Council Panel on Transport

Public Transport Facilities and Arrangements at Boundary Control Points

PURPOSE

This paper presents the public transport facilities and arrangements at the existing boundary control points (BCPs) and those proposed for the new BCPs at the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Corridor (HK-SWC) and the Lok Ma Chau Terminus of the Sheung Shui to Lok Ma Chau Spur Line (Spur Line).

BACKGROUND

2. Over the past decade, with the increasing economic integration and social interaction between Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta Region, especially with the signing of the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) and the implementation of the “Individual Visit Scheme”, there has been a significant and continuous increase in cross-boundary freight and passenger traffic. Between 1993 and 2003, the number of cross-boundary goods vehicle trips increased by 40%, from 7 million to 9.8 million a year. The number of cross-boundary passenger trips also increased by 180%, from 40 million to over 113 million a year.

3. There are currently four land crossings. They are Lo Wu, Lok Ma Chau (LMC), Man Kam To (MKT) and Sha Tau Kok (STK). The LMC, MTK and STK crossings were originally designed mainly for freight traffic¹, while Lo Wu has been a passenger-only crossing right from the beginning. With the continuous increase in cross-boundary

¹ In 1993, of the 7 million cross-boundary goods vehicle trips, 45% were via LMC, 47% via MKT and 8% via STK. In 2003, there were 9.8 million cross-boundary goods vehicle trips. The distribution amongst LMC, MKT and STK was 69%, 26% and 5% respectively.

travel, LMC, MKT and STK have seen more and more passenger traffic. In particular, LMC has taken on the largest share of the increase in both freight and passenger traffic.

4. At present, apart from the East Rail boundary trains via Lo Wu, passengers may use two types of cross-boundary public transport services. They are the LMC-Huanggang Cross-Boundary Shuttle Bus (Shuttle Bus) and cross-boundary coaches. There are suggestions that the BCPs should be opened up to more public transport modes so as to provide more choices for cross-boundary travellers. In considering this suggestion, our key concerns are:

- (a) We need to ensure that freight traffic should not be affected, as smooth cargo flow is of vital importance to the economic development and well-being of Hong Kong.
- (b) We need to ensure the safe and efficient operation of the BCPs, taking into account the space constraints, the need to conserve the nearby environment, as well as the handling capacity of the adjacent road network.
- (c) Given the large number of cross-boundary passengers and that railway is an environmentally friendly mass carrier, it should continue to be the backbone of our cross-boundary passenger traffic.
- (d) Where circumstances allow, we would make available other public transport modes at the BCPs to provide supplementary transport services, partly to cover areas not served by the railway, and partly to offer more choices for passengers.

EXISTING BCPs

LMC

5. LMC is the busiest road crossing. It is now the most important

crossing for cross-boundary freight traffic² and is increasingly popular with cross-boundary passengers. It was originally designed as a crossing mainly for freight traffic with 14 pairs of kiosks for immigration and customs clearance of cross-boundary goods vehicles. To cater for the rapid growth in cross-boundary traffic over the past years, ten additional pairs of kiosks commenced operation in December 1999. Four additional kiosks for private cars will be installed in the coming year for both northbound and southbound directions, so as to release more kiosks for use by goods vehicles. A new boundary bridge across the Shenzhen River is being built next to the existing one to separate freight and non-freight traffic for better traffic flow and to add to the capacity of the existing boundary bridge.

6. It must however be noted that the improvement measures mentioned above all aim to tackle the ever-increasing freight traffic, which is projected to grow even further in the coming few years because of CEPA and the recovery in the local economic conditions. In fact, given the site constraints at the LMC BCP, and the substantial increase in freight traffic, the room for accommodating public transport vehicles at the BCP remains extremely limited. We therefore consider that it would be more effective and efficient to allow the larger passenger carriers, i.e. cross-boundary coaches and the Shuttle Buses, to access the BCP during the daytime when traffic is busy. There is, however, some limited flexibility in the nighttime when traffic at the BCP is generally lighter.

Trial Scheme for Taxis and Green Minibuses (GMB)

7. With the implementation of 24-hour passenger clearance in January 2003, and considering that freight traffic would be less busy during nighttime, we introduced in March 2003 a trial scheme to allow urban and NT taxis and three GMB routes to access the BCP from 12:00 midnight to 6:30 a.m. when traffic is relatively lighter. According to a survey conducted in February 2004, an average of about 1 500 GMB passengers were picked up and dropped off at the BCP during the said hours each day, and about 500 passengers took taxi trips to and from the BCP during those hours each day.

² In 2003, over 18 500 goods vehicles went through the LMC BCP each day. Compared with the 8 700 goods vehicles each day in 1993, the throughput has more than doubled.

8. After careful consideration, we consider that that the arrangement should continue. We would continue to monitor the situation closely to ensure that the arrangement will not unduly affect the operation of the BCP and cross-boundary freight traffic, which will continue to grow at a rapid rate.

Shuttle Bus

9. The Shuttle Bus provides a 24-hour short shuttle service between the San Tin Public Transport Interchange (PTI) and the Huanggang Control Point via the LMC BCP. It has a fleet of 26 buses and runs at 5-15 minute intervals. It currently carries about 34 000 passengers each day.

10. The San Tin PTI serves as a transit point for cross-boundary travellers to interchange between the Shuttle Buses and other public transport modes including franchised buses, public light buses (PLBs), taxis, domestic coaches as well as private cars. The PTI has an area of some 9 600 square metres, with pick-up/drop-off areas for Shuttle Buses, franchised buses, GMBs, NT and urban taxis, and domestic coaches. The San Tin PTI will shortly be provided with air-conditioned passenger waiting facilities³ that can accommodate about 300 passengers and a customer service centre.

Lo Wu

11. Lo Wu serves the majority of cross-boundary travellers and is probably the busiest boundary crossing in the world. Everyday, more than 400 passenger trains run between Lo Wu and Hung Hom. In 2003, some 85 000 000 passengers crossed the boundary through Lo Wu, representing an increase of 127% over 1993.

12. The Lo Wu BCP was designed primarily for the operation of railways. There are physical constraints at the existing road leading to the Lo Wu Terminal Building, i.e. Lo Wu Station Road, which is a road for delivery of supplies and an emergency access to the BCP. The width of the road varies between 3.5 metres and 6 metres from section to

³ Works related to the provision of air-conditioned passenger waiting facilities started in November 2003 and will be completed in phases by November 2004.

section and the narrow sections can only cater for one-lane traffic. It is not suitable for public transport vehicles and there are practical difficulties in widening it for this purpose because of the constraints posed by the presence of slopes, rail tracks, private lots and cemetery on both sides of the road. There is also no space for the provision of a proper PTI. We therefore have no plans to allow other public transport vehicles to access the Lo Wu BCP.

MKT and STK

13. MTK and STK are two small BCPs. In both cases, the Hong Kong and Mainland control points are located at a distance from each other. For safety and security reasons, it is not feasible for passengers to walk from one control point to another. Currently, there are fixed-scheduled cross-boundary coach services⁴ that operate between Mainland and the northern New Territories. These routes are well patronised.

14. Because of the geographical and security constraints mentioned above, access by domestic public transport services to the BCPs will not serve any practical purpose unless there is a shuttle service connecting the control points on both sides. However, such is not feasible due to the lack of space for the provision of laybys and turn-around facilities. The site constraints and the lack of turn-around facilities also preclude the provision of a PTI at the two BCPs.

15. For STK, we are currently building a new boundary bridge to the left of the existing one. This would enhance the safety and the traffic flow at this BCP. However, this would not remove the site constraints that have all along prohibited the operation of public transport services. We therefore do not have plans to change the status quo.

NEW BCPs

16. Two new BCPs at the HK-SWC and Spur Line are expected to

⁴ They are the Fanling–Shatoujiao and Sheung Shui–Wenjindu routes. The Fanling–Shatoujiao service has an en-route stop at the STK town within the Frontier Closed Area to serve the local residents.

come on stream by end-2005 and mid-2007 respectively. The HK-SWC BCP is designed mainly for freight traffic as agreed with the Mainland authorities, although it will also cater for cross-boundary passenger traffic. Co-location of passenger and cargo clearance facilities of both Hong Kong and the Mainland will be implemented. The Spur Line BCP will be a passenger-only crossing served mainly by the East Rail on the Hong Kong side.

HK-SWC

17. Based on the agreement with the Mainland authorities, the HK-SWC is planned and designed mainly for goods vehicles, but it will also cater for cross-boundary travellers who take cross-boundary coaches to the western side of the Pearl River Delta Region. To cater for possible demand for domestic public transport services, we have reached an understanding with the Mainland authorities that an area of about 6 000 square metres will be reserved on the Hong Kong side of the BCP as a PTI for domestic public transport vehicles. This facility will be part of the BCP facilities at the HK-SWC, for which the Finance Committee of this Council had given funding approval in July 2003.

18. We are now formulating a detailed plan for the provision of public transport services. We plan to allow a limited number of franchised buses, PLBs and taxis to the BCP. There will also be a taxi stacking area in the PTI. We will discuss our initial plan with the Mainland authorities to ensure that there is good interface between the services to be provided on both sides.⁵

Spur Line

19. When we consulted the Subcommittee on matters relating to railways of the Legislative Council Panel on Transport on 27 November 2002 on the funding request for PWP item **46TR** “East Rail Extension – essential public infrastructure works for the Sheung Shui to Lok Ma Chau Spur Line”, Members requested that facilities be provided at the LMC Terminus of the Spur Line to allow the operation of other public transport modes including franchised bus, PLB and taxi. In response to

⁵ This will include the operation hours of the BCP, which in turn will hinge on a number of factors, such as the costs of customs/immigration clearance and other supporting services.

Members' suggestion, we have amended the design of the LMC Terminus to include a PTI, thereby allowing the provision of other public transport services to the Terminus.

20. The PTI has an area of about 6 200 square metres. The size of the PTI has been determined having regard to the need for efficient and effective operation of the public transport services at the LMC Terminus and the need to protect the adjacent environment. To mitigate the environmental impact arising from the PTI, we will implement a whole range of mitigation measures as required by the environmental permit. The PTI will be able to accommodate a limited number of franchised buses, GMBs and taxis⁶. A taxi stacking area will also be provided.

21. The Public Works Sub-committee of this Council considered our funding proposal for the design and construction of the PTI on 9 June 2004 and agreed to recommend to the Finance Committee to upgrade the project to Category A of the Public Works Programme. Subject to the Finance Committee's funding approval, construction of the PTI will commence in October this year for completion in mid-2007 to tie in with the commissioning of the Spur Line. We shall plan the public transport services carefully to ensure that passenger demand will be met in an effective way that is in compliance with the conditions set out in the environmental permit.

ADVICE SOUGHT

22. Members are requested to note and comment on the contents of this paper.

Environment, Transport & Works Bureau
June 2004

⁶ Both urban and New Territories taxis will be allowed access to the PTI.