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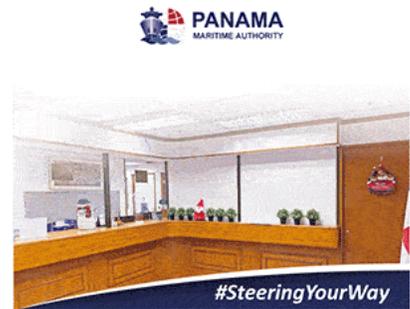
WCT responds to Government stance on ancillary transport and accommodation at Kai Tak Cruise Terminal

🕒 March 19, 2021 👤 Michael Grinter 📁 Port




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WCT responds to Government stance on

On 17 March, Hong Kong lawmaker Regina Ip, questioned the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Edward Yau, on the adequacy of the ancillary and accommodation facilities at Kai Tak Cruise Terminal as well as future policies in this respect. A link to the full exchange can be found at the foot of this article.

Jeff Bent, managing director of Worldwide Cruise Terminals, operator at the KTCT has offered the following response to that exchange:

I've been educating the government on the very unique transportation needs of a cruise homeport, and it's clear I still have a lot of work to do. Cruise is a niche business; it is natural that most do not understand the needs. The differences between a transit port and a home port are substantial, and these were not understood when the terminal was built. The differences between a cruise home port and an airport or major train terminus are also stark. We have an opportunity to address some of these initial planning failures before the district is fully built out, but if we fail to do so, the mistakes will be irreversible.

Difference 1: Tidal flows

Cruise terminal traffic is entirely tidal. The tide rushes out from 07:30-09:30 as thousands of passengers disembark and leave. The tide flows back in from 13:00-17:00 as new passengers arrive and check in. This is in contrast to an airport or train terminus, where relatively small vessels are arriving and departing all day. At the airport, a taxi bringing a passenger in can bring another passenger out. At the cruise terminal, in the morning a taxi needs to make an empty trip in to leave with a passenger. In the afternoon, a taxi will bring a passenger in, but then leave empty. This is four vehicle times. A private car that can park at the terminal arrives full once and leaves full once. A private car reduces road congestion, and during peak hours to boot. This is why modern homeports are built with around 2000 parking spaces per berth. Kai Tak has 120 parking spaces, which are full every weekend even now, just from park visitors, without any banquets or cruise ships at berth. Per the Hong Kong Planning

ancillary transport and accommodation at Kai Tak Cruise Terminal

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Standards and Guidelines, a commercial facility the size of the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal should have 845 parking spaces.

To reduce traffic when cruises resume, we should let willing locals 'park and cruise', and leave taxis for the out-of-towners. We should plan additional levels of underground parking for 'park and cruise' at the unsold sites adjacent to the cruise terminal. The parking has to be right next to the terminal, so people can walk from their cars. If we want to skate where the puck is going and make these additional car parks EV or zero tailpipe emissions vehicles only, that's OK. We can reduce both traffic and roadside emissions.

Difference 2: Passenger profile

Unlike the airport and rail termini, who have many solo business travelers with little luggage, the cruise terminal is all leisure travelers, predominantly multiple generational families, with a lot of luggage. It is the nature of cruise travel. For the airport, with steady daily flows of passengers throughout the day every day, most people can get there via two modes of local transport, e.g. taxi to airport express, or to airport bus. To get to the cruise terminal, most people need to take four modes, e.g. minibus to MTR line 1, to MTR line 2, to bus. For the cruise terminal's 'lumpy' sporadic but very heavy flows, regular public transport is not economical for the operators. The large quantities of luggage mean that double decker buses with luggage racks at the cruise terminal can only accommodate 40-50 passengers, versus airport buses that can be fully seated, given many riders are either airport staff with no bags, or business travelers with only one carry-on.

For a family with kids and grandparents and a lot of luggage in tow, that can afford a cruise vacation, there is a very strong incentive to take point to point transport—taxi, limo, or private car. Even if the first public transport 'leg' out of the cruise terminal is on a vehicle with luggage racks, the next three legs will not have luggage racks. My wife would kill me if I suggested we take four legs of public transport with the kids, grandparents and luggage.

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Difference 3: Metro connectivity

Our airport and major train termini have direct MTR connections. The cruise terminal does not. We missed an opportunity to plan a dedicated lane for a tram or light rail from the cruise terminal to an MTR station. We passed up the opportunity for a monorail, which is fine, but now we need to adjust the planning, which is different for districts with and without a rail connection. Districts without rail are allocated more parking.

Recommendations

We should enhance ferry connectivity at Kai Tak with landing steps or a pontoon at the runway tip, where the North Point – Kwun Tong ferry can easily stop over. We should provide landing steps for kaito service to Hoi Bun Road near the Ngau Tau Kok MTR station. The operators are willing if the facilities are there. Ferry service would primarily be for local residents, and park visitors.

Adjacent hotels can also ease peak traffic if out of town guests, who often arrive a day or two before the cruise, can simply walk to and from the facility, rather than taking a taxi to a hotel in TST. I don't see how the district plans could go from six hotels and a tourism node to zero hotels and a tourism node. What was the change in thinking? It will be odd if the cruise terminal ends up located in a purely residential district.

The good news is that the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal met government throughput targets for 2023 seven years early, in 2016. The government's HK\$6.6bn investment is already over 90% paid back. Traffic will continue to grow. From next year, the cruise terminal will start hosting the largest cruise ship in the world, with 8000-9000 souls onboard. I just hope that we plan the Kai Tak District and its transportation facilities appropriately, before it is completely built out.

<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202103/17/P2021031700491.htm>

