

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)2017/08-09(02)

Ref. : CB1/PL/ITB

Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Special meeting on 30 June 2009

**Background brief
on the implementation of the Government Wi-Fi programme**

Purpose

This paper gives the background to the implementation of the Government Wi-Fi (GovWiFi) programme and also a summary of views and concerns expressed by Members on the subject.

Background

2. Wi-Fi is a technology which can support the connection and access to the Internet through Wi-Fi enabled mobile devices, such as notebook computers, personal digital assistants and mobile phones. The provision of public hotspots has become a global trend nowadays. The impetus is largely fuelled by the increasing availability of mobile devices equipped with Wi-Fi capability in the market.

3. The Government's vision is to make affordable broadband Internet access available to all citizens in Hong Kong. At present, the majority of citizens are using wired broadband access to the Internet. The development and adoption of wireless broadband Internet access is conducive to the development of Hong Kong into a digital society with ubiquitous access to information, applications and services on the Internet.

4. Following consultation with the Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting, the Administration has obtained the approval of the Finance Committee (FC) in May 2007 to create a new commitment of \$217.6 million for the provision of Wi-Fi facilities at government premises with high public patronage for free use by the public. These premises include all public libraries, public enquiry service centres, job centres, key cultural and recreational centres, community halls/centres, large parks and those government offices that are

frequently visited by the public.

5. Since its launch in March 2008, the GovWiFi programme has supported over 1 million Internet connection sessions. The total number of Internet connections per month has increased from 20 000 in April 2008 to 168 000 in March 2009. As at June 2009, the Administration has completed installation of Wi-Fi facilities at 350 government premises for providing Internet connection service to citizens. The Wi-Fi service will be extended to more premises, making a total of around 380 premises by March 2010.

Previous discussions

6. Members in general supported the implementation of the GovWiFi programme as a means to bridge the digital divide. Five questions on the subject matter were raised at the Council meetings on 24 October 2007, 16 January, 20 February, 16 April 2008 and 17 June 2009. Members urged the Administration to speed up the implementation of the GovWiFi programme so as to facilitate the provision and expansion of wireless services and network coverage in Hong Kong.

7. When discussing the proposal of creating a commitment of \$217.6 million for the provision of Wi-fi facilities at government premises for free use by the public on 25 May 2007, FC Members raised the following concerns:

- (a) the Administration should refrain from competing with the commercial sector in the provision of Wi-Fi facilities to avoid unfair competition and adverse impact on the trades;
- (b) a mechanism should be introduced to assess the cost-effectiveness and utilization rate of the GovWiFi programme; and
- (c) there was a need to protect the security of the information in the use of Wi-Fi facilities to prevent unauthorized access to the system.

8. The Administration briefed the Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting on 10 June 2008 on the progress of the implementation of the GovWiFi programme. Panel members noted that while the usage of the GovWiFi service was about 970 user connections on average per day, public libraries were the most popular venues for Wi-Fi users, accounting for about 860 user connections per day. Panel members were keen to ensure that the GovWiFi service would be made available to more venues, including sports centres and community halls. They also expressed concern about information security when performing e-banking or stock transactions in the Wi-Fi environment.

9. The Administration advised that service providers were required to implement security measures (e.g. firewall systems, filtering softwares and peer-to-peer blocking) to safeguard against Internet threats. Users were also provided with two Wi-Fi connection options, i.e. encrypted and unencrypted connections, and advised to use the encrypted connection for better protection of their privacy for transmitting sensitive information.

10. Some Panel members expressed concern about the impacts of radio frequency signals on human health, in particular school children, and questioned if the Administration would monitor the issue on an on-going basis. The Administration assured members that the Government attached importance in ensuring the promotion of Wi-Fi service would not jeopardize citizens' health. So far, there was no evidence suggesting that the use of Wi-Fi facilities would adversely affect human health.

Latest position

11. The Administration will update the Panel on 30 June 2009 on the progress made by relevant departments on the implementation of the GovWiFi programme, including its financial status.

Relevant papers

Paper for meeting of Finance Committee held on 25 May 2007: FCR(2007-08)13
<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/fc/fc/papers/f07-13e.pdf>

Minutes of meeting of Finance Committee held on 25 May 2007
<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/fc/fc/minutes/fc070525.pdf>

Question No. 15 at the Council meeting on 24 October 2007 on "Electronic Service Delivery Scheme"
<http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200710/24/P200710240157.htm>

Question No. 16 at the Council meeting on 16 January 2008 on "Making available public facilities for installation of Wi-Fi antennas"
<http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200801/16/P200801160160.htm>

Question No. 18 at the Council meeting on 20 February 2008 on "Promotion of wireless Internet access"
<http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200802/20/P200802200106.htm>

Question No. 15 at the Council meeting on 16 April 2008 on "Installation of Wi-Fi antennas on lamp posts"
<http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200804/16/P200804160144.htm>

Paper provided by the Administration for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 10 June 2008

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0610cb1-1755-5-e.pdf>

Minutes of Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 10 June 2008

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/english/panels/itb/minutes/itb080610.pdf>

Question No. 19 at the Council meeting on 17 June 2009 on "Public computer facilities"

<http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200906/17/P200906170160.htm>

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
24 June 2009