

Guangzhou airport to edge out Hong Kong as dominant regional hub in ‘coming years’

Guangzhou’s Baiyun International Airport has recorded faster passenger volume growth in percentage terms than Hong Kong during the past decade

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Hong Kong International Airport may be surpassed by Guangzhou’s airport in a few years in terms of passenger volume, according to a report from Hang Seng Management College.

Guangzhou’s Baiyun International Airport handled 60 million passengers last year, trailing Hong Kong’s 70 million passengers. But the passenger growth rates suggest it’s only a matter of time before Guangzhou, which ranks 15th globally, overtakes Hong Kong in the No 8 spot.

“Guangzhou is catching up Hong Kong and the gap in passenger volume is narrowing,” said Collin Wong Wai-hung, head of the department of supply chain and information management in Hang Seng Management College. “Guangzhou may surpass Hong Kong in the coming few years.”

Guangzhou’s passenger volume surged 120 per cent over the past decade, while Hong Kong’s passenger volume has risen 60 in the same period.

If the current growth trends continue, Wong predicts that Guangzhou will overtake Hong Kong's regional lead in passenger volume.

Among obstacles facing Hong Kong are physical space constraints leading to traffic bottlenecks.

In 2015, the average arrival delay in Hong Kong was just over 20 minutes, while the departure flight queue averaged 7.79.

By 2020 the average arrival delay will rise to roughly 90 minutes, while the departure queue will stretch to 44.17 flights.

"Reducing flight delays is important for the competitiveness of the Hong Kong airport," said Wong. "The third runway is urgent and necessary for Hong Kong. But the airspace should be better utilised by improving the scheduling of flights before the completion of the new runway."

Tommy Cheung, assistant professor from Hang Seng Management College called for a traffic reassessment to better utilise available resources. The number of flights to Hefei, the capital city of Anhui province, have declined 95.4 per cent in the past five years while flights to Yancheng, a northern city in Jiangsu province, dropped 73.2 per cent.

He added that Hong Kong should also make an effort to attract more airline alliances using its appeal as a transit hub.

"The airport should improve both infrastructure and flight schedules and improve the passenger experience during transit, such as fast check-in procedures, efficient transportation and better catering services," Cheung said. "It should also provide diversified services to cater to the needs of different customers."

Wong said Guangzhou's airport had overtaken other regional airports and remains the biggest threat to Hong Kong's dominance.

"Shenzhen, as it is too geographically close to Hong Kong, cannot threaten the city as much as Guangzhou is currently."

"Passengers whose final destination is Shenzhen do not mind flying to Hong Kong because of the city's efficient infrastructure and services," said Wong.

She added that Hong Kong's airport should focus on collaborating with other airports in the Pearl River Delta to minimise competition in overlapping routes.

"The Hong Kong government should communicate with mainland authorities on air space relaxation and utilisation in order to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes," she said.