

For information
22 July 2005

Legislative Council Panel on Transport
Cross-boundary Transport Services

Purpose

We have been updating Members on the developments in regard to public transport facilities and arrangements at the boundary control points. This paper provides the latest update.

Background

2. With the ever-increasing economic integration and social interaction between Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta, the last decade has witnessed a significant increase in cross-boundary passenger traffic. Between 1994 and 2004, the number of cross-boundary passengers has increased by 162%, from 56 million to 147 million a year.

3. There are currently four major land crossings. They are Lok Ma Chau (LMC), Man Kam To (MKT), Sha Tau Kok (STK), and Lo Wu. The first three crossings were originally designed for freight traffic, while Lo Wu has been a passenger-only crossing right from the beginning. However, there has been a substantial and continued increase in the volume of passenger traffic at LMC, MKT and STK in recent years, with LMC taking up the majority of the increase. In 2004, Lo Wu accounted for over 68% of the cross-boundary land-based passenger traffic, whereas the other three land crossings at LMC, MKT and STK accounted for 26%, 2% and 1% respectively. The remaining 2% of passengers took the Kowloon-Canton Railway inter-city through train and crossed the boundary at the Hung Hom Control Point.

4. In terms of the modes of cross-boundary transport, the majority (68%) of land-based travellers took the Kowloon-Canton Railway East Rail. The others mostly used cross-boundary coaches or the Lok Ma Chau-Huanggang Cross-boundary Shuttle Buses (Shuttle Buses), which ply between the Huanggang Control Point and the San Tin Public Transport Interchange. In 2004, about 66,000 passengers (18%)

took the cross-boundary coaches, while 39 000 passengers (11%) took the Shuttle Buses each day.

The Lok Ma Chau (LMC) Crossing

Infrastructural developments

5. LMC is the busiest road crossing. It is the only land-based crossing that operates 24 hours each day. In 2004, over 19 000 goods vehicles used LMC each day, which represented an increase of 83% over that in 1994. It accounted for 71% of the cross-boundary freight traffic. Because of its geographical location, the crossing is increasingly popular with cross-boundary passengers. In 2004, around 6 900 private cars used the LMC Control Point each day, compared with 140 in 1994. In total, there are some 104 000 passengers using the LMC Control Point every day, compared to 4 400 in 1994.

6. To cater for the rapid growth in traffic, four additional northbound private car kiosks were installed in October 2004 for immigration and customs clearance. Upon completion of another four southbound private car kiosks later this year, there will altogether be 15 kiosks in each direction for goods vehicles and private cars. In addition, a new boundary bridge across the Shenzhen River was completed in January this year, thus increasing the road capacity between the LMC and Huanggang Control Points.

7. Separately, we are also improving the road connection to and from the LMC Control Point via the San Tin Interchange. For instance, part of the southbound San Sham Road has been widened to provide for an exclusive lane for traffic heading for Sheung Shui. In addition, we are constructing two vehicular flyovers to serve as bypasses to the San Tin Roundabout. Works have started in April 2005 and are scheduled to be completed in March 2007.

Regularisation of cross-boundary coach services

8. Cross-boundary coach services have existed for over 20 years. They were introduced to provide a point-to-point service to cities in Guangdong. They operate under a quota system jointly administered by the Hong Kong and Guangdong authorities, with the number of quotas

set at a level commensurate with the processing capacities of the control points. In mid-2003, quite a number of short-haul scheduled services to Huanggang Control Point started to emerge. They were provided through extensive overruns of the quotas. These services led to serious operational problems at the LMC and Huanggang Control Points, and also congestion problems at their pick-up and drop-off points, particularly in busy areas like Mongkok.

9. To rectify the problem, we agreed with the Mainland authorities measures to regulate the operation of these short-haul services. Six regulated routes that run between the Huanggang and six locations of Hong Kong (i.e. Mongkok, Tsimshatsui, Kwun Tong, Wanchai, Tsuen Wan and Kam Sheung Road West Rail Station) were introduced. At the same time, enhanced enforcement actions would be taken against unauthorised operations and overruns.

10. The measure has been successful in curbing the problem of overruns, and at the same time meeting the demand of cross-boundary passengers for such type of services. The traffic flow and order at LMC and Huanggang have shown significant improvements. Although the number of coach trips has been reduced, the loading rates of coaches have increased. This means that there is now a more efficient operation of the coach services and use of the limited road space at the Control Points. The six regulated routes also provide more reliable and better-managed services, and are well received by passengers.

Trial Scheme for Taxi & Green Minibuses (GMBs) to Operate at the LMC Control Point

11. Given the site constraints at the LMC Control Point, and the substantial increase in freight traffic, we 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 operate there. There is little room to allow other public transport vehicles to access the Control Point during daytime when the traffic is busy.

12. Nonetheless, to provide travellers more choices, we introduced in March 2003 a trial scheme to allow taxis and three GMB routes to access the LMC Control Point from 12 midnight to 6:30 a.m. when traffic is lighter. During this period, northbound passengers may take taxis/GMBs to the Control Point direct and then cross the boundary by Shuttle Buses, while southbound Shuttle Bus passengers may board

taxis/GMBs at the Control Point after immigration clearance.

13. We have reviewed the trial scheme and considered that it has brought about more convenience and choices for cross-boundary passengers. Following the completion of the four additional northbound private car kiosks and the new boundary bridge, which helped increase the handling capacity of the LMC Control Point, we advanced the starting time of the trial scheme from 12 midnight to 11 p.m. in January 2005.

14. According to a survey conducted in February 2005, on average, some 3 500 passengers took GMBs and some 1 500 passengers took taxis to and from the LMC Control Point between 11 p.m. and 6:30 a.m. each day. During the extended hour from 11 p.m. to 12 midnight, some 550 passengers used GMBs and taxis to access and depart from the Control Point. So far, we observe that the cross-boundary traffic has not been affected. We will continue to monitor the situation closely to ensure that the arrangement will not unduly affect the operation of the Control Point and cross-boundary freight traffic.

Man Kam To and Sha Tau Kok

15. MKT and STK are two small border control points. Due to their limited processing capacities and the remote locations, they have been less popular than LMC. In 2004, there were about 6,600 and 1,300 goods vehicles using MKT and STK respectively each day. Nonetheless, to enhance safety and traffic flow at the STK Control Point, a new boundary bridge was built and open to traffic in January 2005.

16. Due to the site constraints, it is not possible to provide for public transport interchanges in the vicinity of MKT and STK. There is thus no provision of public transport services, apart from a small number of cross-boundary coaches. Given the success in regulating the coach services at LMC and Huanggang, we have agreed with the Mainland authorities to introduce similar measures for the coach services via the MKT and STK Control Points.

Disneyland-specific Transport Arrangements

17. The opening of the Hong Kong Disneyland will attract many Mainland tourists. We expect that some of these visitors will be “day-trippers” or Disneyland hotel guests. Hence, there will be a need

for special cross-boundary transport arrangements from the border control points to the Disneyland direct. We believe that amongst the four land crossings, LMC would likely be the most popular one for these “day-trippers” because of its geographical proximity. To address the special need of this group of Mainland visitors, we consider it necessary to put in place coach routes that would take them from LMC to the Disneyland direct.

18. We are also mindful of the limited capacities of the LMC and Huanggang Control Points. Considering both the increase in demand brought about by the Disneyland and the limited capacities of the control points, we have eventually agreed with the Mainland authorities to issue 60 additional quotas for coach services via LMC and Huanggang. Half of them will be used for short-haul services from Shenzhen to the Disneyland, while the other half will be for services to other parts of Guangdong. We understand LMC and Huanggang should be marginally able to handle the additional visitors brought about by these 60 quotas during peak hours. We will monitor the situation closely and make adjustments as necessary. The new coach services will commence operation in mid September 2005 to tie in with the opening of the Disneyland.

19. In terms of passenger clearance, Lo Wu Control Point has the largest capacity and can handle many more passengers at the same time than LMC. The East Rail also has ample capacity to carry additional passengers. Hence, apart from the special coach services mentioned above, a Railbus is being planned by the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation. It is essentially a connecting bus service to facilitate East Rail passengers who cross the border at Lo Wu to take a connecting bus at the Sheung Shui Station to go to the Disneyland direct. We hope that this service would be able to relieve part of the pressure at LMC Control Point, especially during the morning and evening peak hours.

Advice Sought

20. Members are requested to note the content of this paper.

**Environment, Transport & Works Bureau
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