



Joint development of a mutually beneficial “boundary control points economic belt” by Hong Kong and Shenzhen

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1. Introduction

1.1 The **Northern Metropolis Development Strategy**¹ proposed in the 2021 Policy Address put forward the planning concept of “Twin Cities, Three Circles” and formulated a development project from a cross-boundary perspective for the first time. The Strategy not only strengthens economic and housing development in the northern New Territories, but also promotes integration between Hong Kong and Shenzhen and enable Hong Kong to better integrate into the overall development of the country. The Northern Metropolis adjoins the “**Shenzhen-Hong Kong Boundary Control Points Economic Belt**” (“Shenzhen-Hong Kong BCP Economic Belt”) (深港口岸經濟帶) in Shenzhen, namely areas where the land boundary crossings of the Shenzhen side are located and their environs. Owing to historical background and various development constraints, most of the border areas with control points/checkpoints² (口岸) in Hong Kong are not developed at an extensive scale or are still at the planning stage. On the contrary, under the reform and opening-up policy of the country, the border areas of Shenzhen adjoining Hong Kong have taken advantage of their proximity to Hong Kong and are already comparatively well developed with a growing strategic importance. According to the Guangdong Provincial Government and the Shenzhen Municipal Government, the “Shenzhen-Hong Kong BCP Economic Belt” has been incorporated into the provincial and municipal Outline of the 14th Five-year Plan³, and it is also a key project in the national development plan of “Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area”.

¹ See GovHK (2021a).

² Checkpoints are also known as boundary crossings (過境通道) or boundary/immigration control points (邊境/出入境管制站) in Hong Kong.

³ *The Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035* (國民經濟和社會發展第十四個五年規劃和2035年遠景目標綱要) of Guangdong Province and Shenzhen Municipality.

1.2 In general, the public is delighted by the Northern Metropolis Development Strategy, hoping that the Northern Metropolis will facilitate Hong Kong-Shenzhen cooperation at a higher level, pave the way for integrated development in a more intensive manner, and ultimately build a mutually beneficial development paradigm. However, there are concerns in the community over how Hong Kong and Shenzhen should connect with each other and coordinate the development of their BCP Economic Belt, given that there is a need to consider a wide range of issues spanning industry development, land use, transport infrastructure, and management approach, etc. In particular, some believe that, with regard to the **approach to Hong Kong-Shenzhen cooperation**, the advantages of “one country, two systems” and support policies of the Central People’s Government (“the Central Government”) should be better leveraged to explore and attempt alternative approaches that are more conducive to cooperation for mutual benefits.⁴ In fact, the Central Government adopted a new joint-development and management approach to developing Hengqin, Zhuhai (珠海橫琴) last year. There are views that this has certain reference value for future Hong Kong-Shenzhen cooperation, and it should be explored whether some of the arrangements can be applied to the Northern Metropolis and Hong Kong-Shenzhen BCP Belt.

1.3 At the request of Hon CHAN Yuet-ming, the Research Office has prepared this **Information Note** to study issues related to the “joint development of a mutually beneficial BCP Economic Belt by Hong Kong and Shenzhen”, focusing on reviewing various approaches to cross-boundary cooperation. The Note begins with a review of the current development and planning of the BCP Economic Belt on the Shenzhen side, followed by a discussion of Hong Kong’s development in respect of the areas near its land boundary crossings and the northern New Territories, and then a brief review of the present approach to cooperation between Hong Kong and Shenzhen. A summary of policies relevant to developing areas near checkpoints/border areas in the **Macao Special Administrative Region** (“Macao SAR”) and the **European Union** (“EU”) is also provided for reference.⁵ Though the Macao SAR is more compact in land area than Hong Kong and also smaller and more concentrated in terms of the economy’s size and structure respectively, both places are underpinned by “one country, two systems” and are important parts of the national development strategy and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. Reference may be drawn from Macao’s partnership with Guangdong Province/Zhuhai City, especially policy initiatives related to the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth

⁴ See 香港商報(2021) and 信報財經新聞(2021).

⁵ In respect of the reference value and applicability of the policies of the two selected places, the uniqueness of “one country, two systems” and differences in geographical, economic and social aspects of individual regions must be taken into account.

Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. As another selected place, EU also offers an example of breaking geographical barriers in an innovative way when it comes to facilitating more integrated cross-border development among its member states and removing obstacles concerned.

2. “Shenzhen-Hong Kong BCP Economic Belt” within Shenzhen Municipality

2.1 Boundary checkpoints are the nation’s gateway to the world, and the passengers and cargos flowing through them help enhance economic development in their vicinity.⁶ In 2018, the then Mayor of Shenzhen proposed to “develop BCP economic belt” (打造口岸經濟帶) in his Report on the Work of the Government, with a view to facilitating the development of modern service industry and expedite quality economic development.⁷ In 2019 and 2020, delegates to the Shenzhen Municipal People’s Congress and members of the Shenzhen Municipal Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference also presented submissions and proposals on developing “BCP economic corridor” respectively.⁸ Subsequently, the Outline of the 14th Five-year Plan of Guangdong Province and Shenzhen Municipality released in 2021 explicitly proposed for the first time “**high-standard planning and development of the Shenzhen-Hong Kong BCP Economic Belt**” as one of the major policy objectives of promoting intensive Hong Kong-Shenzhen cooperation.⁹

⁶ On the Mainland, an economic belt generally comprises three parts, namely “core area” (核心區), “extended area” (拓展區) and “area served” (輻射區), and “core areas” are where checkpoints are located. BCP economic belt could be generally understood as areas where checkpoints are located and their environs, which rely on or benefit from cross-boundary economic activities. See 中華人民共和國中央人民政府(2019), 深圳市政府口岸辦公室(2019) and 香港01(2021).

⁷ See 深圳市政府(2018).

⁸ According to the reply to a proposal from the Office of Port of Entry and Exit of Shenzhen Municipal Government (深圳市政府口岸辦公室), “In order to further enhance Shenzhen-Hong Kong cooperation for complementarity, coordinated development and mutual benefits, Luohu Port, Wenjindu Port, Liantang Port, Shatoujiao Port and their surrounding areas will be the core in planning and developing the Shenzhen-Hong Kong BCP Economic Belt, and, by enhancing the development of the Shenzhen-Hong Kong BCP Economic Belt, the standards in serving the domestic market and opening up will be further improved, and Shenzhen-Hong Kong cooperation will be furthered and international exchanges enhanced”. See 深圳市政府口岸辦公室(2019).

⁹ The Governor of Guangdong Province also proposed to “proactively connect with Hong Kong’s Northern Metropolis Development Strategy and broaden the scope for furthering Shenzhen-Hong Kong cooperation” in his recent Report on the Work of the Government. See 廣東省政府(2022).

2.2 While it seems that Shenzhen Municipality has not made public any policy paper that outlines the specific geographic coverage of the “Shenzhen-Hong Kong BCP Economic Belt”¹⁰, it generally covers the four **administrative districts of the Municipality** of Shenzhen bordering Hong Kong in which land boundary crossings are located,¹¹ namely **Yantian, Luohu, Futian and Nanshan Districts** (鹽田、羅湖、福田及南山區) from east to west (with a total area of 418 sq km).¹² The major characteristics of each checkpoint and the four districts where they are located are as follows:

- (a) **High concentration of checkpoints:** along the Hong Kong-Shenzhen land boundary spanning approximately 30 km, there are a total of six checkpoints¹³, and this, together with Shenzhen Bay Port, which is directly accessible via the cross-bay Western Corridor, brings the total number to seven. These checkpoints are unevenly distributed in four districts: three in Luohu District (**Luohu** (羅湖), **Wenjindu** (文錦渡) and **Liantang** (蓮塘)), two in Futian District (**Huanggang** (皇崗) and **Futian** (福田)), one in Yantian District (**Shatoujiao** (沙頭角)) and one in Nanshan District (**Shenzhen Bay** (深圳灣)) (see **Figure 1**). Currently, except for Luohu and Futian checkpoints that are solely designated for passenger clearance purposes, all others serve as comprehensive passenger and cargo checkpoints;¹⁴
- (b) **High passenger and vehicle traffic volume:** taking 2019 as an example, when the COVID-19 epidemic had yet to fully unfold, about 200 million passenger trips and over 14 million vehicle trips, or daily averages of about 560 000 passenger trips and 38 000

¹⁰ It is noteworthy that the Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Modern Service Industry Cooperation Zone and the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin have both delineated the specific geographical coverage under the cooperation plans.

¹¹ Shenzhen Municipality has a total of nine administrative districts.

¹² In comparison, the area and usual resident population of the four districts only account for about 20% and 30% respectively of that of the entire municipality. The combined area of the four districts is slightly larger than that of the proposed 300 sq km large Northern Metropolis. Their population of 5.24 million doubles the population that can be accommodated by the Northern Metropolis. The most populated among the four districts is Nanshan District, which has a population of nearly 1.8 million.

¹³ These do not include the BCP in West Kowloon Station and the Futian Station Port in Shenzhen of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link.

¹⁴ Apart from Futian and Luohu, which are connected by rail and only provide passenger clearance service, the others are road-based comprehensive passenger and cargo checkpoints. In addition, the Heung Yuen Wai BCP is the only BCP in Hong Kong that is directly accessible on foot.

vehicle trips, were made at all land boundary crossings (except for Liantang Port, which had yet to be commissioned back then¹⁵). Currently, only Shenzhen Bay and Huanggang checkpoints provide 24-hour clearance service, and Shenzhen Bay is the only Hong Kong-Shenzhen land boundary crossing where the co-location arrangement is implemented;¹⁶

- (c) **Growing economic significance in western Shenzhen:** the gross domestic product (“GDP”) of the four districts amounted to RMB 1.43 trillion (HK\$1.71 trillion) in 2020, accounting for 56.6% of the GDP of Shenzhen Municipality. Among them, Nanshan District in western Shenzhen contributed the most at 25.7%, followed by Futian District at 18.8%. Luohu District in central Shenzhen accounted for 9.4% and Yantian District contributed 2.6%;¹⁷ and
- (d) **Different industry structures:** the strategic positioning of the four districts are explicitly stated in the Outline of the 14th Five-year Plan of Shenzhen Municipality (see [Appendix 1](#)). Currently, **Luohu District** mainly relies on financial and other service industries. As the central district, **Futian District** focuses on mainly financial services and commerce. **Nanshan District** depends on manufacturing and related technology service industries. The key industries of **Yantian District**, which covers Shatoujiao, are transport and tourism industries. As far as current Hong Kong-Shenzhen cooperation is concerned, Luohu District is developing into a “**Demonstration zone for synergistic social development of Shenzhen and Hong Kong**” (深港社會協同發展示範區). The area surrounding Futian Port is developing into the **Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Zone**, and this, together with the **Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park** of Hong Kong in the Lok Ma Chau Loop¹⁸, will form the **Shenzhen-Hong Kong Innovation and Technology Cooperation Zone**¹⁹ (深港科技創新合作區). The **Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Modern Service Industry Cooperation**

¹⁵ The Liantang Port/Heung Yuen Wai BCP was commissioned in August 2020, providing only cargo clearance service at the initial stage.

¹⁶ See 深圳市政府 (2021).

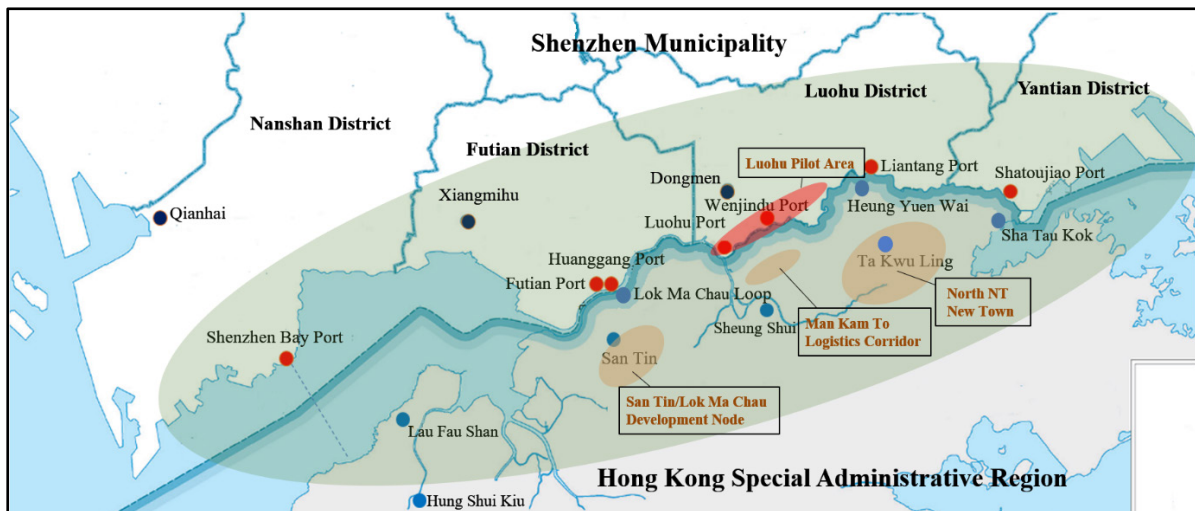
¹⁷ See 深圳市政府 (2021).

¹⁸ The Lok Ma Chau Loop refers to a plot of land with an area of some 90 hectares (0.9 sq km) adjacent to Lok Ma Chau that was created by straightening the Shenzhen River meander.

¹⁹ See Innovation and Technology Bureau (2021a, 2021b).

Zone (前海深港現代服務業合作區) in Nanshan District is oriented towards modern finance and service industries, and proactively seeks to connect with Hong Kong and international markets. Yantian District sees booming **shipping activities**, which are closely related to the development of logistics industry in Hong Kong.²⁰

Figure 1 – Conceptual site plan of Shenzhen-Hong Kong “BCP Economic Belt”



Source: Prepared by the Research Office based on online maps (not actual coverage).

Outline of the 14th Five-year Plan of Shenzhen Municipality related to BCP Economic Belt

2.3 As mentioned above, the **Outline of the 14th Five-year Plan of Shenzhen Municipality** proposes a “high-standard development of the Shenzhen-Hong Kong BCP Economic Belt”, with the major objective of “facilitating the synergistic development of the Shenzhen-Hong Kong BCP Economic Belt encompassing innovation and technology, high-end manufacturing, cultural and tourism consumption, medical and education services, etc., and creating a new platform for Shenzhen-Hong Kong cooperation, with Shenzhen-Hong Kong checkpoints, their neighbouring areas and cross-boundary land being the core”.²¹ Relevant policies include:

²⁰ See Legislative Council Secretariat (2022a).

²¹ See 深圳市發展和改革委員會 (2021).

- (a) **Promoting the development of the Shenzhen-Hong Kong BCP Economic Belt** – to develop Luohu Pilot Area (羅湖先行區) and the Shatoujiao Shenzhen-Hong Kong International Tourism and Consumption Cooperation Zone (沙頭角深港國際旅遊消費合作區), as well as to build a “divergent and synergistic” development paradigm of the BCP Economic Belt;
- (b) **Improving the functions and layout of checkpoints** – to enhance the convenience in customs clearance and progressively implement the “East in East out, West in West out” strategy for cross-boundary goods traffic;²² and
- (c) A model for **integrated reforms of checkpoints** – to expedite the redevelopment of checkpoints such as Huanggang and Shatoujiao, the conversion of checkpoints such as Luohu and Wenjindu, and the construction of new checkpoints such as Qianhai and Dapeng.²³

2.4 As one of the core districts of the BCP Economic Belt with three checkpoints (among them, Luohu Port is the first land boundary crossing that connects Hong Kong), **Luohu District** enjoyed development advantages in the past. However, given Shenzhen’s westward development shift to Nanshan and Futian Districts with strong efforts to develop the innovation and technology industry, the historical advantages of Luohu are gradually fading away. In view of challenges such as over-reliance on the tertiary industry and “declining attractiveness, influence and competitiveness”, a portion of Luohu District will be transformed into “**Luohu Pilot Area of the Shenzhen-Hong Kong BCP**

²² Shenzhen Municipality proposed years ago to designate Shenzhen Bay and Liantang checkpoints as comprehensive passenger and cargo checkpoints, and other land checkpoints as passenger checkpoints, so as to release land in its city centre and address the associated environmental problems. See 深圳市政府(2010).

²³ The Shenzhen authorities are also planning the extension of metro lines to Shatoujiao Port, and have reserved space for connecting with potential railway development in Hong Kong. Similarly, the fresh food inspection function of Wenjindu Port will be transferred to Liantang Port, and strengthened railway connectivity is under planning. One of the key proposals in respect of the Northern Metropolis is to connect its western part (covering Yuen Long, Tin Shui Wai, and Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen) with the Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Modern Service Industry Cooperation Zone by rail. See 文匯報(2021f) and Legislative Council Secretariat (2022a).

Economic Belt” (“Pilot Area”)²⁴ to deepen intensive cooperation with Hong Kong in social and livelihood areas and facilitate integrated social development. It is noteworthy that the Pilot Area will **“focus on Hong Kong youth development, livelihood-related regulatory interface and commuter-oriented development integration, and improve the mechanism for communication, collaboration and interconnection”**. In 2020, the Luohu District promulgated the **“implementation plan for supporting Hong Kong and Macao professionals to start businesses and take up employment and providing associated services”** (支持港澳專業人才創業就業發展及配套服務實施方案), offering policies and fiscal measures to encourage Hong Kong people to start businesses and take up employment.²⁵ In addition, to contribute to the national “dual circulation” strategy, Shenzhen Municipality plans to develop itself into an **international and cross-border consumption centre**, and Luohu District plans to establish a centre for duty-free consumer goods in bid to channel consumption back to the district.²⁶

2.5 As for the **Shatoujiao** Shenzhen-Hong Kong International Tourism and Consumption Cooperation Zone located in Yantian District, it will be reportedly fully open to Hong Kong upon its completion.²⁷ **Hong Kong enterprises will be given priority** in operating available major tourism projects, and a maximum of about 40 000 **jobs exclusively available to Hong Kong people** are expected to be provided. Shatoujiao is currently taking forward the redevelopment of its checkpoint and urban renewal of its industrial zones to release more land for new development. Yantian District Government has indicated that it hopes Hong Kong to **improve its road and railway infrastructure connecting to Shatoujiao**, and that it would seek to “explore the integrated development of Shatoujiao/Sha Tau Kok in Shenzhen and Hong Kong”.²⁸

²⁴ The authorities have delineated the specific coverage of the Pilot Area, which centres around Luohu, Wenjindu and Liantang checkpoints, and is bounded by Shenzhen River to its south, Shennan East Road, Luosha Road and Liantang Road to its north, Hongling South Road to its west and the vicinity of Liantang Port to its east, covering an area of about 7.1 sq km. See 深圳市羅湖區政府(2020).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ See 深圳市羅湖區政府(2021).

²⁷ See 文匯報(2021e).

²⁸ See 深圳市鹽田區政府(2021).

3. “BCP Economic Belt” in Hong Kong

3.1 As observed above, the development of the BCP Economic Belt on the Shenzhen side has demonstrated a higher level of initiative and maturity, in stark contrast to areas near land boundary crossings in the northern part of Hong Kong. The SAR Government planned the North East New Territories New Development Areas (i.e. Kwu Tung North/Fanling North) as early as the 2000s, but it has been criticized as **progressing at a slow pace**.²⁹ In view of the varying pace of land development near Shenzhen-Hong Kong checkpoints, the Legislative Council and a District Council have expressed their concerns and urged the Administration to expedite the development of the northern New Territories and enhance cooperation with Shenzhen.³⁰ In a nutshell, various factors, such as the existing **land ownership and use status in the New Territories** (such as brownfield sites, Tso/Tong land and abandoned agricultural land), different **planning requirements** (including development and conservation), long-outdated **ancillary transport facilities** (railway in particular), and the absence of a **proper institutional structure**, are considered to have hindered the development of land in the north for economic and housing development. In addition, there are also criticisms that some land uses are **incompatible with the development** of areas near Shenzhen checkpoints, such as obnoxious facilities that are already in place/in operation or under construction (such as landfills, slaughterhouses, and columbaria) in the North District.

3.2 Following the announcement of the Northern Metropolis Development Strategy and in anticipation of closer Hong Kong-Shenzhen cooperative relationship, the Government has recently **finetuned the planning of the proposed burial facilities at Sandy Ridge**. At the same time, it has proposed to streamline the **town planning and environmental impact assessment process** to shorten the time required for development. To release more land for development, the Government is now **reviewing Tso/Tong land in the New Territories** and other institutions involving the administration of land in the New Territories, and enhancing the compensation arrangements for land resumption and clearance projects³¹.

²⁹ There are criticisms that from planning to the first population intake, at least 15 years are needed for housing developments in the North East New Territories New Development Areas. See 團結香港基金會 (2019).

³⁰ The Legislative Council passed a Member’s Motion on the development of the BCP Economic Belt in the northern New Territories in 2021, and the North District Council also introduced a motion on the development of the northern New Territories and BCP Economic Belt. See Legislative Council (2021) and North District Council (2020, 2021).

³¹ See Legislative Council Secretariat (2022b).

3.3 The Northern Metropolis Development Strategy, which was unveiled in the Policy Address in October 2021, covers an area of 300 sq km in the northern New Territories. The Strategy was formulated based on the cross-boundary perspective, featuring “Twin Cities, Three Circles”, i.e. **the Shenzhen Bay Quality Development Circle, the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Close Interaction Circle and the Mirs Bay/Yan Chau Tong Eco-recreation/tourism Circle**.³² According to the Government, the Northern Metropolis will become an economic hub outside Victoria Harbour, and help address the home-job imbalance between the north and south arising from existing layout planning.³³ In fact, the Government has, in the key findings of the territorial development strategy under “Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030” released in 2017, unveiled the concept of the “**Northern Economic Belt**”³⁴, which extends from Lok Ma Chau in the west to Liantang/Heung Yuen Wai in the east, and covers three Potential Development Areas near existing cross-boundary crossings, namely **San Tin/Lok Ma Chau Development Node**³⁵, **Man Kam To Logistics Corridor** and **New Territories North New Town**³⁶ (Figure 1).

³² Among them, Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen area in the Shenzhen Bay Quality Development Circle will be developed into a core business district in the northern New Territories and interfaces with Nanshan/Qianhai in Shenzhen. Besides, the authorities plan to connect both sides by rail. A technopole will be developed in San Tin area to connect with the adjacent Shenzhen-Hong Kong Innovation and Technology Cooperation Zone (which is currently under construction) in the Loop, and the Innovation and Technology Zone in Huanggang. The Hong Kong-Shenzhen Close Interaction Circle will cover areas in Luohu District of Shenzhen, while the Eco-recreation/tourism Circle includes areas in Yantian District of Shenzhen (Shatoujiao Port). See GovHK (2021a).

³³ The Government plans to pursue infrastructure-led development by building new and extended railway lines, some of which may connect Shenzhen checkpoints such as Luohu. The Strategy also attaches importance to ecological conservation and plans to retain a substantial proportion of wetlands. The entire plan is expected to increase housing supply substantially to accommodate a population of 2.5 million and create 650 000 jobs.

³⁴ See Development Bureau (2017).

³⁵ The Node covers an area of 320 hectares (32 sq km; half of the area is private land) and will incorporate 20 hectares of land vacated at the current Lok Ma Chau Control Point upon the redevelopment of Huanggang Port and the implementation of the co-location arrangement there. Of these land lots, 11% will be used for residential developments with about 31 000 flats for accommodating about 84 000 people; 22% will be for economic and employment uses creating about 64 000 job opportunities. San Tin area will also see the development of the innovation and technology industry. The Government is carrying out investigation and detailed design, and aims at commencing the construction works in 2024 at the earliest. See Development Bureau (2021a).

³⁶ The Corridor and the New Town cover an area of about 1 140 hectares (114 sq km; half of the area is private land). The New Town is expected to accommodate at least 200 000 people and provide about 134 000 job opportunities. The Government is carrying out a planning and engineering study in this connection. See Development Bureau (2021a).

3.4 Nevertheless, there are comments that land use planning for the Northern Metropolis still lags behind that for the BCP Economic Belt on the Shenzhen side, since the planning for the latter is more strategic and more forward-looking, with a clear delineation of areas with different functions, such as “core area” (核心區), “extended area” (拓展區) and “area served” (輻射區), subject to development priority.³⁷ Some on the other hand view that notwithstanding the possible differences in planning concepts and methods between Hong Kong and Shenzhen, it is more important that, when developing the “BCP Economic Belt” in the Northern Metropolis, Hong Kong should consider **how to connect with Shenzhen in relation to the flow of people, goods, capital, information, etc., and the need to consider overall national development and joint planning and development.**³⁸ It is reported that Hong Kong and Shenzhen have agreed to undertake a “joint thematic study” on the BCP Economic Belt and will “jointly prepare a plan”, but there has been no further news so far.³⁹

3.5 Apart from the Northern Metropolis, some people have also proposed to further open up the **Frontier Closed Area** (“FCA”) to support the development of the BCP Economic Belt, especially Chung Ying Street in Shau Tau Kok Town (沙頭角墟) with historical and cultural characteristics. It is hoped that the redevelopment of Shatoujiao Port in Shenzhen will bring about business opportunities to the Town. However, the Government has reservations about fully opening up the Sha Tau Kok FCA, and holds that it will lead to more unnecessary flow of people and goods, posing greater security risks.⁴⁰ On the other hand, the Government recently said that a consensus had been reached with the Shenzhen Municipal Government to implement the co-location arrangement at the redeveloped Huanggang Port in Shenzhen, which would release over 20 hectares (0.2 sq km) of land at Lok Ma Chau Control Point in Hong Kong for other uses upon completion.⁴¹ Besides, there is also a plan to relocate Lo Wu Station of the East Rail Line and Lo Wu Control Point to Shenzhen’s soon-to-be

³⁷ See 香港01周報(2021).

³⁸ For instance, a think tank believes that there is massive potential synergy between Hong Kong and Shenzhen. Shenzhen, whose economic pillars are manufacturing and innovation and technology, can facilitate re-industrialization in Hong Kong, while Hong Kong is able to complement Shenzhen in relation to its weaker basic scientific research. In addition, the Mainland is promoting “internal circulation”, and consumption does not contribute to the economy of Shenzhen as much as it does to that of Hong Kong. See 北京匯豐商學院(2021).

³⁹ See 文匯報(2021a).

⁴⁰ See GovHK (2021c).

⁴¹ See Legislative Council Public Works Subcommittee (2021).

converted Luohu Port. The relocation is expected to unleash the development potential around Sheung Shui North and Man Kam To.⁴²

Review of Hong Kong-Shenzhen cooperation and views of the community

3.6 Many people are delighted by the strategic development direction of the Northern Metropolis, but they may still be on the fence about how to cooperate over and connect with the planning and development of the areas near checkpoints in Shenzhen. Hong Kong and Shenzhen have had a long history of cooperation in a wide range of areas. As pointed out by the Government, Hong Kong SAR's cooperation with Mainland provinces and municipalities has been "achieved step-by-step by building on the principles of 'one country, two systems', the Basic Law and a mutually beneficial and win-win relationship".⁴³ In recent years, as Hong Kong has been gradually incorporated into the national development planning, the promotion of Hong Kong-Shenzhen cooperation should be oriented towards grasping the opportunities arising from the nation's development, and expanding economies, improving livelihood, and deepening cooperation according to the development needs of the two places.⁴⁴

3.7 According to the Government, under the framework of the Hong Kong/Guangdong Cooperation Joint Conference⁴⁵ a **direct channel of communication** between Hong Kong and Shenzhen has been established by Hong Kong and the Mainland since 2004, namely the **Hong Kong/Shenzhen Cooperation Meeting**, which facilitates preliminary study and exchange of views on subjects of mutual concern.⁴⁶ When a project has progressed to a mature stage, the two sides will submit it to the Hong Kong/Guangdong Cooperation Joint Conference for follow-up and consideration.⁴⁷ According to government press releases, the Hong Kong/Shenzhen Cooperation Meeting was held almost every year in either Hong Kong or Shenzhen and was chaired by senior leaders from both sides (mainly the Chief Secretary for Administration of the Hong Kong Government and the Mayor of Shenzhen Municipality), who

⁴² See GovHK (2021a).

⁴³ See GovHK (2009).

⁴⁴ See Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau (2013).

⁴⁵ The Hong Kong/Guangdong Cooperation Joint Conference has been convened since 1998, under which various special panels/expert groups have been set up.

⁴⁶ See GovHK (2004).

⁴⁷ Apart from the Hong Kong/Guangdong Cooperation Joint Conference and the Hong Kong/Shenzhen Cooperation Meeting, the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Cooperation Forum, initiated by the research institutions of Hong Kong and Shenzhen (the Hong Kong side being the then Central Policy Unit of the Government), has been held almost annually since 2006 to enhance unofficial exchanges between the two places. See GovHK (2010).

directly oversee the cooperation between the two sides, and joined by senior officials from both sides.

3.8 Over the years, the two sides have signed many memoranda and agreements on cooperation in various areas⁴⁸ ranging from finance, tourism, infrastructure to environmental protection and exchange of talents. Examples of such cooperation include the introduction of a mechanism on mutual recognition of professional qualifications under the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement⁴⁹, cooperation in the development of port facilities (e.g. Shenzhen Bay Port), and the SAR Government's provision of advice and support to the development of Qianhai in various aspects.⁵⁰

3.9 In recent years, Hong Kong and Shenzhen have been cooperating more closely in innovation and technology. In terms of land use, they signed a memorandum of understanding on jointly developing the **Lok Ma Chau Loop** in 2017, involving the **joint development** of the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park in the Loop. The Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation has set up a subsidiary, the **Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park Limited (“HSITP”)**, whose board members come from **Hong Kong and Shenzhen, to build, operate and manage the Park**. The two sides have also set up the Joint Task Force on the Development of the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park in the Loop, co-chaired by the Secretary for Innovation and Technology and the Vice Mayor of Shenzhen Municipality. **HSITP reports regularly to the Task Force.**

3.10 In addition, regional development in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area has also intensified Hong Kong-Shenzhen cooperation.⁵¹ Despite closer cooperation, there are comments that under the Central Government's policy of supporting deeper reforms, the cooperation between the two sides could be further enhanced.⁵² At present, the SAR Government has revealed that, in relation to railway development in the Northern Metropolis, it has set up a task force (專班) with Shenzhen to follow up on how to connect

⁴⁸ See Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau (2013).

⁴⁹ See Department of Justice et al. (2021).

⁵⁰ See 中華人民共和國國務院新聞辦公室 (2021).

⁵¹ To strengthen cooperation with the Mainland in relation to the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the Government established in 2018 the Steering Committee for the Development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area chaired by the Chief Executive, and set up the Greater Bay Area Development Office and appointed a Commissioner in 2020 to be specifically responsible for the liaison with the Mainland (Central Government and local governments) and Macao authorities.

⁵² See Legislative Council Secretariat (2022a) and 香港01 (2021a).

with Shenzhen,⁵³ but no announcement has been made in respect of other areas of cooperation. There are comments that Hong Kong and Shenzhen need a new mode of cooperation in the form of an “**all-round, all-embracing and long-term cooperation mechanism**”.⁵⁴ There is also a proposal to set up an experimental “**Management Committee of the Shenzhen-Hong Kong BCP Economic Belt**” (深港口岸經濟帶管理委員會) modelled on the supranational political structure of EU, and subcommittees dedicated to individual areas, industries or regional affairs can be established under the Committee.⁵⁵ There is also a think tank recommending Hong Kong and Shenzhen to **jointly study the planning of land adjoining both places**, so that the key development areas of the Northern Metropolis and Shenzhen can complement each other (e.g. supporting the development of industries leveraging complementary advantages).⁵⁶

3.11 As seen above, there are different possibilities for the **structure and mode** of cross-boundary cooperation, and the experience of other places also shows that the mode of cross-boundary cooperation needs to adapt to the local context and changing circumstances. The factors to be considered include the geographical features of cross-boundary regions, such as the coverage and scale of land. For example, Macao and Zhuhai have designated special sites at the boundary for joint industrial development under the principle of “unified planning and separate management” (統一規劃，分開管理), and in light of changing circumstances, both sides have even joined hands to co-build checkpoints, attempting to implement a cooperation system featuring “mutual discussions, joint construction, joint administration, and shared benefits” (“共商共建共管共享”合作體制). In EU, its members work together to promote cross-border economic development, and neighbouring countries set up “legal entities” to discuss and implement cross-border cooperation projects under this framework. The models of cooperation and observations are discussed below.

4. Cooperation between Macao and Zhuhai

4.1 In the case of Macao and Zhuhai, there seems to be less discussion on BCP economic belt than in Hong Kong and Shenzhen. This may be related to

⁵³ According to the speech of the Secretary for Transport and Housing at the Legislative Council, Hong Kong and Shenzhen have established the “Task Force for Hong Kong-Shenzhen Cooperation on Cross-Boundary Railway Infrastructure” to follow up on the three railway projects proposed under the Northern Metropolis Development Strategy. See GovHK (2022).

⁵⁴ See 北京匯豐商學院(2021).

⁵⁵ See 信報財經新聞(2021).

⁵⁶ See 普華永道(2021).

the smaller area of land surrounding checkpoints in Zhuhai and Macao. However, the density of checkpoints in Zhuhai and Macao is no less than that in Hong Kong and Shenzhen. There are a total of five control points along the land boundary between the two places, namely **Border Gate/Gongbei** (關閘/拱北); **Zhuhai-Macao Cross-Border Industrial Zone** (珠澳跨境工業區); **Qingmao checkpoints**⁵⁷ (青茂口岸); **boundary crossing facilities of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge** (港珠澳大橋口岸) (located on an artificial island) and **Hengqin Port** (橫琴口岸) (Macao boundary crossing facilities located in Zhuhai and administrated by Macao) (see **Figure 1** and **Figure 2** in **Appendix 2**). The first three checkpoints are all located on the northern part of Macao along its boundary with Zhuhai, which is approximately 2 km long. Among them, Gongbei Port in Zhuhai has been the busiest land checkpoint on the Mainland for nine consecutive years since 2011, with 145 million passenger trips in 2019, much higher than that in Luohu Port in Shenzhen.⁵⁸

4.2 All of the above land boundary crossings in Macao (including Hengqin New Area) are connected to the administrative district of Xiangzhou (香洲行政區) in Zhuhai.⁵⁹ Due to its topography, the land connectivity and accessibility between the control points in Xiangzhou⁶⁰ seems to be weaker than that of the Shenzhen BCP Economic Belt. However, the usual resident population of Xiangzhou District accounts for 60% of that of Zhuhai, and its GDP of RMB232 billion (HK\$263 billion) accounted for nearly 68% of the city's GDP in 2019, with tertiary industries dominating the district (65%).⁶¹ Similarly, the old urban areas of Macao near its checkpoints are still mainly for residential use due to the lack of land, while land lots in Taipa (氹仔) and Coloane (路環) are mainly for hotel, tourism and recreational uses.

⁵⁷ Qingmao Port (known as so in Macao as well) was commissioned in 2021, where a customs clearance model known as the “joint boundary control system” (合作查驗，一次放行) is adopted. The automated passenger clearance system is implemented at the checkpoint, and 24-hour clearance service is provided, with a design flow of 200 000 passenger trips per day.

⁵⁸ See 中華人民共和國中央人民政府(2020).

⁵⁹ Except for Border Gate/Gongbei and Qingmao checkpoints in the north, there are waterways separating Zhuhai and Macao.

⁶⁰ Except for Qingmao Port, which is adjacent to the Zhuhai Station of Guangzhou-Zhuhai Intercity Railway, there is no rail connection at the other checkpoints.

⁶¹ See 珠海市統計局(2020).

4.3 Similar to Hong Kong-Shenzhen cooperation, the **Guangdong-Macao Cooperation Joint Conference**⁶² set up the **Zhuhai-Macao Specialized Cooperation Task Force** (now the **Zhuhai-Macao Cooperation Meeting**) in 2008, thus establishing a mechanism for direct communication, consultation and exchange between Zhuhai and Macao. A number of working groups have been set up under the Zhuhai-Macao Cooperation Meeting, including those on immigration clearance and Hengqin development, so as to enhance cooperation. In 2011, Guangdong and Macao further signed the **Framework Agreement on Cooperation Between Guangdong and Macao**, with the aim of promoting the integrated development of the economy, society, culture and lifestyle in the two places, as well as appropriately diversifying Macao's economy.⁶³ Over the years, the project initiatives that Zhuhai and Macao have **jointly planned** and/or **managed** include the smaller-scale **Zhuhai-Macao Cross-Border Industrial Zone**, and the **Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin**, Zhuhai.

Zhuhai-Macao Cross-Border Industrial Zone

4.4 The Zhuhai-Macao Cross-Border Industrial Zone is an early and concrete cooperation project between Macao and Zhuhai, and is considered “the first attempt to combine ‘one country, two systems’ with regional economic cooperation”.⁶⁴ The Cross-Border Industrial Zone came into operation in 2006. It is situated between Gongbei of Zhuhai and Qingzhou of northwest Macao (see **Figure 1 in Appendix 2**), and has a total area of only 0.4 sq km. Built on land through sea reclamation between Zhuhai and Macao, three quarters of the zone are located in Zhuhai, which, known as the Zhuhai Park, primarily focuses on industrial development, alongside logistics, entrepot trade and product exhibition and sale, etc. The rest of it is located in Macao, which, known as the Macao Park, mainly provides and serves as a base for manufacturing enterprises.⁶⁵

⁶² Since 2003, Guangdong and Macao have convened the Guangdong-Macao Cooperation Joint Conference each year to discuss the direction, key areas and major issues of cooperation.

⁶³ See 珠江經濟(2008).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ See 中華人民共和國中央人民政府(2003).

4.5 The development of the Zhuhai-Macao Cross-Border Industrial Zone is an important initiative under the framework of the Mainland and Macao Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement. The project was proposed by the then Chief Executive of the Macao SAR and approved by the State Council, with the aim of helping Macao to maintain economic diversification and promote employment of workers. The Zhuhai-Macao Cross-Border Industrial Zone operates under the principle of **unified planning and separate management**. In respect of the Zhuhai Park, the Zhuhai Municipal Government has established the “Management Committee of the Zhuhai Park of the Zhuhai-Macao Cross-Border Industrial Zone” (珠澳跨境工業區珠海園區管理委員會), which is responsible for managing its administrative and economic affairs. As for the Macao Park, it is managed by the Macao Industrial Parks Development Co., Ltd. established by the Macao SAR Government.⁶⁶ In addition, the two sides have reportedly established the “Coordination Committee of the Zhuhai-Macao Cross-Border Industrial Zone” (珠澳跨境工業區協調委員會) to take charge of the various issues that need to be handled jointly by both sides in the entire Cross-Border Industrial Zone.⁶⁷ The two parts of the Industrial Zone are connected by a bridge, and the Zhuhai and Macao authorities have set up dedicated 24-hour checkpoints at each end of the bridge to facilitate the flow of goods from both places and people working the Zone.⁶⁸ However, probably due to the small size of the Cross-Border Industrial Zone, there has not been much public discussion on its operation and management in recent years.⁶⁹

Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin

4.6 The Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin (“In-Depth Cooperation Zone”) is a major Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao

⁶⁶ See 澳門工業園區發展有限公司(2022).

⁶⁷ See 文匯報(2003).

⁶⁸ Passengers from the two sides are required to apply for and use a special Access Card for the Park. In addition, since 2014, the eligibility of crossing the checkpoint during designated hours has been extended to Mainland students studying in Macao and imported Mainland labourers in Macao, etc. See 澳門特別行政區政府(2006) and 澳門治安警察局(2022).

⁶⁹ In 2010 (i.e. a few years after the commencement of operation of the Cross-Border Industrial Zone), in response to a question raised by a member of the Legislative Assembly of Macao about the effectiveness of the Industrial Zone, the authorities responded that the Zone needed to be upgraded and restructured to adapt to new circumstances, and a team was set up by Zhuhai and Macao to follow up on this issue. See 澳門立法會(2010).

cooperation platform⁷⁰ and a key initiative under the Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. The objective is not only to further support Macao's economic diversification to a suitable degree, but also to promote the better integration of Macao into the overall development of the country.⁷¹ The Central Government decided to develop Hengqin as early as 2009, but its development has been considered unsatisfactory over the years.⁷² In 2021, the Central Government decided to promote the development of Hengqin through deepening Guangdong-Macao cooperation, and boldly experimented with a new cooperation system, namely the system for “**mutual discussions, joint construction, joint administration, and shared benefits**”. The In-Depth Cooperation Zone has a total area of 106 sq km, three times the size of the Macao SAR. Originally under the jurisdiction of Zhuhai (now elevated to be under the administration of Guangdong Province), it is located to the west of Taipa and Coloane in Macao, and is connected to Macao via Hengqin Port. Within the In-Depth Cooperation Zone there is the Hengqin Campus of the University of Macao, which is **administrated in accordance with the law of Macao**. **The administration of the rest of its land is decided by Guangdong and Macao under the new cooperation system.**

4.7 As Macao faces the problems of land shortage and a high degree of sectoral concentration in the economy⁷³, the In-Depth Cooperation Zone provides tax incentives in various aspects to support **suitable economic diversification**, including the development of scientific and technological research and high-end manufacturing industries, Macao brand industries such as traditional Chinese medicine, and cultural, tourism, exhibition, and trade industries, etc. In addition, the In-Depth Cooperation Zone also introduces policies to **facilitate day-to-day lives and employment of Macao residents** (such as partial personal income tax exemption). The two sides also plan to promote the **interconnection of infrastructure facilities**, including supporting the extension of the Macao light rail to the Cooperation Zone to connect with the Zhuhai urban rail network.

4.8 **In respect of boundary checkpoints**, according to the General Plan for Construction of the In-Depth Cooperation Zone, a “**first-line**” crossing (i.e. the link between Macao and Hengqin) and a “**second-line**” crossing (the link between

⁷⁰ The Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin is one of the three parts of the Pilot Free Trade Zone in Guangdong, the other two being Nansha and Qianhai-Shekou. See 中國(廣東)自由貿易試驗區工作辦公室(2020).

⁷¹ The development goals of the In-Depth Cooperation Zone are to establish the development integration and cohesion between Macao and Hengqin by 2024; to achieve the deep connection of rules by 2029; and to realize Macao's adequate economic diversification by 2035. See 中華人民共和國中央人民政府(2021).

⁷² See 中國國際經濟交流中心(2021) and 商訊(2011).

⁷³ See 紫荊雜誌(2021).

Hengqin and the rest of the Mainland) would be established in the In-Depth Cooperation Zone to manage the flow of people and goods (see **Figure 2 in Appendix 2**). For passengers who cross the “first-line” crossing, a clearance model called the “**joint boundary control system**” is adopted⁷⁴, while students and faculty of the Hengqin Campus of the University of Macao may enter and leave the campus by using **channels at a dedicated “new intelligent” checkpoint** in the future. The “second-line” crossing does not impose restrictions on the entry and exit of personnel. Inbound and outbound vehicles at the “first-line” crossing will **only need to undergo one inspection**, and the clearance procedures for customs, immigration and quarantine of both Zhuhai and Macao can be completed in one go, thus saving clearance time. The Customs and Excise Departments of both sides will also **share inspection data** to reduce duplication of inspections. An automated guidance system will be used to separate cross-boundary vehicles requiring inspection from those not requiring inspection.⁷⁵

New system for “mutual discussions, joint construction, joint administration, and shared benefits”

4.9 Under the leadership of the Leading Group for the Development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (粵港澳大灣區建設領導小組), Guangdong and Macao jointly established the **Management Committee of Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin** (橫琴粵澳深度合作區管理委員會) to coordinate decisions on major plans, policies, projects, and personnel appointments and removals relating to the Cooperation Zone that are within the scope of their powers. The Management Committee of the Cooperation Zone implements a **dual director system**. **The Governor of Guangdong Province and the Chief Executive of the Macao SAR shall both serve in these positions**. The Macao SAR appoints an executive deputy director, and Guangdong and Macao negotiate to determine the appointment of other deputy directors. Member units include relevant departments of Guangdong Province and the Macao SAR, Zhuhai Municipal Government, etc. The **Executive Committee** is set up under the Management Committee to **oversee nine Bureaux**, but it does not cover areas such as national security, criminal justice, and law and order. **The principal official taking charge of the Executive Committee is appointed by the Macao side**, while the Mainland

⁷⁴ Passengers only need to queue up once and present their cards for reading at an automated clearance counter to complete the immigration procedures of both Zhuhai and Macao checkpoints, thus reducing the clearance time from the original 30 seconds to 20 seconds. See 澳門治安警察局(2018).

⁷⁵ See 澳門特別行政區保安司長辦公室(2022) and 澳門日報(2021).

authorities only send personnel to assist in the coordination of work related to Guangdong affairs (see **Figure 3** in **Appendix 2**).

4.10 At the same time, Guangdong and Macao may **form development and investment companies** as needed and **share profits**. All investment income before 2024 shall be left to the Management Committee of the Cooperation Zone for the development and construction of the Cooperation Zone. The Central Government grants subsidies to the Cooperation Zone as well, but the subsidies are linked to its performance. The Cooperation Zone’s future transfer of new land should directly serve to support the appropriate diversified economic development of Macao.

4.11 There are comments that the In-Depth Cooperation Zone has fully shifted from the previous mode of cooperation oriented towards individual areas, such as cooperation in industries, cooperation in industrial parks and cooperation in development zones, to “**systemic cooperation**”.⁷⁶ Although “Hengqin-Macao integration” had long been the goal in the past, the momentum and intensity of cooperation was generally considered to be insufficient before the establishment of the In-Depth Cooperation Zone. According to some analysts, the new mode of cooperation, coupled with the experience gained from previous cooperation, will enable Hengqin and Macao to establish a **more stable cooperative relationship**.⁷⁷ Although Hong Kong’s geographic space and industrial structure are different from Macao’s, there are still views that Hong Kong can, to a certain extent, draw on Macao’s direct participation in the “joint administration” model and implement a model similar to Hengqin’s in the areas near its checkpoints.⁷⁸

5. The experience of the European Union on cross-border cooperation

5.1 The experience of EU⁷⁹ may offer an alternative view of cooperation at border regions especially at EU’s internal borders (i.e. borders of Member States within EU). The significance of this cooperation is indicated by the fact that about 30% of the EU population lives in border areas, along some 40 internal borders divided by various barriers like topography or linguistics. There were also about 1.3 million workers who would cross borders to their workplaces on a

⁷⁶ See 21世紀經濟報導(2021).

⁷⁷ See 中國國際經濟交流中心(2021).

⁷⁸ See 香港01(2021b).

⁷⁹ EU is a political and economic union of 27 Member States. Apart from EU, there is also a European Economic Area (for the purpose of a single market) with 31 members, including 4 countries not being members of EU.

regular basis, representing 0.6% of all persons employed across EU.⁸⁰ Under EU's single market with a common currency and Europe-wide laws at supranational level, even though the flow of people, goods, services and capital across EU's internal borders (so-called "four freedoms") are basically unconstrained, cross-border cooperation are by no means unnecessary. On the contrary, the need for cooperation is considered exacerbated by issues arising from increased movements within internal borders under the "four freedoms".⁸¹

5.2 Historically, European border regions were considered as economically peripheral, with inhabitants there having poorer access to different kinds of services. It was estimated that removing just **one-fifth of the barriers** could lift the EU overall gross domestic product by **2%**, and create one million additional jobs.⁸² Thus, persistent efforts have been made at various levels to particularly remove the barriers blocking such cooperation. While many pre-existing barriers have been dismantled, most of the remaining obstacles continuously stem from **diverging national legislation** on either side of the border, **incompatible administrative processes**, or simply **lack of common territorial planning**.⁸³ Alleviation of such barriers remain one of the top EU agenda on further internal integration and cohesion.⁸⁴

5.3 There have been various financial subsidies and legal means through which EU deploys to promote cooperation at border regions and remove barriers in EU. For example, EU has pumped billions of euros since the 1990s to support cross-border cooperation at different levels through an instrument known as **Interreg**.⁸⁵ Funded on a programme basis, Interreg aims to tackle common challenges identified jointly at the border regions such as poor infrastructure connectivity and to exploit the untapped growth potential in border areas, while enhancing the cooperation for harmonious development of EU. Currently, Interreg has over 60 active cross-border programmes with an overall funding budget of approximately €6.6 billion (HK\$66 billion) in diverse areas of mutual interests. However, the funding incentives alone were considered not adequate to deliver effective cross-border cooperation/territorial cooperation, due to a lack

⁸⁰ See European Commission (2017).

⁸¹ See European Committee of the Regions (2007b).

⁸² See European Commission (2017).

⁸³ See European Commission (2015a, 2017).

⁸⁴ Cross-border cooperation is considered at three levels in EU, i.e. local, regional and transnational.

⁸⁵ Interreg was developed as a community initiative in 1990 but was reorganized as a formal objective of European Cohesion Policy in 2000. With funding from the European Regional Development Fund, Interreg supports cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation programmes proposed by any entity in Europe. See European Union (2022).

of common and legal institutional structure across the borders to support the cooperation.⁸⁶ Hence, the European Commission came up with an innovative solution known as “**European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation**” (“**EGTC**”) to fill the gap.

European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation

5.4 Launched in 2006 by EU through the EGTC Regulation, EGTC is the first European legal structure designed to facilitate and promote territorial cooperation with a view to strengthening the economic and social cohesion of the European territory. The major characteristics of **EGTC’s institutional set up** are as follows: (a) it is an entity and must be composed of at least two Member States, or one Member State plus at least one non-EU country;⁸⁷ (b) it is made up of public entities at any level (i.e. national, regional or local);⁸⁸ (c) apart from having a legal personality, it has its own statutes and conventions which must be unanimously agreed by all members;⁸⁹ and (d) it has a central decision-making body comprising elected representatives, and a director responsible for daily operations with annual budgets towards the goals of the EGTC.⁹⁰

5.5 One of the advantages of EGTC is its **bottom-up approach** as the establishment of an EGTC mainly originates from the demand of the local or regional authorities, hence facilitating cooperation without necessarily having a formal cross-border agreement ratified at state level. It is also an institution embodying **multi-level governance**,⁹¹ i.e. where sub-state, regional or state agencies can work together under the EGTC auspices. Under the above described set up, an EGTC can **flexibly define its cooperation tasks or arrangements to suit the local needs**,⁹² allowing for a diversity in types of

⁸⁶ See European Committee of the Regions (2007a, 2007b).

⁸⁷ The non-EU country must share at least one joint border with one of the participating countries under EGTC.

⁸⁸ Private companies which are owned by public entities and carry out operations of general economic interest are also eligible for membership.

⁸⁹ EGTC convention particularly sets out the name of the EGTC and its headquarters, the list of members, the area it covers, its objective, mission and duration. See European Commission (2022).

⁹⁰ There are three common sources of funding for EGTC, namely, membership fee (i.e. contribution from members), fees from provision of services, and funding directly from EU’s Interreg programme. See European Committee of the Regions (2021).

⁹¹ See European Committee of the Regions (2007b).

⁹² Tasks are defined by its members in conformity with the EGTC Regulation and the competence granted to each member of an EGTC under its respective national law. See EUR-Lex (2022).

cooperation.⁹³ While an EGTC has flexibility on cooperation tasks, it is not conferred upon regulatory powers nor it has any power to amend laws applicable to its activities.⁹⁴

A notable example of EGTC

5.6 A notable example among the 79 EGTCs⁹⁵ is the **Strasbourg-Kehl/Ortenau** EGTC at the Franco-German border along the Rhine River.⁹⁶ Established in 2008, that EGTC aims to promote exchanges among its members; experiment with new forms of cross-border cooperation based on joint decision; and improve and facilitate cross-border day to day living of its citizen. Like other EGTC elsewhere, it has a Council comprising equal number of representatives from elected bodies of the communities from both sides, and a secretariat serving as the administrative arm of the EGTC.

5.7 The Strasbourg-Kehl/Ortenau EGTC has focused on at least 14 themes of cross-border cooperation ranging from mobility, territory development, to economy and employment. In terms of spatial planning and development, for example, it has contributed to creating a **joint development plan** (known as Eco City project) straddling the Rhine River involving the regeneration of old industrial areas, and construction of new housing units on sites with a total area of 250 hectares;⁹⁷ and has put in place an online geographic information system with homogenized German and French data to facilitate sharing. To improve the **connectivity** of the border region, tram and bus services have been extended to both sides of the border. Apart from planning and transport, the region has also focused on cooperation on **healthcare service**, by creating at both borders an “Organized Zone for Access to Cross Border Healthcare” to overcome the

⁹³ See European Committee of the Regions (2007b, 2022).

⁹⁴ See European Parliament (2021).

⁹⁵ As at March 2021.

⁹⁶ The Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict brings together 112 municipalities - including the 61 French municipalities of the Eurometropolis of Strasbourg (a network of community centre around the City of Strasbourg) and the Community of Municipalities of the Canton of Erstein and the 51 German municipalities of the Ortenaukreis where some 958 421 inhabitants live and spread over an area of 2 468 km². See Eurodistrict (2022).

⁹⁷ The project was jointly launched by the City of Strasbourg, City of Kehl and a group of municipalities along the Rhine River region. The planning agency of Strasbourg would provide the main technical support in formulating the development plan comprising over 20 sub-development projects spanning over 20 years. The EGTC forms part of the steering committee overseeing the institutional arrangements of these projects. See City of Strasbourg (2010).

administrative and financial obstacles to access to healthcare from either side of the Rhine River. This zone is considered as a pioneer scheme for Europe.⁹⁸

5.8 While EGTC has offered a flexible, bottom-up and multi-level form of governance to promote cross-border cooperation and address the obstacles to integration, there remain **concerns** if EGTC is an overly-complex structure that is time-consuming, if not difficult, to be established, as it involves a lot of effort to agree on the design and structure of EGTC among members.⁹⁹ As such, there are views that such cooperation model should only be adopted (and worth the effort involved) when there is a need to build a legal structure for intensive and/or long-term cooperation.¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, although EGTC has its own statutes for cross-border cooperation, it lacks the power to change the laws if their application constitutes a legal obstacle to delivering a cross-border joint project.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, EGTC represents a major step forward in strengthening cross-border cooperation within EU, and is still regarded as an innovative solution to complement the alignment of financial and regulatory measures for European integration and cohesion. There remain growing interests from border regions in EU in establishing EGTCs.

6. Concluding remarks

6.1 Following the introduction of the Northern Metropolis Development Strategy by the Government, there has been much public interest in how Hong Kong and Shenzhen can further collaborate on the development of the BCP Economic Belt straddling the two sides. Many people hold the view that both sides should adopt innovative ideas and approaches for more intensive cooperation, and there need to be breakthroughs especially in the areas of land planning and related management. Some of them believe that Hong Kong may, to a certain extent, draw on the design and implementation by Guangdong and Macao of the model of “mutual discussions, joint construction, joint administration, and shared benefits” at the top level at the In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, and their joint promotion of major planning and decision on management approach. On the other hand, not only has EU achieved an increasingly unimpeded flow of people, goods, services and capital, but it has also made innovative institutional arrangements for cooperation. For example,

⁹⁸ For more details on the cooperation, see Eurodistrict (2022).

⁹⁹ See Zillmer and Toptsidou (2014).

¹⁰⁰ See CESCO (2022).

¹⁰¹ To resolve this, a mechanism has been proposed, which would enable the application, in a given Member State and in relation to a common cross-border region, of the laws of a neighbouring Member State if the laws of the former were a legal obstacle to the delivery of a joint project. See European Commission (2020).

EGTC provides a framework for regional or local authorities to decide on areas of joint planning and development cooperation in a local context, and put in place standing bodies endowed with funding to take up daily operations to achieve the specific goals set out for particular EGTC, with a view to facilitating bottom-up and more effective cross-border cooperation and internal integration. This is another concept of cooperation that Hong Kong and Shenzhen may draw on.

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Extracts of Outline of the 14th Five-year Plan of Shenzhen Municipality on strategic positioning of Futian/Luohu/Yantian and Nanshan Districts

Futian District: “As the centre for administration, culture, finance, commerce and international exchanges in Shenzhen, a core district for headquarters economy, and a cluster for modern service industries, the District will focus on ‘three new engines’, namely the Shenzhen-Hong Kong Innovation and Technology Cooperation Zone in the Loop, Xiangmihu New Financial Centre, and Central Park Civic Circle (環中心公園活力圈), and build a Central Innovation District, a Central Business District and a Central Civic District with profound international impact and influence.”

Luohu District: “As a demonstration zone for synergistic social development of Shenzhen and Hong Kong, a cluster for innovative development of modern service industries, a global financial and commercial centre, and an international consumption centre, the District will focus on taking forward the development of Caiwuwei-Shenzhen Railway Station-Dongmen area (蔡屋圍-深圳火車站-東門片區), Longgang-Qingshuihe area (龍崗-清水河片區) and Xinxiu-Liantang area (新秀-蓮塘片區), and build sustainable and innovative pioneer urban areas in Luohu.”

Yantian District: “As an international maritime centre, a hub for emerging marine industries and a key base for coastal tourism, the District will focus on taking forward the development of the Shatoujiao Shenzhen-Hong Kong International Tourism and Consumption Cooperation Zone, Yantian central area (鹽田中心片區) and the Port Industrial Belt along Yantian River (鹽田河臨港產業帶), and build an international shipping hub and offshore trade centre in Yantian.”

Nanshan District: “As a cluster for innovation in technology industry, higher education and headquarters economy, the District will focus on taking forward the development of the Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Modern Service Industry Cooperation Zone, Xili Lake International Science and Education City, Shekou International Ocean City, Xili High-Speed Rail New Town and Shenzhen Bay Super Headquarters Base, and build a Central Intelligence District and a world-class innovative coastal inner-city district in Nanshan.”

Figure 1 – Zhuhai-Macao Cross-Border Industrial Zone



Source: prepared by the Research Office based on online maps of Macao.

Figure 2 – Scope of Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin and its “first line” and “second line”



Source: Hengqin (Hong Kong) Representative Office (橫琴駐香港經貿代表處).

Figure 3 – A new system for “mutual discussions, joint construction, joint administration, and shared benefits” at Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin (Chinese only)



Source: Hengqin (Hong Kong) Representative Office (橫琴駐香港經貿代表處).

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