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HKIA faces a pressing need for expansion as traffic demand grows faster than forecast

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Since the opening of Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) at Chek Lap Kok in 1998, air traffic has grown at a phenomenal rate. In 2012 the HKIA handled 56.5 million passengers, 352,000 take offs and landings and 4.03 million tonnes of cargo, maintaining its position as one of the busiest aviation hubs in the world.

To meet air traffic demand in the medium-term, the Airport Authority (the AA) has invested over HK\$12 billion since 2011 in two development projects: the Midfield Development and the Apron Expansion, which together provide 48 parking stands, a new concourse at Midfield and other related facilities. These facilities will start to operate in phases by the end of 2015. In addition, in view of the faster-than-expected growth in demand, we plan to build 10 additional parking stands at Midfield in 2017. This will enable HKIA to accommodate up to 420,000 flight movements, which is the annual practical maximum runway capacity of HKIA's existing two-runway system. Notwithstanding the above, once these medium-term projects are completed, there will not be sufficient land within the airfield for further development of the airport.

What's more, current traffic volumes at HKIA are ahead of the HKIA Master Plan 2030 forecast, which implies that the current two-runway system of HKIA will likely approach its maximum handling capacity earlier than expected. There is, therefore, a pressing need to expand the airport into a three-runway system.

The air traffic demand forecast in the HKIA Master Plan 2030 has in fact taken into account factors such as the Express Rail Link that connects Hong Kong to the Mainland's high-speed train network, cross-strait direct flights between Taiwan and the Mainland, and the expansion plans of major airports in the Greater Pearl River Delta (GPRD). The GPRD is estimated to reach 387 million passenger trips and 18 million tonnes of cargo yearly by 2030. Such demand is well beyond the combined capacity of all five GPRD airports, namely HKIA, Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport, Shenzhen Bao'an International Airport, Macao International Airport and Zhuhai Airport.

Airport expansion needs long lead time to implement. If HKIA's development plan cannot be implemented as soon as practicable, Hong Kong will not be able to meet future demand for air traffic. This will also lead to increases in air fare and a contraction of HKIA's air network. Moreover, this will undermine Hong Kong's position as an international aviation hub and the city's economy, especially the competitiveness of the logistics and tourism sectors.

In order to meet the expected long-term growth in demand for air traffic, the AA is now carrying out a thorough and rigorous statutory Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) study for the three-runway system (3RS) project. We are now more than half-way

through the study and the AA will host an exhibition and two sessions of public forum in early August at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre to provide the public with an update on the EIA study and the 3RS project.

We wish to complete the relevant process smoothly and to commence construction as early as possible. In addition to a new runway, the 3RS project also includes facilities such as parking stands, passenger concourse/ terminal and other related operational systems. When the 3RS is commissioned and commences operation in 2023, the airport will be able to accommodate 620,000 aircraft movements per year, allowing HKIA to meet air traffic demand up to and possibly beyond 2030.

This year marks the 15th anniversary of HKIA, and in the past the airport has received enormous support from Hong Kong citizens and travellers around the world. We hope that the public can continue to support the expansion of HKIA and that together we can build a better Hong Kong.