

LCQ18: SkyPier ferry services

Following is a question by the Hon Abraham Shek and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (March 9):

Question:

A member of the public has relayed to me that the Government should allow non-transit passengers to use the SkyPier ferry services so as to expand the business opportunities of the peripheral area of the airport and promote tourism on Lantau Island. The member of the public has also pointed out that while the Government has all along rejected the aforesaid suggestion, it has agreed to call tender again for leasing out the Tuen Mun Ferry Terminal, whose scheduled service and passengers have been sparse and few, to shipping companies to operate cross-boundary ferry services between Tuen Mun and Macao from April 2011, and such arrangement is a waste of resources. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) whether it knows the cross-boundary passenger throughput of the SkyPier last year; and the annual passenger flow of the Macao Ferry Terminal and China Ferry Terminal at present; and whether it has assessed, based on the patronage, if the operations of such terminals are cost effective; if it has, of the outcome;
- (b) of the justifications for the Government to agree to lease out the Tuen Mun Ferry Terminal again for operating cross-boundary ferry routes to and from Macao;
- (c) given that the authorities indicated that in 2008 and 2009, the Airport Authority (AA) had looked into a proposal of providing customs and immigration facilities at the SkyPier, whether the Government will require AA to make public the study report, and of the obstacles in policy and operation which cause the authorities to decide that non-transit passengers may not use the SkyPier;
- (d) whether it knows the floor area in the SkyPier earmarked for providing customs and immigration facilities for non-transit passengers, as well as the uses of such area at present; whether it has assessed if there is any operational inefficiency in the overall utilisation of space at the pier at present; if such an assessment has been made, of the outcome;

(e) whether the Government will consider afresh making the services at the SkyPier available to non-transit passengers in response to the vast number of mainland visitors to be brought to Hong Kong by the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, so as to promote tourism development and convention and exhibition activities on Lantau Island to generate economic benefits; and

(f) of the authorities' timetable for reviewing the existing arrangements related to the SkyPier?

Reply:

President,

(a) Based on the information of the Airport Authority Hong Kong (AA), the cross-boundary passenger throughput of the SkyPier at the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) last year was 2,241,529. The SkyPier services aim to provide speedy ferry services for air-to-sea/sea-to-air transit passengers travelling to and from the Pearl River Delta (PRD) and Macao. As such services are one of the key measures to strengthen the links between the HKIA and the PRD and Macao, and are part of the airport services used by some passengers, the SkyPier is part of the airport passenger facilities and AA has not assessed the cost-effectiveness of the SkyPier operation on its own.

At present, cross-boundary ferry service operating from the government-managed Hong Kong-Macao Ferry Terminal (MFT) and China Ferry Terminal (CFT) connects Hong Kong to Macao and 13 ports in the Mainland. According to statistics of the Marine Department, the patronage of MFT and CFT last year amounted to 17,267,326 and 7,239,758 respectively which represented an increase by 10.7% and 8.9% respectively when compared with 2009. These two cross-boundary ferry terminals are public facilities with growth in total patronage by over 40% in the past ten years, contributing to a diversified cross-boundary transport service for travellers. In 2010, five new cross-boundary ferry routes between Macao and the two terminals were launched. As demonstrated by the above, these two cross-boundary ferry terminals have positive impact on enhancing the connectivity between Hong Kong and the PRD and help maintain Hong Kong's position as a transport and maritime hub.

(b) All along, cross-boundary ferry terminals are planned and provided by the Government on a territory-wide basis. Given the two cross-boundary ferry terminals managed by the Government still have sufficient capacity to meet the projected demand in future, the Government has no intention to spend public monies to build another cross-boundary ferry terminal for a particular district.

The mode of operation of the Tuen Mun Ferry Terminal (TMFT) is different from that of MFT and CFT. In 2003, certain private enterprises indicated interest in making modifications to the Tuen Mun Ferry Pier at their own costs in order to operate cross-boundary ferry services thereat. Having considered the requests from the local community and the views of the Legislative Council, and that the proposal could bring about one more choice and convenient cross-boundary transport service to the residents in the New Territories, the Government decided to invite bids to take up a tenancy of part of the Tuen Mun Ferry Pier for the operation of cross-boundary passenger ferry service by a private operator.

In accordance with the tenancy agreement concluded at that time, apart from financing the necessary modification works, the operator was required to pay the Government a monthly rental, as well as to be responsible for other expenses, including utilities charges and general maintenance, etc. On the other hand, the Government would provide necessary supporting services, such as immigration, customs, police, marine control and port health. In view of the expiration of the original tenancy agreement in December last year, the Government, having thoroughly considered the existing policy as well as the opinions of the Tuen Mun community, decided in mid 2010 to conduct an open tender exercise so as to enable the concerned cross-boundary ferry service to continue under the same mode of operation.

(c) In 2008 and 2009, AA looked into a proposal of providing customs, immigration and quarantine (CIQ) facilities at the SkyPier. After considering the relevant factors (including the economic situation at that time, cross-strait direct flights and the impact of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge on the estimated service demand), AA has concluded that the provision of the CIQ facilities will not increase the usage of the SkyPier services by transit passengers. AA has therefore decided not to pursue the proposal. The relevant documents are for AA's internal reference and not suitable for being made public.

(d) At present, no space is available for providing CIQ facilities at the SkyPier. The

four berths of the SkyPier now cope with an average of 113 ferry sailings each day, and the berthing hours from 8 am to 5 pm on a weekday are nearly fully used.

(e) and (f) The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge will commence operation in 2016. Its Hong Kong Boundary Crossing Facilities will be provided with CIQ facilities and public transport interchange facilities. It will also accommodate road sections for traffic to and from the North West New Territories and North Lantau and will become a strategic multi-modal transportation hub on the west of Hong Kong, making travel between Hong Kong and the PRD more convenient. Hence, the Government and AA have no plans now to review the existing arrangements.

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