

The Background

1. On 28th February, 2005, the Joint Panel passed a motion calling upon Government to expedite the provision of a permanent commercial heliport in the Central Business District (CBD), and to allow the future heliport at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (HKCEC) to be shared by both Government and commercial users. The motion further stipulated that unlawful reclamation should not be permitted for the purpose of constructing a heliport.
2. The Hong Kong Regional Heliport Working Group (RHWG) has put forward a proposal for a new CBD heliport that is in full accord with the Joint Panel motion. It is the RHWG's contention that Government's proposal for provision of heliports in the CBD is seriously flawed and, when compared with the RHWG proposal, will result in reduced connectivity with the Pearl River Delta (PRD) region.

Why Government's Proposal is Flawed

1) Ignores Cross boundary single engine operation

3. Government has based its heliport strategy on an artificial and misguided distinction between regional and domestic helicopter services.
4. In making provision for a new heliport, the more appropriate distinction is between single-engine and twin-engine operations. This is because Civil Aviation Department regulations require that single-engine helicopters take off and land from ground-level. Twin-engine helicopters can use both elevated and ground-level facilities.
5. Some 85% of the worldwide commercial helicopter fleet is

single-engine, as these provide the only viable and affordable option for the services normally provided by commercial helicopter operators.

6. Under Government's helicopter strategy, the Macau Ferry Terminal heliport – an elevated facility – is designated as Hong Kong's regional CBD heliport. The proposed facility at the HKCEC – which is at ground level – would provide domestic services only.
7. The RHWG has conducted extensive consultation with local and international business leaders, and with senior officials in the Guangdong and regional city governments. All parties overwhelmingly support the opening of helicopter traffic between Hong Kong's CBD and the PRD, including both regularly scheduled services and point-to-point taxi-like services. Only single-engine helicopters operating from a ground level heliport can meet the demand for both regularly scheduled and point-to-point services.
8. By designating an elevated facility as the sole facility permitted to serve the regional market, Government is effectively dictating that cross-boundary services be provided by twin-engine helicopters. This is a seriously flawed policy, as it places severe restrictions on the contribution that the helicopter industry can make to improve connectivity between Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta.

II) Inadequate Capacity

9. Government suggests that its proposed site at the HKCEC can be configured for two ground-level helipads. Government further suggests that this would provide ample capacity for 20,000 flight movements per year, a figure 2.4 times the number of movements recorded in 2004. Government asserts that this facility would be sufficient to meet demand to the year 2020.

10. The RHWG strongly disputes the basis of Government's projection. The RHWG estimates that a two-pad facility would allow only some 8,700 commercial movements per year. This figure is less than the traffic that the five-pad Central Heliport handled in the year prior to its closing at the end of 2003. Following the closure, the number of flight movements declined in 2004. Moreover, figures for past demand cover domestic services only. Demand growth would be magnified if cross-boundary services were included.
11. The RHWG's proposal for a new four-pad heliport at the HKCEC would allow for some 18,900 movements per year. With Macau Ferry Terminal providing scheduled cross-boundary services, and the HKCEC providing primarily point-to-point services, sufficient capacity would exist for a viable regional helicopter service.

Public Engagement

12. Both the RHWG and the Government attended meetings of relevant public bodies in recent months in order to consult the public on the way forward.
13. Harbour-front Enhancement Committee: Sub-committee on Wan Chai Development Phase II Review: Members viewed that reclamation should be minimized and the harbour preserved as far as possible. Those against the RHWG proposal opposed it in the belief that the public had doubts regarding the legality and desirability of the "covering" of the harbour. The RHWG will appear before the Sub-committee on Wan Chai Development Phase II Review, Harbour-front Enhancement Committee on 26th October.
14. Islands District Council: No strong views were expressed. However, the RHWG's proposal was preferred, as Members believed that four pads would provide greater flexibility than two in emergency operations.

- 15. Wan Chai District Council:** Objected to any heliport on the grounds that Government was proceeding to build a permanent heliport in the Wan Chai district over the recorded objection of the District Council. However, some Members felt that the provision of a commercial heliport could be reviewed in the context of an overall Wan Chai development plan.
- 16. Town Planning Board:** Very critical of Government for not providing plans, schematics or other illustrations to indicate what the future heliport would look like. The RHWG's proposals were not discussed.

Compliance with the Protection of the Harbour Ordinance

- 17.** The RHWG would welcome any initiative by Government to designate land within the CBD to provide a full replacement for the former five-pad Central Heliport. In the meantime, the RHWG has made a proposal for a new heliport at the HKCEC that it believes balances the many interests involved for the overall good of the community and is in full compliance with the provisions of the Protection of the Harbour Ordinance.
- 18.** The public objection to helicopters can be summed up in one word: noise. The RHWG thus explored options that would allow a heliport to integrate with the surrounding area with minimal impact. The RHWG concluded that an offshore deck offered the optimal solution.
- 19.** The proposed site at the HKCEC is further away from residential buildings than any other location within the CBD, thus minimising noise impact on sensitive receivers. Furthermore, the RHWG proposal would retain the existing ferry terminal building, providing a natural buffer between helicopters and visitors to Golden Bauhinia Square. Government's proposal would require

the demolition of the ferry terminal building, exposing visitors to Golden Bauhinia Square directly to helicopter operations.

20. The proposed offshore deck would not require reclamation. It can be built either as a piled structure, or as a set of floating pontoons. Government based its latest proposal for a new cruise terminal on the premise that pontoons do not constitute reclamation. Please refer to the minutes of the meeting of the Panel on Economic Services held on 28th June 2004.

21. In order to make it very clear that the structures required for an offshore heliport do not require the permanent alienation of an area of the harbour, the RHWG proposes that any structure that is built in or over the inner harbour be permitted only upon the acceptance of an approved decommissioning plan. The decommissioning plan would provide for complete removal of the facility at the end of its useful life. The RHWG makes this as a general proposal for any structure that may be required within the harbour from time to time.

Noise

22. The RHWG has commissioned an independent noise study of the operation of commercial helicopters from the proposed offshore deck adjacent to the HKCEC. The tests showed no impact over ambient noise levels at the HKCEC and the Wan Chai residential area. Full details are available at the RHWG web site, at www.heliport.com.hk (top line results attached).

Conclusion

23. A replacement facility at ground level with multiple pads suited to cross boundary single-engine operation is an essential component of a multi-modal transportation infrastructure linking



Hong Kong to its hinterland in the Pearl River Delta. We must be far sighted, and choose the right road ahead for Hong Kong.

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Appendix 2

Result of Noise Tests

Monitoring Location	Ambient		Ambient + Helicopter Noise	
	Leq	Lmax	Leq	Lmax
M1	69	80	70	83
M2	75	88	75	84
M3 – A	68	79	66	73
M3 – B	66	80	78	81
M3 – C	68	75	66	79
M4	68	81	69	79
M5	75	88	75	84
M6	69	79	70	80
M7	67	75	66	72
M8	70	77	70	76

Reference on Daily Activities:

At bus stop at Convention Avnue next to Ferry Per: Lmax 96 dB

In a Chinese Restaurant during dinner time: Lmax 95 dB