



HONG KONG AIRPORT STUDIES ADDING DAY AND NIGHT FLIGHTS AHEAD OF 2-RUNWAY CAPACITY CRUNCH

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The Airport Authority may increase take-offs at night to tackle a looming capacity crunch at Chek Lap Kok before a third runway is built, lawmakers were told yesterday.

Daytime capacity could also be raised from the present maximum of 68 take-offs and landings per hour -- which the operator said would be reached next year -- to 70 movements.

The plans were part of a two-pronged approach the authority's chief executive, Fred Lam Tin-fuk, had in mind to boost flights around the clock "before the complete saturation" of the airport.

"We are conducting a study to see if we can make use of technology to increase the number from 68 onwards," Lam said.

He said any increase "will be very limited, to 70 air traffic movements [ATMs] ... but it will be of extra help to the capacity of the airport as a whole".

The per-hour limit of 68 aircraft movements translates into 420,000 in a year - because night flights are scheduled at 37 an hour to avoid noise pollution.

Night-time capacity could be increased by granting new take-off and landing slots to quieter, more fuel-efficient aircraft. This would be the subject of a new study taking up to two years, Lam told lawmakers.

"Nowadays, planes are much quieter, so we are conducting a study," he said. "Now if we do not increase noise pollution, is it possible to add more ATMs at night? If that is possible, it may solve half of the problems."

Cathay Pacific, Dragonair and Hong Kong Airlines welcomed the measures. A spokeswoman for Cathay Pacific and Dragonair said: "As modern aircraft are increasingly quiet and more environmentally friendly, we believe certain night slots can also be better utilised."

Hong Kong Airlines welcomed "any initiative which is beneficial for strengthening Hong Kong's status as a premier international aviation hub".

Lam said, however, that the planned growth in flight handling would in no way "replace the need" for the HK\$141.5 billion third runway, which some critics say is unnecessary.

A spokesman for the Airport Development Concern Network, Michael Mo Kwan-tai, said it was a promising way to maximise capacity. "If the airport is using the maximum capacity, we would see the airport handling up to 72 or 73 flight movements per hour without significant changes."

Mo said flight traffic could then be monitored before a third runway was built.

But Green Sense president Roy Tam Hoi-pong, a candidate in district council elections this month in Ma Wan, near the airport, objected to more night flights. "Even if there are noise mitigation measures at night, I will not agree to increasing more flights at night because Ma Wan residents need to sleep."

04 NOVEMBER 2015

SOURCE: SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST

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