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Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Meeting on 10 January 2011

**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 also a summary of views and concerns expressed by Members in the 2009-2010 session.

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 construction of the DTT network in Hong Kong is being carried out in phases and the DTT coverage has been extended to about 85% of the population in the 18 districts of the territory by the end of 2009. According to a survey conducted in September 2010, about 61% (approximately 1 410 000) households are watching DTT via DTT receivers (including set-top boxes or integrated digital television sets) or computers.

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.

5. At the Panel meeting on 14 December 2009, members noted that five new fill-in stations had been launched to further extend the digital coverage of the population. The completion of 17 more fill-in stations between 2010 to 2011 would bring the ultimate DTT coverage on par with that of the existing analogue coverage (i.e. more than 99% of the population). Some Panel members were concerned whether there would still be places that could not receive DTT signals after the completion of the additional 17 fill-in stations. The Administration advised that due to the hilly terrain of the territory, certain places, especially areas with less population, might suffer unsatisfactory DTT reception. The Administration would closely monitor the situation and liaise closely with the two free television programme service licensees to study how best to maximize the DTT coverage and improve television reception.

6. Some Panel members expressed concern that the quality and variety of the television programmes provided by ATV were far from satisfactory. They considered that ATV had under-performed in respect of its digital high-definition television (HDTV) programmes commitment, and they questioned ATV's capability in fulfilling the licence requirement of providing quality service and alternative programme choices for the viewing public. These members urged the Administration to explore measures to bring in competition to increase programme choices for Hong Kong viewers.

7. According to the Administration, both ATV and TVB were in the process of reviewing the roll out of their DTT channels with a view to introducing a greater variety of television programmes (both standard definition television and HDTV) originated from Hong Kong, the Mainland and Taiwan as well as increasing the total digital television broadcast time. So far, the provision of DTT services was in line with their commitment and in time with the overall roll-out plan.

8. 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. According to the Administration, it is still the Government's plan to cease analogue broadcasting by the end of 2012. However, the Government will take into account the future market situation,

including the DTT take-up rate, before taking a final decision on the switch-off. Sufficient preparation will be made in all aspects to ensure public awareness before the analogue switch-off is to be implemented.

Recent developments

9. At its meeting on 29 June 2010, the Chief Executive in Council approved the Broadcasting Authority's recommendations in respect of the mid-term review of the domestic free TV programme service licences of ATV and TVB. Among other requirements, ATV and TVB will have to increase the amount of HDTV programming, namely, from 14 to 60 hours per week starting from 2010 for ATV and from 20 hours per week to 120 hours per week by 2015 for TVB. These new commitments will be included in the licences of ATV and TVB for the period from 2010 to 2015.

10. According to the letter to the Panel issued by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development on 3 December 2010, the Government had briefed the staff of Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) on the various new developments, including the launch of DTT services, to fulfil its role and mission as the public service broadcaster of Hong Kong. In the next few years, RTHK will be committed to establishing the DTT transmission network, including discussing with the two free-to-air TV broadcasters on the rental of suitable hilltop sites, purchasing transmitters and equipment, and conducting technical trials. The Government has allocated the required resources to RTHK, and has agreed to provide additional resources to enable RTHK to increase its production of HDTV programmes from about 50 hours to not less than 200 hours per year as from 2011-2012.

Latest position

11. The Administration will brief the Panel on 10 January 2011 on the latest progress of implementation of the DTT services, including network rollout, supply of receiver products in the consumer electronics market, public response and the latest publicity.

Relevant papers

Information paper provided by the Administration for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 14 December 2009

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/itb/papers/itb1214cb1-602-6-e.pdf>

Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 14 December 2009

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/itb/papers/itb1214cb1-602-7-e.pdf>

Minutes of Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 14 December 2009

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/itb/minutes/itb20091214.pdf>

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>

Legislative Council Brief on mid-term review of the domestic free television programme service licences of Asia Television Limited and Television Broadcasts Limited

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0712-ctbcr92210-e.pdf>

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 12 July 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0712cb1-2465-9-e.pdf>

Information paper provided by the Administration for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 15 October 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/papers/itb1015cb1-18-1-e.pdf>

Letter from the Administration on new developments of Radio Television Hong Kong for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel on 3 December 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/papers/itbcb1-682-1-e.pdf>

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