

LCQ12: Building a mega business and shopping centre near the boundary

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Gregory So, in the Legislative Council today (April 9):

Question:

It is learnt that over 30 million Mainland visitors entered Hong Kong by land transport in 2013. There are comments that although such visitors can help boost the economic development of Hong Kong, they have also caused some problems, such as shop rentals soaring continuously which have led to the closure of some small and unique shops, overcrowding of vehicle/train compartments of public transport and the streets, rising commodity prices, as well as shortage of certain daily necessities. On the other hand, residents in the New Territories North have to travel to other districts to work due to insufficient job opportunities in their district. Thus, building a mega business and shopping centre in an area close to the boundary can not only divert the excessive number of visitors from the urban areas, but also create job opportunities for residents in areas near the boundary in the New Territories North. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the upcoming "Preliminary Feasibility Study on Developing the New Territories North" will include studying the feasibility of building the aforesaid business and shopping centre; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will include this subject in the Study;

(2) whether it will consider identifying a suitable site in an area close to the boundary for building the aforesaid business and shopping centre, and applying to the Town Planning Board for zoning the site for "Other Specified Uses" annotated "Business" to facilitate private enterprises to develop such facilities on that site; and

(3) whether it has plans, in collaboration with the MTR Corporation Limited, to explore the feasibility of constructing a new station along the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line and building the aforesaid business and shopping centre above that station?

Reply:

President,

Tourism is an important pillar industry of Hong Kong's economy. Continued expansion in visitor arrivals certainly brings challenges to Hong Kong, while it also promotes economic growth and stimulates employment. In 2013, visitors contributed consumption of more than \$340 billion, and stimulated the growth of many tourism-related industries, including the retail, catering and transportation trades which also provided many job opportunities with relatively low skill requirement.

The Government realises that continued expansion of visitor arrivals in recent years and excessive concentration of visitors will bring pressure and challenges to the society and general public. Therefore, the Government will strive to balance the impact of tourism on the local economy and residents' livelihood, and will work to enhance Hong Kong's tourist receiving capacity in various aspects. The measures include strengthening the promotion of different districts' characteristics to provide more choices to visitors on one hand and to alleviate congestion in traditional popular tourist areas on the other; as well as encouraging visitors to visit and consume in tourist attractions of different districts, with a view to expanding the overall economic benefits of the tourism industry.

The New Territories North is strategically located near the Mainland in close proximity to a number of land boundary crossings. From the tourism perspective, developing business and shopping centre(s) in these areas could redirect visitors to these areas which help alleviate pressure in the traditional popular tourist areas. It could also create more job opportunities for residents of the New Territories.

Having consulted the Development Bureau and the Transport and Housing Bureau, my reply to the Hon Chan's question is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Planning Department and the Civil Engineering and Development Department jointly commissioned a consultant in January 2014 to conduct the Preliminary Feasibility Study on Developing the New Territories North (the Study). The Study will examine the feasibility of economic development and job creation near the three boundary control points at Lok Ma Chau, Man Kam To and Liantang/Heung Yuen Wai in the New Territories North and identify potential areas for such development; formulate broad land uses and development scale of these areas; and ascertain their preliminary technical feasibility and major supporting infrastructures required. Public engagement activities will be carried out during the course of the Study, and the Study will take into account the proposal for developing business and

shopping centre(s) should there be any. The Development Bureau anticipates that the Study will complete in around mid 2015.

At present, should any person or organisation have a concrete proposal for developing a business and shopping centre at suitable location in the New Territories North, he/she can make an application for or proceed with such development in accordance with the prevailing planning and land administration procedures. The Tourism Commission will be glad to coordinate with the government departments concerned to provide the relevant information and assistance to the project proponent if necessary.

(3) The Government has earlier commissioned a consultant to conduct a study for the Review and Update of the Railway Development Strategy 2000, with a view to updating the long-term railway development blueprint for Hong Kong to cater for the latest development needs of the society. Two stages of public engagement exercise have been conducted to explore the conceptual proposals of 10 railway schemes (including adding a Kwu Tung Station on the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line). The Transport and Housing Bureau is finalising the blueprint for railway development beyond 2020 having regard to three major aspects, namely transport demand, cost-effectiveness and development needs of the New Development Areas, and will announce the way forward for the new railway proposals later in 2014. When individual projects proceed to the detailed planning stage, the Government will further study the technical details (including the coordination with the proposed facilities in the New Development Areas) and consult the public on the projects.

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