

Managing the Threat of Influenza Pandemic to a Railway

Abstract:

The MTR Corporation

MTR Corporation based in Hong Kong constructs and operates one of the most densely utilized metropolitan railways in the world carrying 4.1 millions passengers daily. In addition to metro services, it also operates intercity railway services for passengers travelling between Hong Kong and Guangdong Province, Beijing and Shanghai in the Mainland of China. The Corporation is also a major property developer and management company in Hong Kong. This business involves development of many major residential and commercial projects and related property management. Since 2002, the Corporation has expanded into the Mainland of China and is undertaking a range of railway construction and operations projects internationally. The Corporation, in joint venture with Deutsche Bahn, is operating the London Overground under a franchised agreement. The Corporation also conducts consultancy business internationally, covering cities across Asia, Australia, Middle East and Europe. While the majority of the Corporation's shares are owned by the Government, part of the shares are floated in the stock market.

The Risk of Influenza Pandemic

History tells us influenza pandemic occurs roughly every 10 to 50 years. Medical experts agree that we are likely to face another pandemic, although the timeframe cannot be determined. The scientific community is increasingly concerned by the incidence of avian influenza cases. The H5N1 virus has fulfilled the first two criteria for a pandemic influenza virus i.e. people have little immunity to it, and it can infect people and cause illness or death. If this virus gains the ability to spread easily from human to human, a pandemic situation is likely to occur. Whilst the World Health Organization has advised that an influenza pandemic has not yet been formed, vigilance and surveillance need to be maintained. This prompts enterprises of many countries to develop their pandemic preparedness and response plans.

An influenza pandemic in Hong Kong can drastically reduce MTR Corporation's ability to provide its services. During an influenza pandemic, train services may have to be curtailed as many staff may not be available for work because of sickness, quarantine requirement and fear of contagion. Patronage may drop drastically as many people prefer to stay at home. The property projects may have to halt and demands for property will likely drop. These impacts may affect the revenue and share price of the Corporation.

Managing the Threat of Influenza Pandemic

In managing the threat of influenza pandemic, the MTR Corporation has established a dedicated task force, comprising department heads and senior managers, to coordinate and the establishment of a preparedness and response action plan in 2005. Following a consultancy review to the Corporation's pandemic planning, an upgraded "Influenza Pandemic Business Continuity Plan (IPBCP)" was developed in 2007. The Corporate IPBCP comprises of 3 parts i.e. (1) the influenza pandemic response organization including the Influenza Pandemic Command Team and some 130 Influenza Managers; (2) the Corporate policies on nine influenza pandemic related focuses such as Communication, Optimizing Staff Health, Reducing Infection Risk; and (3) a Corporate IPBCP action table which includes a series of established response actions in response to the triggers of different pandemic phases or response levels. The Corporate IPBCP action table was customized for each division.