

Development of Heliport – a Greater PRD Perspective
Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce
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Introduction

1. The Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce welcomes the opportunity of being consulted on the development of heliports in the city.
2. Despite the phenomenal growth in helicopter travel over the past few years, we believe a huge potential market has remained as yet untapped, namely, the demand arising from integration of the Greater Pearl River Delta.
3. As a champion of Greater Pearl River Delta integration, the Chamber considers that it is of the utmost importance to develop a range of facilitating infrastructure and “agents of integration”, of which cross-border helicopter services is one, along with others such as high-speed trains between Hong Kong and Guangzhou, simpler border-crossing procedures, and liberalisation of rules and procedures.
4. On helicopter services in particular, we consider that its development should be guided by the concept of “integration”. From this perspective, we would like to offer our views in terms of:
 - integrated development of the PRD
 - integrated planning of the harbour front
 - integrated development of harbour-front heliports

Integrated development of the PRD

5. Besides government services, there are demands on various types of commercial helicopter services, such as:
 - scheduled cross-border commercial travel
 - chartered and point-to-point cross-border commercial travel
 - scheduled domestic tourist travel
 - point-to-point domestic travel
6. As a service sector with linkages to the business transport and tourism services – hence one with significant economic multiplier effect – the growth of helicopter services would be a welcome development, and one which the Chamber supports.
7. More importantly, from the point of view of Greater PRD integration, the growth of helicopter services will serve a very significant function. As institutional barriers to PRD integration begin to break down (e.g. through simplification of rules and procedures), the need to overcome the physical barrier of distance has become all

the more important. Here, suitable helicopter services, including both scheduled and point-to-point flights, will provide the PRD business people with a competitive edge. This could have profound impact on business, as competition is becoming more globalised and time-sensitive. Such cross-border services will be especially meaningful for owners of small and medium enterprises who often find the need for personal travel much more acute.

Integrated planning for the harbour front

8. The Chamber is aware of the constraints in planning for heliports in the city. This is especially so given that
 - there are competing needs for use of precious waterfront land, especially the need for a continuous harbour-front promenade;
 - there are environmental impacts, such as noise, associated with heliports, which have to be mitigated;
 - the Protection of the Harbour Ordinance has mandated that there should be no reclamation other than to fulfil an over-riding public need, and such a need is very difficult to justify.
9. On the other hand, we appreciate that a helicopter service situated at the harbour-front would also benefit the public at large. The harbour is not only to be preserved for the public, but to be enjoyed by the public. Hence the Chamber supports enlarging the market for harbour cruises and helicopter travel, which are in themselves “harbour experiences”. Even at current levels, the commercial service is quite accessible to ordinary members of the public, and we believe that it is realistic, through suitable market expansion and economies of scale, to make the service even more widely used.
10. The Chamber is a strong advocate for harbour-front enhancement, and we do not under-estimate the difficulty in resolving the environmental impacts arising from helicopter operation. On the other hand, there are well-established principles of integrated harbour planning promulgated by the Town Planning Board and the Harbourfront Enhancement Committee, and we do not see the development of waterfront heliport as necessarily conflicting with any of these principles. With integrated planning principles as guidance, it would remain a challenge – but not, in our view, an insurmountable challenge – to develop the waterfront heliport in a way that enhances, rather than compromises, the quality of the waterfront for the enjoyment of the public. It should be the kind of challenge that Hong Kong as a world city would welcome.

Integrated development of harbour-front heliports

11. We are aware of a number of existing and planned helipads on the north shore of Hong Kong Island, including:
 - the planned helipad for Government Flying Services at the north-east of the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre;

- the proposal by the Hong Kong Regional Heliport Working Group to expand the helipad at HKCEC to one suitable for commercial use;
- the current commercial heliport in Shun Tak Centre and its planned expansion;
- the proposed heliport by the government in Sheung Wan waterfront;
- the helipad at Eastern Hospital.

12. Whilst we support the development of heliports in the city, we do not necessarily encourage a proliferation of helipads on different parts of the waterfront. While the Chamber has not drawn any conclusion on the number of heliports needed, it would appear reasonable to us to examine the need for some rationalisation in siting the waterfront helipads. Instead of haphazard development, an integrated approach along the waterfront would be much preferable.