

LCQ17: Usage of facilities at Chek Lap Kok Air Mail Centre

Following is a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mrs Rita Lau, to a question by the Hon Albert Chan in the Legislative Council today (April 22):

Question:

The Air Mail Centre (the Centre) situated at Chek Lap Kok has come into operation for over 10 years since 1998. I have recently received complaints that a large quantity of expensive facilities installed in the Centre several years ago are still being left idle while the staff of the Centre still have to move bulky parcels manually. It has been reported that in March this year, Hongkong Post refused to give a detailed response about the aforesaid situation on grounds of "internal operation and aviation security". In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether the electronic display panel in the Centre can display real-time flight information (including flight delay messages); if not, of the reasons for that;

(b) in respect of each conveyor belt on each floor of the Centre, of the daily average number of hours it was in operation and the daily average quantity of parcels it handled last year;

(c) why the pulley duct and large turntable packing platform on the first floor of the Centre, the large lift linking the ground floor to the second floor, as well as the X-ray scanner for human beings and objects have been left idle for a long time;

(d) of the reasons why bulky parcels still have to be moved manually in the Centre; and

(e) whether it will consider taking measures to improve efficiency of parcel handling in the Centre, and penalising the staff concerned for not taking measures to enable the aforesaid facilities to be fully utilised; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

To tie in with the relocation of the airport from Kai Tak to Chek Lap Kok, the Post Office (PO) constructed the Air Mail Centre (AMC) at the Hong Kong International Airport. The Postal Mechanisation System (POMS) came into operation in July 1998. However, between then and the design of the AMC facilities in the early 1990s, there were changes to the operating environment and the nature of international mail. These changes, together with the less-than-expected growth in the mail volume, have led to the underutilisation of some of the AMC facilities. The Audit Commission carried out an audit review on the POMS, and set out its concern and recommendations regarding the operation and cost-effectiveness of the POMS in Report No. 44 of the Director of Audit released in March 2005. Subsequently, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the Legislative Council held hearings on the project and set out its conclusions and recommendations in PAC Report No 44. The PO has completed all the follow-up actions recommended by the Audit Commission and the PAC, and has submitted regular reports to the Legislative Council.

My replies to the questions raised by the Hon Albert Chan are as follows:

(a) The electronic display panel at the AMC shows information on flights to mailing destinations to facilitate mail sorting by AMC staff in the order of the flights' departure time. While the panel cannot provide information on flight delay or cancellation, the AMC has established with the airlines or their agents a communication mechanism through which information on flight changes is available immediately so that the officer-in-charge can make the necessary adjustments based on operational needs.

(b) The AMC is equipped with a conveyor system that comprises five units, i.e. Units A, B, D, E and F. The system is mainly used for handling parcels and Speedpost items. The locations of these Units and their average daily operating hours during the past year are set out in Annex.

The Audit Commission also pointed out that the utilisation rate of Unit D had been low. The Unit was constructed in accordance with the operating conditions in the early 1990s. Due to subsequent changes to the operating environment, it has not been fully utilised.

(c) The three systems have not been put to use because of the following reasons:

Unit load device transfer system (UDTS) (i.e. the "pulley duct and large turntable packing platform" as stated in the question): According to PO's design concept of the AMC, the UDTS can dispatch inbound mail to the General Post Office and the International Mail Centre together with the unit load devices (ULDs), thereby obviating the need to open and unload the ULDs at the AMC. However, the plan did not materialise because of changes in the mode of operation. The UDTS has therefore not been put to use.

Container storage and retrieval system (CSRS) (i.e. the "large lift linking the ground floor to the second floor" as stated in the question): The CSRS at the AMC comprises storage bins for temporary storage of processed mail before dispatch to outbound aircrafts. However, as the number of flights at the Hong Kong International Airport has been higher than expected, the mail dispatch frequency has been very high, and the need for temporary storage decreases. The Audit Commission was aware of the situation when it conducted the audit review. The PO has already used the facility for other storage purpose, so as to better utilise resources.

Metal Detector Archway (i.e. the "X-ray scanner for human beings and objects" as stated in the question): The PO originally planned to install a metal detector archway at both the main entrance and the entrance of the airside platform to enhance security at the AMC. However, since all people entering the AMC have already passed their security check, the PO considers it unnecessary to install such a detector at the entrance of the airside platform.

(d) Currently, the Packet Sorting System and the Parcel Sorting System at the AMC handle over 90% of the packets and 60% of the parcels each day. Other mail items with odd shape, thickness, size or weight that cannot be sorted by machines require manual sorting. Owing to the practical operational needs of the AMC, it is inevitable that parcels would have to be moved manually. Examples include placing these parcels in mail bags for sealing and dispatch.

(e) The Audit Commission has recommended that continuous effort should be made by the PO to further improve the performance of the POMS. Pursuant to this recommendation, the PO, with the assistance of the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, has gradually improved the performance of the Packet Sorting System, and has raised its utilisation rate from an average of sorting 31% of packets each year in 1999-2004 to 92% last year. As for the Parcel Sorting System, since it has been in use for over 10 years i.e. two-third of its designed operating life,

there is little room to further improve its performance. We have reported this to the Legislative Council in May 2007.

As mentioned above, the main reason for the underutilisation of the system is that there have been changes in the operating conditions and the nature of mail items since the system was designed in the early 1990s.

Ends/Wednesday, April 22, 2009

Locations of units of conveyer system and their average daily
operating hours during the past year

Unit	Location	Average daily operating hours during the past year
A	From the roadside platform to the X-ray machine at the entrance	18 hours
B	From G/F to the Parcel Sorting System	13.5 hours
D	From G/F to the raised platform of the Transit Section	0.5 hour
E	From the raised platform to G/F of the Transit Section	16 hours ^(Note)
F	Linkage with the Parcel Sorting System	18 hours ^(Note)

^{Note:} Some parts of the Units have not been used. The above operating hours only apply to other parts of the Units.