

China's Greater Bay Area airport cluster plans

By Suwatchai Songwanich, Executive Vice President, Bangkok Bank

Despite the catastrophic impact of the Covid-19 crisis on airline travel, China is pushing ahead with the construction of an airport cluster in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, in a bid to support their ambitious development of this dynamic economic region of 70 million people.

Five main airports – Hong Kong International Airport, Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport, Shenzhen Bao'an International Airport, Macao International Airport and Zhuhai Jinwan Airport – as well as a group of feeder airports in the area, will constitute the airport cluster which will be developed in two phases. Phase one will establish a Greater Bay Area airport conglomerate, with greater interactions and dynamics between them. This is due for completion in 2025. Phase 2, which goes up to 2035, will lift all the airports to a world-class level with “safe, green, smart, human and synergetic qualities”.

The airport cluster development will build on the advantages that these airports in the Greater Bay Area already have such as diversified domestic and international flights, sound infrastructure and well-developed airlines. Due to its easy accessibility by sea, river and air, the area is already the most prosperous in China. It will receive an additional boost with the development of a globally competitive airport cluster that further enhances Hong Kong's status as an international aviation hub.

The construction is already well underway with a satellite terminal in Shenzhen airport scheduled to be completed this year and put into use in 2021. In addition, Guangzhou airport is due to finish its expansion by 2025, which includes its fourth and fifth runways and a third terminal. What's more, Zhuhai airport is preparing to increase its capacity by 2027 with the construction of its second 190,000-sqm terminal and the addition of 25 aircraft parking bays.

At the Asean summit in Thailand last year, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha signed an agreement to expand bilateral cooperation and connectivity between the Greater Bay Area and Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC).

With infrastructure a development lynchpin of both of these regions, the Airports of Thailand (AOT) is also focused on expanding its airport infrastructure despite the pandemic. Currently AOT is building the third runway for Suvarnabhumi Airport as a part of Suvarnabhumi Airport's second-phase development and part of the 2015-2022 transport infrastructure development plan approved by the cabinet in May 2015. The cost of the third runway, which is 60 metres wide and 4,000 metres long, is estimated at 6.6 billion baht. The construction is expected to take approximately three years. Once complete, the airport will be capable of handling up to 94 flights per hour, as opposed to the current 68 flights and a large proportion of those flights are certain to be coming from the GBA.