

Legislative Council Panel on Transport

Traffic Conditions in Lok Ma Chau

PURPOSE

This paper briefs members on the current passenger and vehicular traffic conditions at Lok Ma Chau and the various measures being implemented or planned by the Administration to smoothen passenger and vehicular flows at the control point.

BACKGROUND

Current Traffic Conditions at Lok Ma Chau

2. Lok Ma Chau (LMC) is currently the largest and most popular vehicular crossing, handling about 68% of all cross-boundary traffic (or around 21,000 vehicle trips a day). The volume of cross-boundary traffic at LMC has increased by 69% from 4.5 million vehicular trips in 1995 to 7.6 million in 2000. At present, about 80% of the 21,000 daily average vehicular trips are made by goods/container vehicles, with the remainder by coaches, shuttle buses, private cars and hire cars. Traffic at LMC is usually most heavy on Fridays.

3. Lo Wu is the main crossing point for cross-boundary passenger movements, handling some 87% of all cross-boundary commuters (or 236,000 passengers a day). LMC comes second and handles about 11% of all cross-boundary passenger traffic (or a daily throughput of 29,900 passengers) with the LMC-Huanggang shuttle bus service and other cross-boundary coach services. The volume of passenger movements at LMC has increased by over 3 times from 2.5 million in 1995 to 10.9 million in 2000. The average daily patronage of the

LMC-Huanggang shuttle bus has increased from 4,400 passengers in 1997 (when the service was first introduced) to 13,700 passengers in 2000, representing a 211% growth. Passenger traffic at LMC is particularly heavy during weekends and long holidays.

4. The substantial growth in cross-boundary traffic has resulted in serious congestion problem at LMC. Following the implementation of improvement measures by both the HKSARG and the Mainland (including the deployment of additional manpower resources, streamlining of clearance procedures and enhanced communication between the two sides) as well as commissioning of additional kiosks for immigration and customs clearance of vehicles, congestion at LMC has been much alleviated but continuous improvements are still needed to cater for the growth in traffic demand.

Improvement Measures

LMC Control Point Expansion Programme

5. To speed up the traffic flow at LMC Control Point, 10 additional pairs of kiosks for immigration and customs clearance of cross-boundary vehicles were constructed under Phase I of the LMC expansion programme. The kiosks commenced operation in December 1999, increasing the total number of kiosks from 14 to 24 pairs, and the processing capacity from 19,000 to 32,000 vehicles a day.

6. Congestion at LMC has been much alleviated following commissioning of the new kiosks. Surveys conducted in late 1999 and early

2000 revealed that the average waiting time for vehicles to proceed from the approach roads to LMC control point has been reduced from one hour to 20 minutes. Traffic on the LMC corridor flows smoothly and no queue is observed in most hours of the day. The Transport Department will continue to closely monitor the situation.

7. The LMC Phase II project includes expansion of the Immigration Hall, installation of X-ray machines for customs inspection of cross-boundary vehicles, additional lay-bys for coaches and reconstruction of the old kiosks. The works commenced in November 2000 and are scheduled for completion in September 2003. Upon completion of the Phase II works, the handling capacity of the LMC control point will be increased from 25,000 to 35,000 passengers a day.

8. To minimise disruption to cross-boundary traffic, the old kiosks will be reconstructed by phases under Phase II. At least nine pairs of kiosks will be available for vehicular clearance in each direction between now and July 2001. To cater for heavy vehicular traffic during the peak season, the works have been so scheduled to ensure that all the kiosks (24 pairs in total) will be open during the peak season in August and September in 2001 and 2002. In the off-peak seasons after coming September, at least ten pairs of kiosks will be available in each direction at any time until completion of the Phase II project. Given that majority of the trips are made by goods/container vehicles, two pairs of kiosks in each direction will be designated for shared use by goods/container vehicles and private cars while the remaining will be designated for use by goods/container vehicles only.

Other Improvement Works

9. Apart from introducing traffic management measures (e.g. the introduction of traffic signs and road markings to prevent goods vehicles from queue jumping), minor improvement works have also been or are being implemented to improve the cross-boundary traffic flow. These include –

- (a) expanding the slip road leading to the southbound vehicle holding area from one to two lanes in September 2000 to enable two vehicles to enter the holding area simultaneously;
- (b) widening the approach road to LMC so as to segregate cross-boundary goods vehicles from passenger vehicles by July 2001;
and
- (c) installing CCTVs to better monitor traffic flows by the third quarter of 2001.

New Arrangement for Immigration and Customs Clearance for Passengers in Private Cars

10. To facilitate traffic flow at kiosk lanes at LMC control point, a new arrangement has been implemented since 7 February 2001 whereby private cars that do not carry any passengers or that carry passengers who are Hong Kong residents will be segregated for clearance from private cars carrying non-Hong Kong residents.

Automation of Customs Clearance

11. To enhance the efficiency of customs operations at land boundary crossings, the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) has been exploring means to speed up cargo clearance and streamline clearance procedures through the application of advanced technology. In 2001/02, a sum of \$14 million has been reserved to install 42 sets of Automatic Vehicle Recognition system (AVRS) at the three land boundary control points, including LMC. Installation work will be completed in September 2003. With the use of the AVRS, Customs officers at the kiosks will no longer be required to input vehicle licence numbers, thereby shortening the processing time by about 5 to 6 seconds per vehicle.

12. A pre-arrival customs clearance arrangement for cargo vehicles has been successfully tried out at northbound traffic lanes at LMC control point. C&ED is considering extending this arrangement to the southbound traffic lanes at LMC and the other two land boundary crossing points. At the same time, C&ED is actively examining the feasibility of implementing a new "Road Manifest" system, which will allow electronic pre-arrival clearance for cross-boundary cargo vehicles and hence further expedite vehicular clearance.

Three-Stage Emergency Response and Liaison Mechanism

13. The Security Bureau, in consultation with Bureaux and departments concerned as well as the Mainland authorities, has devised an emergency response and liaison mechanism for LMC control point, which classifies traffic incidents on the approach roads leading to the control point into three stages of alert according to the extent of the congestion and length of tailback. It sets out

clearly the actions to be taken by various departments to deal with traffic incidents under different stages of alert so that traffic situation could resume normal as soon as possible. If congestion is caused by traffic tailing back from the Mainland side, boundary liaison officers and where necessary, the Security Bureau, will liaise with their Mainland counterparts with a view to ascertaining the cause of congestion, assessing the extent of the problem and taking necessary corresponding measures. The above system has worked well and similar emergency response and liaison mechanisms have now been devised for the Man Kam To and Sha Tau Kok control points.

Lok Ma Chau (LMC) - Huanggang Shuttle Bus Service

14. The LMC-Huanggang shuttle bus service was introduced in March 1997. It operates from 7.00 a.m. to 9.30 p.m. daily, providing service between San Tin in Yuen Long and the Huanggang Control Point on the Mainland side via the LMC Control Point.

15. The shuttle bus operator has a fleet of 10 buses. It has a maximum carrying capacity of about 1,100 passengers per peak hour at present.

Measures Taken/Planned to Enhance the Shuttle Bus Service

16. To cope with increasing demand, the operator will replace six existing shuttle buses by larger vehicles which can carry more passengers. When the conversion is completed by around mid 2001, the maximum handling capacity of the shuttle bus service will increase by about 18% to about 1,300 passengers per peak hour.

17. In anticipation of upsurge in demand during the Ching Ming and Easter Holidays, special arrangement was made to allow the operator to deploy up to two additional vehicles to enhance its service. This arrangement was implemented during 5-9 and 12-16 April.

18. We also plan to improve the environment of the San Tin shuttle bus terminus by providing additional shelters and lighting facilities over the passenger holding area. Works are targetted to commence before end 2001 and are expected to be completed in about one year.

Possible Measures to Further Enhance the Shuttle Bus Service

19. We are examining the feasibility of the following possible measures to further enhance the shuttle bus service :-

- (a) to replace more of the existing shuttle buses with larger vehicles;
- (b) to modify the internal layout and seating arrangement of the buses to further increase their passenger carrying capacity e.g. by providing more spaces for standees; and
- (c) to retain part or all of the existing buses which are to be replaced by larger vehicles as operational reserve for use when necessary to meet very high passenger demand during peak periods.

20. The Administration is examining the details in conjunction with the shuttle bus operator. However, any expansion plan must also have regard to the

clearance capacity and arrangement at the LMC Control Point. Furthermore, changes to the service level or the fleet size of the shuttle bus service are subject to the mutual agreement between HKSARG and the Shenzhen Authorities.

WAY FORWARD

21. While the Administration will continue to seek ways to enhance the vehicular and passenger flows at LMC, new crossings will be required to meet the long-term demand. We are now discussing with the Mainland authorities the implementation arrangements for the Shenzhen Western Corridor (SWC). The design handling capacity of SWC is 42,000 vehicles a day. Under the LMC Spur Line project, a new immigration control point for rail passengers with a handling capacity of around 150,000, expandable to 300,000, will be set up. The statutory procedures for the project are underway. The project will commence as soon as the statutory procedures have been settled.

Transport Bureau
April