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Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Meeting on 14 May 2018

Updated background brief on development of Wi-Fi connected city

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the development of Hong Kong as a Wi-Fi connected city and summarizes the key areas of concerns previously expressed by Members on the subject.

Background

2. The advent of wireless and multi-platform technologies, cloud computing, Internet of Things and big data in recent years has provided new impetus for social and economic developments. In the 2017 Policy Address, the Chief Executive reaffirms the Administration's commitment to develop Hong Kong into a smart city by using innovation and technology to enhance city management and improve people's livelihood. One of the strategies to make Hong Kong a better connected city is to increase the number of free hotspots to provide free public Wi-Fi service.

Government Wi-Fi programme

3. The Administration has launched the Government Wi-Fi ("GovWiFi") which provides free wireless Internet access services in government premises. Under this initiative, Wi-Fi facilities were installed at designated government premises throughout the territory, including public libraries, public enquiry service centres, sports venues, cultural and recreational centres, cooked food

markets and cooked food centres, job centres, community halls, major parks, government buildings and offices. As of March 2016, around 3 100 Wi-Fi hotspots at 603 government premises have been installed to provide GovWiFi services. According to the Administration, the average number of daily users and Internet connections increased from 3 700 and 6 700 in June 2009 to over 34 000 and 49 000 in February 2016 respectively.

"Wi-Fi.HK" brand

4. In August 2014, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer ("OGCIO") launched the "Wi-Fi.HK" in collaboration with public and private organizations to provide free or time limited Wi-Fi services to the general public or their customers across the 18 districts in Hong Kong. Participating organizations of "Wi-Fi.HK" offer at least 30 minutes of free Wi-Fi services to the public and inbound visitors without prior user registration. As at February 2017, the number of hotspots under "Wi-Fi.HK" has significantly increased from some 5 000 since its service launch to more than 19 000. Locations covered by "Wi-Fi.HK" include the Hong Kong International Airport, major tourist attractions, theme parks, public phone booths, college campuses, Cyberport, Hong Kong Science Park, government venues as well as some shopping malls, restaurants, cafés and convenience stores.

5. The Administration commissioned a consultancy study in mid-2015 to explore the viable business model and operation of future public Wi-Fi services at government venues. The consultant recommended that the Government should adopt a public-private collaboration approach and work with the private sector to provide free public Wi-Fi services at government venues.

6. Pursuant to the 2016 Policy Address, the Administration sought approval from the Finance Committee ("FC") in May 2016 for a funding commitment of \$500 million for the implementation of the Wi-Fi Connected City programme ("the programme") to progressively expand the coverage of free "Wi-Fi.HK" service. Apart from continuing the provision of Wi-Fi service at government venues, the programme seeks to encourage public and private organizations to participate in "Wi-Fi.HK" to provide Wi-Fi service at suitable government venues through public-private collaboration, and at more non-government venues.

7. The funding commitment also included subsidies for youth service centres and study rooms run by non-profit-making organizations to provide Wi-Fi services, thereby facilitating the public, in particular students, in using Internet resources and in learning. Since the commencement of the programme

in mid-2016, the number of free hotspots has increased from 17 000 to 18 400. The Administration expects that the number of hotspots will reach 34 000 by 2019.

Free Wi-Fi services provided in hospitals

8. In early 2015, OGCIO facilitated the Hospital Authority ("HA") to collaborate with Wi-Fi service providers to provide one-hour free "Wi-Fi.HK" services at public areas such as the waiting halls of their Accident and Emergency ("A&E") Departments and specialist out-patient clinics of six public hospitals. The Administration has informed the Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting ("the Panel") that it would work with HA to extend the current collaboration model to all public hospitals.

Previous discussions

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9. At the meeting of the Panel held on 10 April 2017, the Administration briefed members on the progress in the development of the programme.

Information on free public Wi-Fi hotspots

10. Members queried whether the public could access information about the distribution and locations of free public Wi-Fi hotspots over the territory, and whether the Administration would offer free mobile applications with which the public could locate free public Wi-Fi hotspots in their proximity. They suggested that the Administration should publicize information about the locations of free public Wi-Fi hotspots in collaboration with the Hong Kong Tourism Board

Provision of free Wi-Fi services in public hospitals and clinics

11. Members suggested that the Administration would provide free Wi-Fi services in all public hospitals, and queried about the locations of the "Wi-Fi.HK" hotspots in public hospitals and clinics. They also questioned the rationale for providing only one hour of free public Wi-Fi service in the waiting halls of A&E Departments and specialist out-patient clinics operated by HA in view of the long service waiting time. The Administration said that six public hospitals, namely Caritas Medical Centre, Hong Kong Eye Hospital, Kwong Wah Hospital, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Yan Chai Hospital and Princess Margaret Hospital, had been

provided with "Wi-Fi.HK" hotspots. More hotspots would be installed in seven other public hospitals from the second half of 2017.

The " Wi-Fi.HK" programme

12. Members were concerned on the level of participation by industrial and commercial organizations in the "Wi-Fi.HK" programme, and how the Administration intended to promote wider private sector participation. The Administration explained that it had approached numerous private organizations, and most preferred to display their own brands prominently rather than subsuming their service under the "Wi-Fi.HK" brand unless there were sufficient incentives for them to do so. The Administration would continue to explore measures to encourage participation by the commercial and industrial sectors.

Upgrading the Government WiFi service

13. Members called for the upgrading of the GovWiFi service, which was launched in 2008. The Administration explained that the "GovWiFi" service had undergone a major upgrade in 2012 where both the data transfer speed and the service capacity had improved. The current "GovWiFi" service contract would expire in January 2018, and the Administration was undergoing the procurement procedure for a major upgrade to be carried out in the new contract due to commence in 2018. Apart from improving the speed and capacity, the Administration would adopt the latest communications protocol and technical standards in the new service.

Provision of free public Wi-Fi services at government venues

14. Members queried whether all public Wi-Fi service would be delivered under a public-private collaboration model. There were also concerns about the slow progress in the increase of the number of free public Wi-Fi hotspots. Members queried whether the Administration would commit to provide free public Wi-Fi service in all government venues in the long term. As a few commercial or industrial organizations were participating in providing free public Wi-Fi service, some members suggested that the Administration should discuss with organizations such as Mass Transit Railway Corporation and encourage them to collaborate with the Government in providing free public Wi-Fi services under "Wi-Fi.HK".

15. The Administration explained that there were certain venues where private service providers did not find attractive. It would be necessary for the Government to operate Wi-Fi service at these venues at its own expense. The

Administration added that the it would engage more private organizations to participate in the provision of free public Wi-Fi services. As some commercial or industrial organizations might have engaged separate service providers to offer free Wi-Fi service at their venues, it might be difficult for them to adjust their service to the "Wi-Fi.HK" standards before their service contracts with the existing service providers expired.

Quality of free public Wi-Fi services

16. Members noted that Internet connection speed at certain public Wi-Fi hotspots, especially those at popular tourist areas, was very slow and suggested that the situation be improved. They suggested the system should be upgraded, with the Hong Kong Wireless Technology Industry Association be engaged to conduct independent and impartial assessments of Internet connection speed at different public Wi-Fi hotspots, and would follow up with the service providers concerned if necessary.

Finance Committee meeting

17. At the Special FC meeting on 19 April 2018, members raised queries to the Administration regarding progress and achievements of the work on promoting the development of Hong Kong into a Wi-Fi connected city, including expenditure and the location of hotspots.

Latest position

18. The Administration will brief the Panel on 14 May 2018 on the Wi-Fi connected city programme.

Relevant papers

19. A list of the relevant papers is set out in **Appendix**.

List of relevant papers

Issued by	Meeting date/ Issue date	Paper
Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting	10 April 2017	<p>Administration's paper on progress update on the implementation of the Wi-Fi Connected City Programme (LC Paper No. CB(4)801/16-17(03))</p> <p>Updated background brief on development of Wi-Fi connected city (LC Paper No. CB(4)801/16-17(04))</p> <p>Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. CB(4)1079/16-17)</p>
Special Finance Committee	19 April 2018	<p>Administration's replies to Members initial written questions (Reply Serial Nos. ITB001, ITB202, ITB231, ITB237)</p> <p>https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr17-18/english/fc/fc/w_q/itb-e.pdf</p>