

立法會 *Legislative Council*

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Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Mainland-HKSAR Families

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 7 December 2009

Arrangements for cross-boundary students

Purpose

This paper gives an account of the past discussions by the Panel on Security and the Panel on Education on the immigration and transport arrangements for cross-boundary students.

Background

2. In recent years, there has been an increasing number of children who are Hong Kong residents but reside on the Mainland. Many of them have to travel across the boundary on a daily basis to attend schools in Hong Kong, especially those located in the North District. According to the latest figures provided by the Education Bureau, there were 6 768 cross-boundary students who were Hong Kong residents but were residing in Shenzhen and attending schools in Hong Kong during the 2008-2009 school year. The respective numbers of cross-boundary students enrolled in kindergartens, primary schools and secondary schools in Hong Kong were 1 780, 3 910 and 1 078.

3. The cross-boundary students normally go to school in the North District daily via the Lo Wu Control Point.

Past discussions

4. The Panel on Security discussed with the Administration the arrangements for cross-boundary students on 3 July 2007. Similar concerns were raised at the meeting of the Panel on Education on 20 October 2009. Major views/concerns expressed by members and the Administration's responses are set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

Cross-boundary students using Lo Wu Control Point

5. Members were advised that cross-boundary students normally went to school in the North District daily via the Lo Wu Control Point. To facilitate their immigration clearance, the Immigration Department had opened additional immigration counters for the students' use during the busy hours from Monday to Friday. For arrival clearance, two additional counters were opened mainly for the students' use from around 7:30 am to 9:00 am and from 11:30 am to 12:30 pm. For departure clearance, the number of counters opened was increased from three to a maximum of six from 3:00 pm to 4:30 pm for use by both the students and other boundary crossers.

6. Members noted with concern that a number of cross-boundary students had to travel daily by public transport in Shenzhen and school coaches in Hong Kong before they could arrive at schools. For those students who had not been issued Closed Area Permits (CAPs) for taking school coaches at Lo Wu Station Road outside the Lo Wu Control Point, they had to cross the boundary in the same way as other ordinary passengers. Members were concerned about the safety of these cross-boundary students, and took the view that arrangements should be made for these students to go to school at staggered hours. Some members also suggested that CAPs should be issued to all cross-boundary students.

7. The Administration advised that Lo Wu Station Road, which was just outside the Lo Wu Control Point and managed by the Mass Transit Railway Corporation (MTRC), was located within the Frontier Closed Area (FCA). Only holders of CAPs issued by the Police could enter FCA. Under the FCA policy, CAPs were normally not issued to persons who transited FCA to access places outside FCA, when other means of access (e.g. different modes of public transport) were available. As of June 2007, a total of about 2 530 CAPs had been issued to cross-boundary students using Lo Wu Station Road. The maximum number of CAPs that could be issued was, however, limited by the capacity of Lo Wu Station Road. As the road concerned was a country road with a limited design capacity for 100 vehicular trips per hour and was the only emergency vehicle access to the Lo Wu Control Point, safety risks would arise from overuse of the road. The highest frequency of school coaches or mini-buses using the Road was 84 trips per hour. As the Road was also used by other vehicles at an estimated frequency of 50 trips per hour, its capacity of 100 trips per hour was already exceeded by over 30%. Overuse carried obvious safety risks, in addition to traffic management concerns. The Administration further advised that a number of schools outside FCA had arranged for school coaches or mini-buses to operate between the schools and Lo Wu Station Road to take cross-boundary students to and from the Lo Wu Control Point.

8. Members were also advised that the Security Bureau and the Police, having taken into account the views of the relevant parties such as the District Office

(North) and the Education Bureau, had applied the CAP policy flexibly by issuing CAPs to qualifying students (i.e. those of a tender age or having special needs such as students with disabilities, and students being siblings of students possessing CAPs) up to a limit consistent with the physical and safety constraints of Lo Wu Station Road.

Access to Lok Ma Chau Control Point

9. In the light of the limited capacity of Lo Wu Station Road, some members suggested that school coaches should be given access to the Lok Ma Chau Control Point. Alternatively, school coaches should be allowed to use the Public Transport Interchange at the Lok Ma Chau Terminus of the Sheung Shui – Lok Ma Chau Spur Line.

10. The Administration advised that owing to the busy traffic at the Lok Ma Chau Control Point during daytime, school coaches could not be allowed to take students to the Control Point. However, the Lok Ma Chau – Huanggang Shuttle Buses (Yellow Buses) operator had arranged some buses for carrying cross-boundary students to the San Tin Public Transport Interchange, and permission was given to some school coaches to pick up and set down cross-boundary students inside the Public Transport Interchange. Moreover, cross-boundary coach operators could use their cross-boundary coach quotas to provide services to carry cross-boundary students between Shenzhen and their schools in Hong Kong.

Transport cost

11. Given that concessionary fares were offered to Lo Wu residents but not cross-boundary students travelling by train to or from Lo Wu Station, members were concerned about the high transport cost of these students. Some members considered that either the concessionary fares for Lo Wu residents should be offered to cross-boundary students or travelling subsidy should be provided to such students.

12. The Administration advised that under the Student Travel Subsidy Scheme of the Students Finance Assistance Agency, travel subsidies were provided to needy students travelling within the territory of Hong Kong. Starting from the 2007-2008 school year, travel subsidies would also be provided to eligible cross-boundary students.

Additional measures to facilitate the students' attendance at schools

13. Members were advised that the District Office (North) had been coordinating with the relevant parties both within and outside the Administration to explore additional measures to facilitate the students to attend schools outside FCA. Such measures included –

- (a) inviting schools to make arrangements to allow cross-boundary students to go to school at staggered hours, with a view to alleviating the congestion at the Lo Wu Station Road during the busy hours and facilitating consideration of issuing more CAPs for using the Road;
- (b) liaising with MTRC to deploy more station assistants as well as making available additional ticket turnstiles during peak hours to assist cross-boundary students taking trains;
- (c) exploring the feasibility of allowing school coaches to operate between the San Tin Public Transport Interchange and the schools;
- (d) encouraging schools to provide enhanced support and assistance to cross-boundary students, such as providing escorts or nannies to accompany these students to ensure their safe journeys; and
- (e) exploring the feasibility of allowing the operation of cross-boundary school coaches to take cross-boundary students directly from/to Shenzhen to/from their schools.

14. At the meeting of the Panel on Security on 3 July 2007, members agreed that the Panel should write to the Chief Secretary for Administration to convey its concerns and views in connection with the transport and complementary arrangements for cross-boundary students. In the Secretary for Education's reply, the Administration reiterated the arrangements in place to facilitate cross-boundary students' attendance at schools in Hong Kong. The Administration would keep a close watch on students' actual needs and continue to explore various options to address the transportation needs of cross-boundary students in a holistic manner.

15. At the meeting of the Panel on Education on 20 October 2009, members were advised that prior to the beginning of each school year, different bureaux including the Education Bureau, the Transport Department, the Police and the Immigration Department would coordinate the transport and immigration arrangements for the students travelling across the border to attend schools in Hong Kong. In view of the limited capacity of the Lo Wu Control Point which could not accommodate more than 3 000 such students, some students might have to be diverted to the Lok Ma Chau Control Point; separately, the construction works of the Liantang/Heung Yuen Wai Control Point would soon commence. The Administration regularly communicated with the respective authorities of Shenzhen with a view to lowering the transport cost for cross-border students.

Related information

16. At the Council meeting on 22 October 2008, Hon CHEUNG Hok-ming raised a question on the subject matter. Members may wish to note that the Administration has advised, among others, that in late September 2008, the Government for the first time issued 20 special quotas to service providers for operating cross-boundary school coach services. These services have commenced operation.

Relevant papers

17. Members are invited to access the Legislative Council's website (<http://www.legco.gov.hk>) for details of the relevant papers and minutes of the meetings. A list of relevant papers in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
2 December 2009

Appendix

Relevant Papers/Documents

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Meeting Date</u>	<u>Papers/Question</u>
Legislative Council	22 October 2008	Written question on "Cross-boundary students" raised by Hon CHEUNG Hok-ming
Panel on Security	3 July 2007	Administration's paper LC Paper No. CB(2)2284/06-07(04) Minutes of meeting LC Paper No. CB(2)2681/06-07 Letter dated 11 July 2007 from the Panel Chairman to the Chief Secretary for Administration and the reply from the Secretary for Education dated 15 August 2007 LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2634/06-07(01) and (02)
Panel on Education	20 October 2009	Minutes of meeting

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