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Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Meeting on 11 April 2011

**Updated background brief
on the implementation of the Government Wi-Fi programme**

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the implementation of the Government Wi-Fi (GovWiFi) programme and also a summary of views and concerns expressed by Members on the subject.

Background

2.　　Wi-Fi is a technology which can support the connection and access to the Internet through Wi-Fi enabled mobile devices, such as notebook computers, personal digital assistants and mobile phones.　The provision of public hotspots has become a global trend nowadays.　The impetus is largely fuelled by the increasing availability of mobile devices equipped with Wi-Fi capability in the market.

3.　　The Government's vision is to make affordable broadband Internet access available to all citizens in Hong Kong.　At present, the majority of citizens are using wired broadband access to the Internet.　The development and adoption of wireless broadband Internet access is conducive to the development of Hong Kong into a digital society with ubiquitous access to information, applications and services on the Internet.

4.　　Following consultation with the Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting (the Panel), the Administration has obtained the approval of the Finance Committee (FC) in May 2007 to create a new commitment of $217.6 million for the provision of Wi-Fi facilities at government

premises with high public patronage for free use by the public. These premises include all public libraries, public enquiry service centres, job centres, key cultural and recreational centres, community halls/centres, large parks and those government offices that are frequently visited by the public.

5. Since its launch in March 2008, the GovWiFi programme has made steady progress. In terms of number of Internet connections through the service, an average monthly growth rate of 7% since the full service roll-out in June 2009 was observed. As at March 2011, the average number of users and Internet connections per day were around 14 000 and 26 000 respectively. As at October 2010, the Administration has completed installation of Wi-Fi facilities at around 400 government premises for providing Internet connection service to citizens. In 2010, the service usage was 5.7 million user connections.

Previous discussions

6. Members in general supported the implementation of the GovWiFi programme as a means to bridge the digital divide. Six questions on the subject mater were raised by Members at the Council meetings on 24 October 2007, 16 January, 20 February, 16 April 2008, 17 June 2009 and 26 May 2010. Members called on the Administration to speed up the implementation of the GovWiFi programme so as to facilitate the provision and expansion of wireless services and network coverage in Hong Kong. The Administration was also urged to step up publicity to enhance public awareness of information security when using Wi-Fi facilities at Government premises.

7. The Administration briefed the Panel on 10 June 2008 and 30 June 2009 on the progress of the implementation of the GovWiFi programme. Panel members were keen to ensure that the GovWiFi services would be made available to more venues, including sports centres and community halls. They also expressed concern about information security when performing e-banking or stock transactions in the Wi-Fi environment.

8. The Administration advised that service providers were required to implement security measures (e.g. firewall systems, filtering softwares and peer-to-peer blocking) to safeguard against Internet threats. Users were also provided with two Wi-Fi connection options, i.e. encrypted and unencrypted connections, and advised to use the encrypted connection for better protection of their privacy for transmitting sensitive information.

9.   Panel members considered that there was a need to formulate a timetable of 100% coverage of major public areas by GovWiFi. They were also concerned about the progress of Hong Kong's development into a wireless city as compared to other major cities in the world. In response, the Administration advised that it had not preset any targets for 100% WiFi coverage over the territory. Hong Kong had a leading edge in the development of telecommunications infrastructure as it ranked the second in the world and the first in Asia in terms of broadband coverage.

10.   Some Panel members opined that the Administration should refrain from competing with the private sector in the provision of Wi-Fi facilities. The Administration responded that synergies had been achieved between the Government and the private sector in providing Wi-Fi services as reflected in the increase in Wi-Fi hotspots from about 1 000 at the launch of the GovWiFi programme to about 8 000 in June 2009.

11.   At the policy briefing for the Panel on 15 October 2010, members noted that in view of the strong public demand of the GovWiFi services, the Administration had recently completed a review and confirmed that there was a continual need for the GovWiFi services. In this connection, the Administration was planning for the Next Generation GovWiFi Programme with upgraded services to dovetail the existing one upon the expiry of the contract with the current operator by December 2012. In the ensuing months, the Administration would collect information from the industry on market services and explore the option of arranging the next generation of GovWiFi services.

Recent developments

12.   At the special FC meeting on 21 March 2011, Dr Hon PAN Pey-chyou and Dr Samson TAM raised questions on the Administration's plan for the next generation of GovWiFi services and on enhancing information security for such services. Members noted that the expenditure and manpower for such services were estimated to be around $130 million and 45 man-months respectively. The Administration would conduct regular security risk assessment and audit to assure that the Wi-Fi services could continue to fulfil the security requirements.

Latest position

13.   The Administration will brief members on 11 April 2011 on its plan for the next generation of the GovWiFi programme and seek the Panel's support on the proposed programme with a view to submitting a financial

proposal to FC in May 2011.

Relevant papers

Paper for meeting of Finance Committee held on 25 May 2007: FCR(2007-08)13
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/fc/fc/papers/f07-13e.pdf

Minutes of meeting of Finance Committee held on 25 May 2007
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/fc/fc/minutes/fc070525.pdf

Question No. 15 at the Council meeting on 24 October 2007 on "Electronic Service Delivery Scheme"
http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200710/24/P200710240157.htm

Question No. 16 at the Council meeting on 16 January 2008 on "Making available public facilities for installation of Wi-Fi antennas"
http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200801/16/P200801160160.htm

Question No. 18 at the Council meeting on 20 February 2008 on "Promotion of wireless Internet access"
http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200802/20/P200802200106.htm

Question No. 15 at the Council meeting on 16 April 2008 on "Installation of Wi-Fi antennas on lamp posts"
http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200804/16/P200804160144.htmPaper provided by the Administration for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 10 June 2008
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0610cb1-1755-5-e.pdf

Minutes of Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 10 June 2008
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/english/panels/itb/minutes/itb080610.pdf

Question No. 19 at the Council meeting on 17 June 2009 on "Public computer facilities"
http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200906/17/P200906170160.htm

Question No. 8 at the Council meeting on 26 May 2010 on "Security of Wi-Fi facilities in government venues"
http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201005/26/P201005260160.htm

Paper provided by the Administration for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel special meeting on 30 June 2009
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0630cb1-2017-1-e.pdf

Minutes of Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel special meeting on 30 June 2009
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/itb/minutes/itb20090630.pdf

Administration's paper on policy initiatives of Communications and Technology Branch, Commerce and Economic Development Bureau for the information Technology and Broadcasting Panel special meeting on 15 October 2010
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/papers/itb1015cb1-18-1-e.pdf

Administration's replies to initial written questions raised by Finance Committee Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2011-12: serial nos. CEDB(CT)088 and CEDB(CT)090
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/fc/fc/w_q/cedb-ct-e.pdf

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