

Response to Proposal to Establish the Innovation and Technology Bureau (ITB)

LC Paper No. CB(4)532/13-14(04)

Date: April 29, 2014

First of all, I would like to express my strong support for the establishment of the ITB. I believe it is a long overdue and important strategic initiative for Hong Kong. I also support the overall conceptual structure of forming the ITB, drawing from the knowledge base and operations at the respective CEDB and CTB departments.

That being said, it is extremely important to note that, the major reason for reorganizing into the ITB is on the synergistic value beyond efficiency only. That means the key questions we need to ask is not what existing functions will be preserved (or even enhanced), but what future functions of the ITB may look like and include. More specifically, the Proposal to establish the ITB must contain concrete future functions that would be possible now that Innovation and Technology are elevated to a bureau level.

If we truly believe that the ITB is setup with an aim to “signify the Government’s commitment and determination to stay ahead in the global race”, then we can no longer afford to look within Hong Kong only, and have the ITB’s activities confined to the local. Today, global Internet governance, standards, protocols and policies developments affect local businesses and users directly, and Hong Kong government’s participation in the global multistakeholder model is critical for Hong Kong to stay ahead.

In particular, I would like to recommend that the ITB look into several sorely missing high level strategic functions that the HKSAR government should be able to address once the ITB is formed (and which are lacking because of the current separation and structural level of respective departments):

Global Internet policy & standards development – the ITB, must actively participate in ICANN (www.icann.org), IETF (www.ietf.org), W3C (www.w3c.org), UNIGF (www.intgovforum.org), NETmundial (www.netmundial.br), etc. Unlike multilateral driven global policies, the global Internet governance discussions emphasize a multi-stakeholder approach, which means HK cannot depend only on the participation by the Central government in these issues. In fact, the ITB can coordinate with and support our Central government where appropriate in the global forums as well. The HK government must dedicate efforts to actively participate in these forums to look out for the public interests of HK citizens and businesses.

Cyber-security, Cyber-safety & Cyber-warfare – cyber-security is an issue requiring cross jurisdictional, international and global coordination. Again, unlike in traditional physical security where we could depend on the PLA, HK must have appropriate high-level strategic measures to combat cyber-crime and cyber-warfare. Furthermore, this is not a matter that can be solved by the police or law enforcement agencies alone (or in their silos). Based on proven international experience, effective preparations to address these issues must embrace a multi-stakeholder, open and transparent model and must avoid the trap of security by obscurity. ITB should proactively bring together a platform for such coordination.

Privacy, Online Rights & Mass Surveillance – in HK as a highly developed economy, privacy must be a right to be recognized and must not be compromised against mass surveillance or similar arbitrary or

unlawful monitoring. Because of the Internet, mass surveillance of HK citizen activities online by non-local actors must also be addressed. Such require the coordination of the HK government with other jurisdictions. Furthermore, other online rights, including freedom of information, freedom of expression, etc. must be upheld online as they are observed offline, and such high level strategic initiatives, including potentially introducing amendments or new ordinances as necessary. For example, Brazil had recently passed an Internet Bill of Rights in response to the mass surveillance revelations, while the European Union Court ruled against the Data Retention Directive which was original passed in 2006 (<http://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2014-04/cp140054en.pdf>) to guard against data leakage such as those seen during the real-name requirements in Korea. These international developments must not only be observed and studied. Proactive initiatives in HK should be coordinated by the future ITB. Here again, especially given the one-country-two-system, we cannot rely solely on the efforts from mainland/Central authorities/representative. The ITB must participate in the multilateral as well as multi-stakeholder discussions internationally to ensure that HK views are advanced

Innovation and Technology – innovation is not just about inventions or application of technology. A broad universal approach to innovation starts from education and should be encouraged in every aspect in life, study, work and play. Furthermore, it is not only about innovation with technology but also innovation given the prevalence of technology. Also, welfare and social safety-net must be enhanced to support innovators. Not all innovators succeed. If we do not have appropriate social safety-net for our innovators, we cannot foster an innovative environment where innovation is encouraged. Again, innovations in all aspects must be promoted by the ITB, from simple innovations at home or the office place to make one’s desk more comfortable to work in, to innovations in process and policies, to innovations in waste management and reduction. The ITB must embrace the multi-dimensional nature of innovation and proactively bring together relevant bureaus (and their respective departments) to cultivate a culture of innovation in HK for innovation in technology to ultimately take hold and be fruitful.

As a brief summary, the above are just some of many initiatives that the ITB should engage in immediately as it is formed. These initiatives cannot be fully taken onboard by the previous departments while they were under CEDB and CTB respectively as neither the departments themselves nor the parent bureau has, within their respective scope, the ability to engage effectively. At a bureau level dedicated to strategic initiatives for HK in Innovation and Technology, the ITB can and must finally help the HK government catch up in all of the above and perhaps more.

Finally, the community here in HK who have been participating in the many initiatives above as technology community, academic, civil society or businesses in the multi-stakeholder dialogues stands more than ready to support and assist the future ITB to effectively engage the global community so HK can really stay ahead in the global race.

Sincerely,

Edmon Chung
Chief Executive Officer, DotAsia Organisation
Head of Secretariat, Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum
International Liaison, Internet Society Hong Kong

This letter was prepared in response to the Proposal to Establish the Innovation and Technology Bureau:
<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr13-14/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0414cb4-532-4-e.pdf>