

## **Environment a Key Focus for HKIA Expansion**

In the two weeks since Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK) launched the three-month consultation on Hong Kong International Airport's (HKIA) Master Plan 2030 (MP 2030) for the airport's future development, we have heard that stakeholders would like more information regarding the environmental impact of building a third runway. We welcome this feedback and are glad to address it.

We would like to reiterate two things. First, environmental stewardship has long been one of the core values of the Airport Authority. Second, environmental impact is listed in the consultation document for MP2030 as one of the five major factors the community needs to consider as they evaluate the two development options: to maintain and enhance the two-runway system, or to expand to a three-runway system.

The third runway alignment and airport layout plan that have been presented to the public were selected after studying 15 different runway alignment alternatives and 18 possible layouts. Their relative environmental advantages contributed significantly to their selections. The consultation document clearly states that building a third runway would have more environmental impact than maintaining the two-runway system. Our goal for a third runway, then, would be to reduce this impact as much as possible while maintaining passenger convenience, operational safety and efficiency.

Regarding the third runway option, environmental groups have expressed concern about three main areas: impact on marine ecology from reclamation; the possibility of additional noise pollution from increased air traffic; and the effects airport expansion might have on air quality and carbon emissions. These are all valid concerns, and we understand that we have a responsibility to ensure that they are addressed in a professional and satisfactory manner.

Marine ecology is the most talked-about subject. The reclamation would result in the permanent loss of 650 hectares of sea bed and marine habitat. We are fully prepared to compensate for or mitigate this loss in accordance with internationally recognised principles. While more detailed studies and assessments are required before we can arrive at specific measures, we want to assure the community that all options for minimising impact on Chinese White Dolphins and other marine life will be explored if the three-runway system is taken forward to the statutory environmental impact assessment (EIA) stage.

Our guiding principles are “avoid, minimise, mitigate and compensate”. Currently, we believe that mitigation could include setting up a dolphin exclusion zone and monitoring the density and behaviour of dolphins before, during and after construction and commissioning. We are open to reviewing approaches recommended by other parties. We also understand that establishing designated marine park areas has always been a viable compensation option. If we receive the approval to proceed to the EIA process, these measures will be evaluated further.

Noise is also a key issue, but Preliminary Noise Exposure Forecast (NEF) contours for Option 2 compared with contours published in 1998 indicate that the three-runway development option, operating at its full capacity, would not differ significantly in terms of noise from the two-runway system. The noise contours also comply with the land-use planning standard in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines. This would be because of improvements in aircraft and engine technology, which have resulted in quieter aircraft with fewer emissions; the institution of new flight paths as well as takeoff and landing procedures to minimise flights flying over residential areas; and the concentration of night-time traffic movements on the future middle and north runways while placing the south runway in standby mode, which would help alleviate noise impact on residents along the northern coast of Lantau.

Equally important is air quality and greenhouse emissions. Global research figures show the aviation industry, which is committed to carbon-neutral growth from 2020 onwards, only contributes 2% of the carbon emissions arising from human economic activities. Also, all aircraft produced today are required to meet engine certification standards adopted by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), which targets an NO<sub>x</sub> emissions reduction of 60% from the current standard by 2026. Meanwhile, preliminary projections show that air quality standards under a three-runway system would meet prevailing Air Quality Objectives (AQOs) requirements. Advances in aircraft engine design and aviation fuel are also expected to continue reducing emissions.

It needs to be emphasised that the environmental work AAHK has carried out thus far for the MP2030 consultation is only preliminary. A full statutory EIA would take place should the three-runway option be selected.

The decision to expand HKIA is not easy, but it is vital to the competitiveness of Hong Kong. We are committed to being one of the greenest airports in the world. We truly believe that development and environmental conservation are not mutually exclusive. Should Hong Kong decide that building a third runway is the best way forward, AAHK will work even more closely

with our stakeholders, especially environmental groups, to ensure as open, transparent, professional and responsible an EIA process as possible.

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