

Consultation paper

PORT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

Proposal of Optimizing the Use of Central Harbour Transit

Purpose

Currently, specified types of cruise ships¹ at the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal (“KTCT”) may ply through the Central Fairway, Northern Fairway and Western Fairway (collectively called the “Central Harbour Transit (CHT)”) during the period between 19:00 and 22:00 hours (“transit window”) daily without the need to obtain prior approval from the Vessel Traffic Centre (“VTC”) of the Marine Department (“MD”). This paper serves to seek members’ comments and supports with regard to the proposal of optimizing the aforementioned transit window.

Background

2. In February 2024, the relevant consultative committees² under the MD collectively endorsed the relevant consultation papers³ on the establishment of a 24-month trial scheme. The trial scheme commenced on 4 March 2024 with the establishment of the transit window to allow specified types of cruise ships berthing/unberthing at KTCT, whilst meeting the berthing guidelines (“BGL”) (*Annex I*), to ply through CHT without the need to obtain prior approval from VTC.

3. For any cruise ships intending to use CHT outside the transit window or not belonging to the specified types of cruise ships, the ships are still required to

1 i.e. highly maneuverable ocean-going passenger vessels (“OGPV”) under 345m Length Overall (“LOA”); and conventional OGPVs under 290m LOA.

2 Port Operations Committee (POC); Pilotage Advisory Committee (PAC), Locals Vessels Advisory Committee (LVAC) and High Speed Craft Consultative Committee (HSCCC).

3 PAC Paper No. 6/2023; LVAC Paper No. 16/2023; POC Paper No. 4/2023; and HSCCC Paper No. 3/2023 and the relevant supplementary notes to these papers.

apply to VTC for permission on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the existing practice.

Current Situation of the Trial Scheme and the Proposal of Optimizing the Transit Window

4. The Government has always actively propelled and strengthened the development of cruise tourism. Indeed, the spirit of implementing the trial scheme aims to draw a balance between navigational safety of vessels using CHT and the development of cruise tourism. Although no cruise ship has ever taken the route of CHT through the scheme since its implementation⁴, some cruise lines have already expressed their intention to regularly ply through CHT when planning for their future homeporting operations, thereby enhancing the attractiveness of their cruise itineraries in source markets worldwide and bringing more visitors to Hong Kong. Meanwhile, the MD also observes that the operations of the majority of cruise ships for berthing/unberthing at KTCT are conducted outside the transit window.

5. In consideration the current harbour marine traffic flow is lower than the time when a study, as commissioned by the Tourism Commission (“TC”), was conducted in recent years, the MD considers that there is room to optimize the transit window thus **proposing to adjust the transit window from its existing period to the period of 18:00 hours of a day to 06:00 hours the next day (“newly proposed transit window”)**, without the need to obtain prior approval from VTC but subject to comply with the relevant BGL (*Annex II*).

6. Any cruise ships intending to use CHT outside the newly proposed transit window or not the specified types of cruise ships are still required to follow existing practice of seeking approval from VTC.

7. Apart from the newly proposed transit window, all other conditions such as specified types of cruise ships; mitigation measures; KTCT operator to publish CHT transit schedule in advance to inform harbour users and the general public etc. under the trial scheme (as contained in the documents listed in Footnote 3) remain valid and be followed by relevant stakeholders.

8. In view of the newly proposed transit window, the earliest and latest pilot on board time for inbound vessels and terminal departure time for outbound vessels have also been amended accordingly (*Annex III*).

⁴ The VTC permitted CHT of Serenade of the Seas berthing at KTCT on 28 Mar 2024, which was the maiden call of the ship.

Way forward

9. The newly proposed transit window is still under the 24-month trial scheme as commenced on 4 March 2024. The MD and TC will continuously monitor the smoothness of the operation of the trial scheme and, subject to actual circumstances as warranted, appropriate further adjustments as needed upon consultation with stakeholders may not be excluded.

10. Subject to the views of members and the Pilotage Advisory Committee about the proposal and the BGL amendments, it is anticipated that the newly proposed transit window may be implemented around mid to end of November 2024.

Advice Sought

11. Members' supports are hereby sought. If members have any comments, please liaise with the Secretariat on or before 11 November 2024.

Marine Department
28 October 2024