

GREATER BAY AREA

One-stop online shop boosts flow of cross-border life

Portal allows people and firms access to public services such as tax filings and licence renewals

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Hong Kong and Guangdong authorities yesterday unveiled a one-stop online portal to allow people and businesses on both sides of the border to access public services covering tax filing, licence renewals or applications, and company registrations.

Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry Sun Dong joined the deputy secretary general of the Guangdong provincial government, Xu Dianhui, at a ceremony to celebrate the scheme, designed to improve Greater Bay Area connectivity.

Sun said cooperation between the city and Guangdong in the provision of government services was part of moves towards a digitalised government and the development of smart cities.

"There are more than 50 online government services now available to facilitate the convenience of residents and businesses in both Guangdong and Hong Kong," he added.



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SUN DONG, SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY

The first 54 Hong Kong services covered include areas such as taxation, company registration, real estate, vehicle inquiries and registration, identification documents and immigration applications, welfare and education, and healthcare. Access to all the services is through a single website.

Hong Kong residents in the bay area can register for or upgrade to IAM Smart in Guangdong to access the cross-boundary services through the website and the Yuezhengshi mobile app.

The Hong Kong government has also set up IAM Smart registration service counters to help city residents who live in Guangzhou and Qianhai in Shenzhen.

The existing IAM Smart app, developed by the Hong Kong government, allows a single digital identity and authentication to perform government and commercial transactions online.

It automatically fills in personal details on electronic forms and handles statutory documents and procedures. Mainland residents in Hong

Kong are also able to access public services offered by Guangdong authorities, which include those for employment, housing, applying for retirement pensions and business registrations.

Guangdong and Hong Kong residents can use self-help kiosks in both areas, rather than having to access government services by visiting the relevant offices.

In Hong Kong, Guangdong authorities launched their first self-service kiosk at the Treasury Building in Cheung Sha Wan.

Hong Kong is looking to introduce self-service kiosks in Guangzhou by the first quarter of next year, with the scheme now in the research and trial phase.

Statistics show 505,000 Hongkongers were living in Guangdong at the end of last year. Bar owner Andrew Ho Ying-wai, a Hongkonger who has lived in Guangzhou for 10 years, recalled the challenges of getting identity documents for his daughter after she was born in July last year and said it took half a year.

"I could do it only after quarantine-free travel resumed in February," the 36-year-old said. "But I took three trips to Hong Kong just to be able to apply for her ID card and passport."

"I think the new website can provide certain degrees of help, but I look forward to everything going smoothly when I renew my passport and driver's licence next time."

Linda Tsang Chi-man, executive director of the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions' Greater Bay Area branch, said the kiosks would save time for residents living on the mainland who needed access to public services.

"The mainland has actually provided self-service machines but people still have to use them by going to the government offices in person," she said.

She hoped the services would expand to cover appointments for applying and renewing Home Return Permits and Hong Kong identity cards, a move which would help the elderly people her team looked after.

Services currently available on the portal include those for Hong Kong passports and certificates of no criminal conviction.

The new portal is in line with a State Council 2020 directive that said provincial governments should pave the way for integrated services on a nationwide basis.

Guangdong in 2021 invited Hong Kong authorities to join the cross-boundary public services drive in the bay area.

Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu said in his policy address last week that the government would collaborate with Guangdong to develop the "Digital Bay Area", including the promotion of the cross-border public services programme.

The initiative was designed to boost the provision of public services and investment in the bay area and improve convenience and satisfaction levels with access to services on either side of the boundary.

The portal's address is cross-boundaryservices.gov.hk