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Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Meeting on 11 July 2011

**Updated background brief on the progress of the implementation of
digital terrestrial television broadcasting in Hong Kong**

Purpose

This paper sets out the progress of the implementation of digital terrestrial television (DTT) broadcasting in Hong Kong, and also a summary of views and concerns previously expressed by Members.

Background

2. Pursuant to the implementation framework for DTT broadcasting announced by the Government in 2004, the two domestic free television programmes service licensees, i.e. Asia Television Limited (ATV) and Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB), officially launched DTT on 31 December 2007. ATV and TVB had been assigned three digital multiplexes to provide DTT services to the viewing public. They shared one multiplex for the digital simulcast of their four analogue television programmes. In addition, each broadcaster took up one additional multiplex to provide new digital television programme channels and services.

3. Since the successful launch of DTT at the end of 2007, the construction of the DTT network in Hong Kong is being carried out in phases and the DTT coverage has been extended to about 85% of the population in the 18 districts of the territory by the end of 2009. According to a survey conducted in September 2010, about 61% (approximately 1 410 000) households were watching DTT via DTT receivers (including set-top boxes or integrated digital television sets) or computers (i.e. DTT take-up rate). The rate had climbed to 63% according to a recent regular public survey conducted in March 2011.

Previous discussions

4. The Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting (the Panel) received regular reports from the Administration on the latest progress of the implementation of DTT and network rollout since 2007. Panel members in general supported the implementation of DTT broadcasting which had brought major benefits in enhancing efficiency in utilizing radio spectrum, resolved some reception problems, and offered opportunities of new services.

5. At the Panel meeting on 10 January 2011, members noted that by end 2011, the DTT coverage would be close to that of the current analogue TV broadcasting, i.e. covering 98% of the population. Some Panel members expressed concern that there would still be 2% of the population that could not have digital coverage. Some remote areas, particular those close to the boundary, currently did not have satisfactory analogue TV reception. This would deprive residents there of their legitimate rights to enjoy quality TV services. Referring to the Administration's claim that the launch of DTT would help address the TV reception problem in remote areas, members urged the Administration to strive to achieve 100% coverage. They also called on the Administration to follow up closely with the two domestic free TV service licensees on network planning and the resources for the construction of transmitting stations. The Administration assured members that ATV and TVB, along with the Office of the Telecommunications Authority, would examine how best to maximize the DTT coverage and, at the same time, endeavour to address the problem of TV reception in those remote areas currently suffered from unsatisfactory analogue TV reception.

6. Some Panel members opined that more programmes of internationally renowned channels should be relayed to increase programme variety. They also expressed concern about the growing phenomenon of TV stations airing programmes of exclusive broadcast rights through their pay TV channels only. As the existing free-to-air TV service was a major source of information and entertainment for the general public in Hong Kong, these members urged the two free terrestrial TV broadcasters to increase the production and variety of their digital TV programmes, so as to attract more viewers to switch to DTT services. The Administration advised that licence conditions were included for ATV and TVB to improve their programme services and to increase the amount of their high-definition television (HDTV) programming, taking into account public views on their performance in the mid-term review of the domestic free TV programme service licences.

7. Some Panel members expressed concern about the low DTT penetration rate as only about 61% of the households in Hong Kong received DTT services. These members opined that measures should be taken by the Administration to boost DTT take-up. They also called on the Administration to assess the impact of the development of integrated digital TV (iDTV) on the DTT penetration rate. The Administration advised that the penetration rate would increase steadily with the much improved audio-visual experience brought about by DTT, the growing variety and choice of iDTV and set-top boxes available in the market at a decreasing price, and the rising public awareness of DTT due to publicity.

Council meetings

8. Hon KAM Nai-wai raised a question at the Council meeting on 20 January 2010 regarding DTT broadcasting, in particular the timing of the analogue switch-off (ASO). The Administration advised that it would take into account the future market situation, including the DTT take-up rate, before taking a final decision on the switch-off. Sufficient preparation would be made in all aspects to ensure public awareness before the ASO was to be implemented.

9. Hon Albert Chan raised a question at the Council meeting on 15 June 2011 regarding the reception of digital terrestrial television and analogue television signals. The Administration advised that currently, with DTT signals transmitted from a total of 20 stations, the coverage had reached over 90% of the population across the 18 districts. The coverage would be further extended when nine more transmitting stations were launched by the end of 2011.

Recent developments

10. On 21 June 2011, the Chief Executive in Council ordered that the target date for ASO be deferred from end 2012 to end 2015. Given that DTT network coverage only stood at about 89% of the Hong Kong population in late 2010, the network coverage of DTT was not yet on par with that of analogue TV at about 98%. Moreover, as the DTT take-up rate stood only at about 63%, the Administration considered that the rate should reach a much higher level than 60% before ASO should be considered.

11. The Administration advised that the deferral would give ATV and TVB more time to extend and optimize its DTT network, including the feasibility study on improvement of coverage in remote areas where current analogue

television reception was poor, allow more time for the viewing public to switch to DTT, and allow more time for the Administration to coordinate with the Mainland authorities on the use of digital dividend in order to yield the maximum economic benefits for Hong Kong.

Latest position

12. The Administration will brief the Panel on 11 July 2011 on the latest progress of implementation of the DTT services – the ASO.

Relevant papers

Hon KAM Nai-wai's question on "Analogue and Digital Television Services" at the Council meeting on 20 January 2010 and the Administration's reply
<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/counmtg/hansard/cm0120-translate-e.pdf>

Information paper provided by the Administration for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 10 January 2011
<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0110cb1-932-3-e.pdf>

Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 10 January 2011
<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0110cb1-932-4-e.pdf>

Minutes of Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 10 January 2011
<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/minutes/itb20110110.pdf>

Legislative Council Brief on digital terrestrial television - analogue switch-off
<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0711-ctbcr91911-e.pdf>

Hon Albert CHAN's question on "Reception of digital terrestrial television signals and analogue television signals" at the Council meeting on 15 June 2011 and the Administration's reply
<http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201106/15/P201106150148.htm>

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