

# 立法會

## *Legislative Council*

LC Paper No. CB(1)214/19-20(06)

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### **Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting**

**Meeting on 9 December 2019**

### **Background brief on public payphone review and free Wi-Fi hotspots in public telephone kiosks**

#### **Purpose**

This paper provides background information on public payphones and the use of public telephone booths to provide public Wi-Fi service. It also summarizes the major views and concerns expressed by members of the Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting ("the Panel") in previous discussions on the subject.

#### **Background**

##### Provision of public payphones

2. Under section 35B of the Telecommunications Ordinance (Cap. 106), the Communications Authority ("CA") may require fixed carrier licensees<sup>1</sup> to provide a reasonable number of public payphones in Hong Kong. At present, PCCW-HKT Telephone Limited and Hong Kong Telecommunications (HKT) Limited ("PCCW-HKT"), as the joint holders of Unified Carrier Licence No. 025, are operating more than 99% of all registered public payphones in Hong Kong<sup>2</sup> in accordance with their universal service obligation ("USO").

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<sup>1</sup> Since August 2008, the unified carrier licence ("UCL") regime has been introduced as a single licensing vehicle for both fixed and mobile telecommunications services. UCL has been implemented to replace fixed carrier licence and mobile carrier licence.

<sup>2</sup> According to the reply given by the Administration to a question raised at the meeting of the Legislative Council on 7 June 2017, the small number of remaining public payphones is provided by another operator on a commercial basis.

3. In June 2017, CA embarked on a review of the number and distribution of public payphones under USO with a view to reducing the number of public payphones to a reasonable level and thereby reducing the costs borne by all relevant telecommunications service operators. CA announced that public payphones with an extremely low usage rate,<sup>3</sup> excluding emergency helplines set up in remote areas for emergency purposes, were to be the subject of the review. The review was expected to be completed by end 2019.

#### Use of public telephone booths to provide public Wi-Fi service

4. According to the Office of the Communications Authority's guidelines,<sup>4</sup> an operator who intends to provide public Wi-Fi service across public streets or unleased government land is required to hold a fixed telecommunications network services licence, a fixed carrier licence or a unified carrier licence incorporated with the necessary special conditions for the provision of the relevant service.

5. At present, PCCW-HKT has installed and maintained a number of telephone booths on public streets and unleased government land under a block licence issued by Director of Lands for providing public payphone service. Other fixed network operators who intend to deploy PCCW-HKT's telephone booths for the provision of public Wi-Fi service may seek PCCW-HKT's agreement to do so on a commercial basis. They will then seek CA's formal authorization to use the telephone booths after commercial agreement with PCCW-HKT has been reached. There are currently some 800 to 1 000 telephone booths providing public Wi-Fi service in Hong Kong.<sup>5</sup>

#### Provision of free public Wi-Fi hotspots under the "Wi-Fi Connected City" Programme

6. In May 2016, the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council

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<sup>3</sup> The description referred to payphones which had average daily revenue of not more than HK\$1.

<sup>4</sup> Office of the Communications Authority ("OFCA"). (2013) *Guidelines on the Use of Public Payphone Booths Established and Maintained by PCCW-HKT Telephone Limited on Public Streets and Unleased Government Land to Provide Public Wi-Fi Service*. Available from: <https://www.coms-auth.hk/filemanager/statement/en/upload/185/gn62013e.pdf> [Accessed November 2019]

<sup>5</sup> OFCA. (2019) *List of Authorised Public Payphone Kiosks for Wi-Fi Installations by PCCW-HKT Telephone Limited*. Available from: [https://www.ofca.gov.hk/en/data\\_statistics/data\\_statistics/public\\_payphone/index.html](https://www.ofca.gov.hk/en/data_statistics/data_statistics/public_payphone/index.html); Office of the Government Chief Information Officer. *Hotspot locations (telephone booths) of Wi-Fi.hk*. Available from: <https://www.wi-fi.hk/en/HotspotLocation>; and OFCA. (2018) *Universal Service Contribution - Confirmed Level for 2017 and Provisional Level from 1 January 2018*. Available from: [https://www.ofca.gov.hk/en/industry\\_focus/telecommunications/obligation/level/](https://www.ofca.gov.hk/en/industry_focus/telecommunications/obligation/level/) [All accessed November 2019]

approved a funding commitment of \$500 million for implementing the "Wi-Fi Connected City" programme to expand the coverage of "Wi-Fi.HK" hotspots progressively and to enlist the participation of more public and private organizations to provide the public and visitors with free Wi-Fi services in various districts across the territory.

7. As of end-September 2019, the number of "Wi-Fi.HK" hotspots had exceeded 30 000, covering different types of venues, including universities and tertiary institutions, parks, cultural and sports venues, entertainment and leisure venues, government offices, youth service centres and study rooms, hospitals, banks, malls, food premises, hotels, convenience stores, telephone booths, public transport facilities, etc.

## **Previous discussions**

### Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

8. At the Panel meeting on 14 May 2018, Panel members, when discussing with the Administration the progress on the implementation of the "Wi-Fi Connected City" Programme, commented that the Administration's plan to remove under-used public telephone booths with inbuilt free Wi-Fi hotspots was contrary to the objectives of the "Wi-Fi Connected City" Programme which sought to expand the coverage of "Wi-Fi.HK" hotspots over the territory progressively. Some members suggested that under-used public telephone booths should be converted into smart city facilities for extension of the free public Wi-Fi network.

9. The Administration clarified that usually two or more public telephone booths would be installed alongside each other at each location, and at least one of them would be retained for installation of free public Wi-Fi hotspot facilities. The Administration added that areas with high pedestrian flow or tourist hotspots would be identified for installation of smart lampposts with free public Wi-Fi function. In addition, free public Wi-Fi hotspots might also be set up at parks and suitable government premises.

10. Panel members commented that the Administration should ensure that there would be no time gap between the removal of telephone booths and the installation of smart lampposts with free public Wi-Fi hotspots, especially in high pedestrian flow areas or tourist hotspots. Due consideration should also be given to public views and feedback when evaluating the free public Wi-Fi services.

Finance Committee

11. At the special Finance Committee meeting to examine the Estimates of Expenditure 2019-2020 held on 10 April 2019, a member enquired about the review of public payphones. The Administration's reply is listed in the **Appendix**.

**Latest position**

12. The Administration will brief the Panel on the outcome of the review on public payphones, and replacement arrangements for Wi-Fi hotspots at public payphone kiosks to be removed.

**Relevant papers**

13. A list of the relevant papers is set out in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 1  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
3 December 2019

**List of relevant papers**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Meeting date/ Issue date</b>	<b>Paper</b>
Council	25 April 2018	Question No. 21 raised by Hon Charles MOK <a href="#">Converting on-street facilities into infrastructural facilities needed for building a smart city</a>
Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting	14 May 2018	Minutes of meeting <a href="#">LC Paper No. CB(4)1594/17-18</a>
Special Finance Committee	10 April 2019	<a href="#">Administration's replies to Members initial written questions</a> (Reply Serial No. CEDB(CCI)024)