

USTH's speech on Cathay Pacific Airways' new passenger service to Milan (English only) (with photos)

Following is the speech by the Under Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Yau Shing-mu, at a press conference at Malpensa International Airport, Italy, on Cathay Pacific Airways' new passenger service to Milan yesterday (March 31, Milan time):

Chris (Pratt), Madam Mayor (of Milan, Mrs Moratti), Minister Cattaneo, friends of the media, ladies and gentlemen,

Buongiorno! (Good day!)

I am delighted to join this press conference on Cathay Pacific Airway's new four-weekly passenger service between Hong Kong and Milan.

Cathay Pacific's decision to launch the service has the support of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. This is in line with the Government policy on liberalising our air services regime to give our home carriers more opportunities to develop their routes.

Hong Kong is an international and regional aviation hub. We have some 90 airlines providing over 5,300 flights per week, with an aviation network of more than 110 international cities and about 40 Mainland destinations.

Last year was a difficult one for the aviation industry because of the financial crisis. Hong Kong was no exception, but we managed to minimise the adverse impact. The number of passengers dropped by 5% to 46.1 million, whilst cargo throughput was 3.35 million tonnes, down by 7.6%. That said, Hong Kong International Airport was the world's busiest international air cargo hub, and ranked fourth in terms of international passenger throughput.

The direct flights between the two cities have been warmly welcomed by businesses and the general public alike. Travellers now have a greater incentive to hop on the flights for business and leisure because the flights offer them choice and convenience.

I should add that the addition of Milan to our already extensive aviation network carries greater significance because of the respective roles of Milan and Hong Kong.

You know how important Milan is when it comes to business and finance, particularly in fashion, as well as its connectivity to other parts of southern Europe, northern Italy and other Mediterranean countries.

On the other hand, Hong Kong is at the heart of East and Southeast Asia, and a gateway to the Mainland of China. We are within five-hours' flying time of half of the world's population. So the direct flights will take passengers not just to Hong Kong, but also beyond Hong Kong to major cities in Asia and the Mainland of China.

As you know the high-speed train is changing the transport landscape in your country. We in Hong Kong just began building a high-speed rail line connecting Hong Kong to Mainland China. When this super rail is commissioned in 2015, Hong Kong will be the southern gateway to the 16,000-kilometre national high-speed network. We anticipate from then on more and more Mainland Chinese visitors will come to Hong Kong for day or weekend trips, to buy industrial products and shop for consumer goods offered by the world, including the Italians.

The Government will also continue to support Cathay Pacific's efforts in launching additional services to new destinations or on existing routes, by expediting the liberalisation of our air services regime. To maintain our competitiveness as an international and regional aviation hub,

we will continue to enhance our multi-modal connectivity to the Pearl River Delta, which has become a key driver of growth for our airport.

The airport's connectivity will be substantially enhanced by a mega project called the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge. This will be the first land-link between Hong Kong and the western part of the Pearl River Delta, and is expected to open around 2016.

I am sure we will have the continued support of Cathay Pacific when it comes to our efforts to stay competitive on the aviation front.

In closing, I wish Cathay Pacific every success with its new service to Milan and look forward to its growing the service in the future!

Thank you.

Ends/Thursday, April 1, 2010