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Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Meeting on 12 March 2012

**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 provides 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 two existing domestic free television programme service licensees have completed construction of 29 DTT transmission stations, extending coverage to 96% of the population across 18 districts in Hong Kong. The take-up rate has kept growing steadily as more viewers switch to DTT service. According to the Administration, a public opinion survey conducted in December 2011 shows that about 68% of households have access to DTT service through various means.

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.

Panel meeting on 10 January 2011

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. In fact, ATV had committed to provide a minimum of 60 hours of high definition television (HDTV) programmes per

week for 2010–2015 and TVB had committed to gradually increase the provision of HDTV programmes from 20 hours per week in 2009 to 120 hours per week by end of 2015. As at January 2011, the amount of HDTV programmes on the channels of ATV and TVB were 105 hours and 150 hours per week respectively, representing a respective increase of 91 hours and 136 hours as compared with December 2007 when DTT services were first launched. As regards programme content, the licensees provided HDTV programmes of different genres, including dramas, 24-hour news and finance programmes, infotainment programmes and documentaries.

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.

Progress since June 2011

8. On 21 June 2011, the Chief Executive in Council ordered that the target date for switching off analogue television services (i.e. analogue switch-off, or 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.

9. At the Panel meeting on 11 July 2011, members noted that the deferral of ASO 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 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.

10. Some Panel members expressed concern that the new target date for ASO in end 2015 might have to be further postponed if there was no improvement on DTT coverage. These members considered that the two

domestic free television programme licensees should invest more so as to enlarge the DTT network during the deferral period from end 2012 to end 2015. They also opined that more quality programmes should be broadcast in the DTT channels so as to encourage the audience to switch to DTT. The Administration advised that the DTT network was currently made up of 20 transmitting stations and nine more would be built by end 2011 to further extend the network coverage. The location of the transmitting stations, including the nine new fill-in stations, and the respective covered areas are set out in the **Appendix**. The Administration advised that based on prudent commercial considerations, the television licencees had already seen the need to broadcast quality programmes on their DTT channels to enhance the penetration rate and acted accordingly.

11. Some Panel members opined that the penetration rate might be misleading as many households owned the receivers to watch DTT services on top of the traditional analogue TV sets. To be more accurate, the number of households which owned the receivers to watch DTT services in addition to the analogue TV sets should also be included in the assessment of the penetration rate. This would help the Administration set a more reasonable ASO target date which would not entail the premature and full scale redundancy of the analogue TV sets. The Administration advised that statistics on the number of households which owned the receivers to watch DTT services in addition to the analogue TV sets were not kept by the Administration. Premature replacement of the analogue TV sets on a large scale as a result of the ASO was not envisaged as the prices of set-top boxes which enabled the watching of DTT service on analogue TV sets had fallen to very affordable levels.

Council questions

12. 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. Hon Albert Chan also raised a question at the Council meeting on 15 June 2011 regarding the reception of digital terrestrial television and analogue television signals.

Special meeting of the Finance Committee

13. Hon Miriam LAU raised a question on, inter alia, the Administration's work plan and expenditure estimates of DTT services at the special meeting of

the Finance Committee to examine the Estimates of Expenditure 2012-2013 on 7 March 2012. The Administration advised that in 2012-2013, it would continue to monitor the optimization of network coverage by the two existing domestic free television programme licensees with existing resources.

Latest position

14. The Administration will brief the Panel on 12 March 2012 on the latest progress of implementation of the digital terrestrial television services, including progress on achieving DTT coverage on par with that of the analogue broadcasting, market situation of receiver products, public response and latest publicity to encourage DTT take-up.

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>

Follow-up paper provided by the Administration to the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 10 January 2011
<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0110cb1-2695-1-e.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>

Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 11 July 2011
<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0711cb1-2646-6-e.pdf>

Minutes of Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 11 July 2011
<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/minutes/itb20110711.pdf>

Administration's replies to Members initial written questions raised at the special meeting of the Finance Committee on 7 March 2012
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/fc/fc/w_q/cedb-ct-e.pdf

Council Business Division 1
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Appendix

Covered areas and transmitting stations of digital terrestrial television (DTT) services

DTT station	Covered areas
<i>(A) The 20 existing DTT transmitting stations</i>	
Temple Hill	Quarry Bay, North Point, Wan Chai, Central & Western, Yau Tsim Mong, Kowloon City, Wong Tai Sin, Sham Shui Po, Sha Tin, Cheung Chau, Discovery Bay
Kowloon Peak	Siu Sai Wan, Chai Wan, Shau Kei Wan, Sai Kung, Tseung Kwan O, Yau Tong, Kwun Tong
Golden Hill	Lai Chi Kok, Kwai Chung, Tsing Yi, Tsuen Wan, Ting Kau, Sham Tseng, Tsing Lung Tau
Castle Peak	So Kwun Wat, Tuen Mun, Lam Tei, Yuen Long, Tin Shui Wai, Tung Chung
Cloudy Hill	Ma On Shan, Ma Liu Shui, Tai Po, Fanling, Sheung Shui, Lo Wu
Lamma Island	Repulse Bay, Wong Chuk Hang, Ap Lei Chau, Aberdeen, Pok Fu Lam, Lamma Island
Mount Nicholson	Happy Valley, Causeway Bay, Wan Chai
Sheung Yeung Shan	Tseung Kwan O, Sheung Yeung, Ha Yeung, Sheung Sze Wan
Sai Wan Shan (Chai Wan)	Chai Wan, Siu Sai Wan
Piper's Hill	Cheung Sha Wan, Sham Shui Po
Brick Hill	Aberdeen, Shouson Hill, Repulse Bay, Chung Hom Kok
Beacon Hill	Hin Tin, Tai Wai
Hill 374 (Yuen Long)	Yuen Long, Mong Tseng Wai, Shui Pin Tsuen
Potting Peak	Shek O, Hok Tsui (Cape D'Auguilar)
Stanley	Stanley, Red Hill
Cheung Chau	Cheung Chau
Hill 141 (Tai Lam Chung)	Tai Lam Chung
Tai Po Tsai	Tai Po Tsai
Robin's Nest	Shan Tsui, Yim Liu Ha, Luk Keng, Ping Che, Kwan Tei
Tai O	Tai O

DTT station	Covered areas
<i>(B) The nine DTT fill-in stations to be completed by end of 2011</i>	
Hill 297 (Yuen Long)	Shap Pat Heung, Tai Tong
Hill 275 (Lantau Island)	Mui Wo, Pui O, Tong Fuk, Cheung Chau
Chiu Keng Wan Shan	Tiu Keng Leng
Ap Lei Chau Aberdeen	Ap Lei Chau, Aberdeen
Kau Wa Keng	Kau Wa Keng San Tsuen, Kau Wa Keng Old Village
Ying Pun	Ngau Tam Mei, Lin Tong Mei
Sham Tseng	Sham Tseng Village, Sham Tseng San Tsuen, Sham Tseng Kau Tsuen
Tung Chung	Lung Tseng Tau, Wong Ka Wai, Ha Ling Pei, Sheung Ling Pei, Ma Wan New Village,
Pok Fu Lam	Pok Fu Lam Village