

LCQ9: Taxi Drivers' Identity Plates

Following is a question by the Hon Tanya Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (November 18):

Question:

On October 23 this year, the Transport Department (TD) launched the newly designed taxi driver identity plate and taxi drivers are required to display the new plate inside their cars, and those who fail to do so will be subject to a fine of \$2,000. TD has indicated that the objective of launching the new plate is "to enhance the taxi service quality and the professional image of taxi drivers". In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) apart from being smaller in size as compared with that of the old plate and a slight change in the photograph position and background colour of the identity plate, as well as the addition of a six-digit identification number, how the changes in design outlook of the new plate can "enhance the taxi service quality and the professional image of taxi drivers", and therefore they must complete the replacement of identity plates by the end of March next year, or else they will face a fine;

(b) given the government requirement that the overall width of the new plate inserted inside the plate holder together with the plate holder shall not exceed 120 mm, which is 5 mm smaller than the minimum width of the old plate, making it necessary for the taxi drivers to replace the plate holders, whether it knows the price of plate holders;

(c) given that currently taxi drivers are required to display the taxi driver identity plate on top of the dashboard to the

left of the taximeter, and as a result, rear-seat passengers may not be able to see it clearly, whether the Government will consider changing the display position and require the taxi driver identity plate be displayed at conspicuous positions at both the front and rear seats; if it will, of the detailed arrangement; if not, the reasons for that;

(d) given that currently taxi drivers have to pay the agents of taxi driver identity plates (agents) a fee ranging from \$10 to \$100 for the new plate, whether it knows how the replacement fee is determined; whether part of the income from replacement fees will be given to the Government, or the whole amount retained by the agents; whether it will consider centralising the issuance of new plates under TD and standardising the replacement fee; if it will, of the detailed arrangement; if not, the reasons for that;

(e) whether it knows if there is a standardised application form for the new plate at present; what types of personal data will be collected in the application form for the new plate; how the agents relay such information to TD; whether there are measures in place to ensure that the drivers' personal data will not be divulged; if there are, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(f) as some taxi drivers have pointed out that the locations for replacement of identity plates are insufficient (such as there are no such locations in the Southern and Western Districts of Hong Kong Island), whether the Government will consider providing additional locations; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

(a) The old taxi driver identity plates (TDIPs) were introduced in 2002. Having been used for over seven years,

some of these TDIPs may have worn out or been damaged, thus affecting the image of the taxi trade. In addition, some members of the trade consider the old TDIPs too big for display on top of the dashboard, possibly blocking the drivers' sightline. In response to the request of the trade, the Transport Department (TD) has also permitted the drivers to display the TDIPs in front of the dashboard while this may make it less convenient for rear seat passengers to read the names of the drivers.

With a view to improving the above situation, the TD rolled out the new TDIPs on October 23, 2009 after consultation with the taxi trade. While there is no change in the font size of the name of the driver on the new TDIPs, the colour of the plate has been changed and the size of the plate has been reduced. The new TDIPs can be displayed on top of the dashboard to the left of the taximeter in all taxis and the names of the drivers can be clearly shown to both front and rear seat passengers. The replacement campaign standardises the specifications and method of display of all TDIPs and removes those old and torn plates altogether, thereby helping to enhance the professional image and service quality of taxi drivers.

To allow sufficient time for the replacement, the TD has consulted the trade and decided to offer a grace period of about four months from October 23, 2009 to February 28, 2010 for taxi drivers to replace their TDIPs.

(b) The Government does not designate the suppliers of new plate holders. Drivers can purchase any holders that meet the relevant requirements from the market at their choice. The unit price is about tens of dollars. It is noted that the two dedicated liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) companies are offering new holders for TDIPs for sale or as a gift upon purchase of goods or services.

(c) Regarding the method of display, the TD has consulted the

taxi trade. Both TD and the trade consider it more appropriate to place the TDIPs on top of the dashboard to the left of the taximeter as this position allows front and rear seat passengers to read the names of the drivers clearly.

(d) The TD does not specify a fixed fee for processing the new TDIPs. The authorised agents are free to set their fees to attract patronisation but prior notice to the TD regarding the fee level is required. Revenue generated from the processing all goes to the agents. Since the agents have to use the template form provided by the TD in their production of the new TDIPs, they have to pay to the TD the cost of form printing (current unit cost at 80 cents). To facilitate drivers to make comparison and choice, the TD has distributed to the taxi trade promotional leaflets listing the TDIP processing centres operated by the authorised agents. Relevant information, such as the locations of processing centres and fees, has also been uploaded onto the TD's website.

(e) When applying for the new TDIPs, drivers must use the application form prescribed and provided by the TD. Applicants are required to fill out in the form their Chinese and English names as well as their driving licence numbers. They have to produce their driving licences for checking when submitting their applications to the authorised agents. Also, the agents will request the drivers to leave their contact numbers so that the agents can notify the drivers to collect the new TDIPs.

The TD has required the authorised agents to deliver to the TD in person or by registered post all application forms containing drivers' particulars. The TD also requires the agents to follow strictly the stipulations under the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance when handling, keeping, securing, managing and retaining data of taxi drivers who apply for the new TDIPs.

(f) As at November 11, 2009, there were a total of 22 authorised

agents across the territory, including dedicated LPG refilling stations, taxi associations, photo shops and driving schools. They operate processing centres at 34 locations in different districts to facilitate the processing of new TDIPs. Since taxi drivers will be travelling among different districts during their daily operation and before/after shift change, they can choose any appropriate and convenient time and location to process the new TDIPs.

The TD sets no limit on the number of authorised agents and welcomes more organisations and taxi associations to join in. Interested parties can submit their applications to the TD. Besides, the TD does not limit the number of processing centres either. Authorised agents can arrange to set up additional processing centres as necessary after notifying the TD.

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