

Legislative Council Panel on Security

Manpower Deployment of the Immigration Department

I. Introduction

This paper sets out the manpower deployment by the Immigration Department (ImmD) at the control points (CPs) and the measures adopted to ensure their smooth operation.

II. Background

Growth in Traffic and CP Performance

2. There has been a significant growth in the volume of passenger traffic. In the past five years, passenger traffic¹ increased from 162 million in 2002 to 202 million in 2006, representing an increase of 24.6%. During festive periods and holidays, the volume of traffic may exceed that on an ordinary day by over 50%.

3. Despite the increase in traffic, the Government has been able to ensure smooth flow at the CPs and maintain effective immigration control. All the CPs met the performance pledge of clearing 92%² of passengers within the target waiting time (15 minutes for air passengers and 30 minutes for sea / land passengers). The relevant traffic and performance statistics are at **Annex**.

¹ Drivers of cross-boundary vehicles not included. They amounted to 14.99 million in 2006.

² To strive for even better services, ImmD has further enhanced the target since 2007 with a pledge to clear 95% of land passengers who are Hong Kong residents within 15 minutes and 92% of those who are visitors within 30 minutes.

III. Capacity and Efficiency Enhancement

4. It would not have been possible for the Immigration Department (ImmD) to cope with the growth in traffic without the efforts of ImmD staff and close co-operation within the Department. The Department has also pursued various measures to enhance its capability in coping with the increasing traffic.

e-Channels

5. One group of such measures is the use of advanced technology. Examples include the 246 e-Channels installed at CPs. Some 80% of cross-boundary Hong Kong resident passengers now use e-Channels. Likewise cross-boundary drivers who are Hong Kong residents can use the 40 Automatic Vehicle Clearance (AVC) lanes. The e-Channel and AVC projects have enabled the redeployment of over 210 posts for other tasks.

Streamlined Immigration Processing

6. Streamlining immigration procedures has not only helped expedite clearance, but also relieved manpower resources for deployment to other positions. Such measures include the waiver in 2004 of the furnishing of arrival / departure cards by Hong Kong residents holding a HKSAR travel document or the British National (Overseas) passport and certain categories of travellers³. Also, ImmD started to issue machine-readable Re-Entry Permits in 2001 and Document of Identity for Visa Purposes in 2003.

Flexible CP Operation

7. To cope with traffic “peaks”, ImmD has introduced a number of measures to ensure the flexible deployment of staff. Staff tackling other duties at Headquarters or other offices are deployed to reinforce the CPs on a need basis. CPs introduce special traffic control measures whenever necessary, such as the “Contra-flow Arrangement” at Lo Wu CP during peak periods. Security guards are employed to assist in maintaining order.

³ Namely Hong Kong residents whose travel document bears an endorsement indicating that they have permission to stay in Hong Kong for residence, employment or study, and holders of an Exit/Entry Permit to Hong Kong and Macau or a Chinese Travel Permit issued by the Mainland authorities other than cross-boundary drivers.

Manpower Resources

8. We recognize that the above measures alone are not sufficient to enable ImmD to cope with the increased workload arising from the growth in traffic. In addition to the re-deployment of staff relieved through some of the measures above, we have also recruited additional uniformed staff. In the past five years, the establishment of ImmD uniformed staff increased from 4,138 in 2002 to 4,566 in 2006, an increase of 10.3%. This contrasts with the reduction in the number of civil service establishment from some 181 000 to some 162 000 during the same period. Since 2003 the civil services had been subject to a general recruitment freeze. In recognition of ImmD's need for additional manpower, however, ImmD had been given exceptional approval to recruit 607 uniformed staff. In 2007-08, ImmD aims to recruit about 500 additional uniformed staff.

IV. Staff Working Conditions

9. ImmD staff's dedication and professionalism have helped ensure the smooth operation of the CPs. ImmD has been maintaining close and regular dialogue with the staff unions over their working conditions. Frontline staff at CPs are given a break of 10 to 15 minutes every two hours, and those working over seven hours are given a one-hour meal break in accordance with the Civil Service Regulations. They are also given an annual roster leave of one to four weeks. No rank and file staff have forfeited their leave, which varies between 14 to 40.5 days per year depending on their length of service, although leaves during festival periods (i.e. rush periods for CPs) have to be supported by stronger justifications. The compliance of the relevant arrangements is monitored by both ImmD and staff unions.

V. Conclusion

10. Looking ahead, the Government will continue to ensure the smooth operation of CPs by means such as exploring the possibility of allowing further categories of passengers to use the e-Channels. More importantly, two new CPs, namely the Shenzhen Bay Control Point (SBCP) and the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point (SLCP), will be commissioned in mid-2007. The two CPs will

have 124 clearance counters and 106 e-Channels⁴ (which are 21% and 43% respectively of the current total). We believe that the two new CPs will significantly increase ImmD's capacity, in terms of both manpower and cross-boundary facilities, and relieve traffic at the existing land CPs and improve the working conditions of staff. The Government will continue to review the resource requirements for CP operations.

11. Furthermore, ImmD will continue to ensure reasonable working conditions for the front-line staff, and maintaining regular and close dialogue with the staff unions.

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⁴ To be commissioned in phases.

Volume of Passengers Handled by Immigration Department

Note: Passenger figures in millions.

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Land Control Points					
Lok Ma Chau	16.72	24.47	38.12	44.61	49.01
Lo Wu	95.71	85.17	89.67	90.82	92.70
Hung Hom	2.36	2.20	3.02	3.17	3.33
Man Kam To	1.14	1.91	2.96	3.04	3.06
Sha Tau Kok	1.70	1.75	2.07	2.20	2.65
<i>Sub-total:</i>	117.63	115.5	135.84	143.84	150.75
Performance ¹ (%)	98.5	99.5	99.7	99.7	99.3
Harbour Control Points					
All control points ²	20.96	18.64	21.41	21.53	23.29
Performance (%)	99	99.7	99.5	99.9	99.9
Air Control Point					
Hong Kong International Airport	23.56	18.85	24.21	25.96	28.07
Performance (%)	99.3	99.7	99.9	99.9	99
Total No. of Passengers	162.15	152.99	181.46	191.33	202.11

¹ ImmD has the performance target of clearing 92% of land / sea passengers within 30-minute waiting time, and 92% of air passengers within 15-minute waiting time.

² Namely the China Ferry Terminal (CFT), Macau Ferry Terminal (MFT), Harbour Control, Tuen Mun Ferry Terminal and River Trade Terminal. CFT and MFT handle over 95% of the sea passengers.