

LCQ10: Penalty for passengers travelling First Class on East Rail Line without valid tickets

Following is a question by the Hon Lau Kong-wah and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Yau Shing-mu, at the Legislative Council meeting today (May 26):

Question:

Recently, some members of the public have relayed to me that quite a number of East Rail Line (ERL) passengers, in particular mainland tourists, were required to pay a surcharge of \$500 when they travelled First Class because they had not paid a premium in advance as they were not aware of the stipulation. Those passengers who refused to pay the surcharge would be led out of the compartment immediately. As such, these members of the public worry that such a system may arouse suspicion of reaping money, thus affecting the reputation of Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council whether it knows:

(a) the total amount of surcharge which passengers travelling First Class on ERL were required to pay in the past three years because they had not paid the premium and the information on those passengers, including their age distribution as well as the ratio of tourists to local residents among them, etc.;

(b) apart from the notices on the platforms and in the compartments, whether the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) has other ways at present to inform passengers that a premium has to be paid in advance for travelling First Class on ERL; whether it has assessed if the relevant publicity is adequate, and whether it will step up publicity in this regard;

(c) the existing procedures for requiring the aforesaid passengers to pay the surcharge; whether ticket inspectors

will give a warning or reminder beforehand; whether there is any discretionary mechanism in place for handling cases involving offenders who are elderly passengers or tourists;

(d) the average number of staff members deployed by MTRCL daily to perform ticket inspection duties and the percentage of such number in the average daily manpower for maintaining services on the platforms and in the compartments; as well as the frequency of ticket inspections conducted;

(e) the criteria based on which MTRCL determined the surcharge level of \$500 initially; for how long such an amount has been in force; why MTRCL does not follow the practice of certain overseas railway corporations and allow passengers who have forgotten to buy tickets or pay the premium to pay the fare difference on the spot; and

(f) given that some members of the public worry that the aforesaid surcharge system may affect the reputation of Hong Kong, whether MTRCL will assess and review the system?

Reply:

President,

At present, East Rail Line (ERL) is the only railway line of the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) that provides First Class Service. Passengers who travel in First Class compartments must pay the First Class Premium, which is equivalent to the normal Standard Class Fare for the same ERL journey. Passengers using Single Journey Tickets may purchase First Class Single Journey Tickets from Ticket Issuing Machines in ERL stations or from the Customer Service Centre in any MTR station. Passengers using Octopus cards must validate their Octopus cards at the First Class Processors after entering a station and before boarding the First Class compartments. These processors are located on the platforms of the ERL or beside the gangway doors of the First Class

compartments. Notices are also posted advising passengers on how to use the processors to pay the First Class Premium. Passengers can do so simply by swiping their cards over the First Class Processors. There will be a green light and "beep" sound once a card has been validated.

Replies to the questions raised are as follows:

(a) From 2008 to the first quarter of 2010, a total of 22,202 passengers paid a surcharge of HK\$500 in accordance with the MTR By-laws and Conditions of Issue of Tickets for failing to produce a valid ticket while travelling in First Class compartments.

MTRCL would issue a "Notification for Surcharge" to offending passengers and request them to provide personal information for follow-up action. If passengers pay the surcharge immediately, MTRCL would issue a receipt on the spot. If passengers refuse to provide their personal information after paying the surcharge, MTRCL would exercise discretion and would not insist on obtaining their personal information. Therefore, MTRCL is unable to provide the age distribution and personal information of offending passengers in the past three years.

(b) As MTRCL provides First Class Service on the ERL, detailed information on the First Class Premium and normal Standard Class fares is available at Customer Service Centres and Ticket Issuing Machines in stations on the ERL.

MTRCL has displayed notices inside First Class compartments and at prominent locations on platforms to remind passengers who travel in First Class must possess a valid First Class Single Journey Ticket or an Octopus card which has been validated on the First Class Processors, or they will be liable to a surcharge of HK\$500.

To further enhance the dissemination of information of

First Class Service to passengers, MTRCL is conducting a trial in the waiting area of the First Class compartment on the platform at Fo Tan Station. A new large information stand has been erected with enhanced signage advising passengers the location of the First Class Processors. Notices in traditional and simplified Chinese as well as English are displayed to remind passengers to validate their Octopus card on the First Class Processors before travelling in First Class compartments. If the trial is proved to be effective, it will be rolled out to other ERL stations later this year.

(c) When passengers travelling on the ERL swipe their Octopus cards on the ticket gate, only normal Standard Class Fare will be deducted. To facilitate Octopus card users to travel in First Class compartments of ERL, MTRCL has installed First Class Processors on platforms and beside the gangway doors of the First Class compartments. Passengers using Octopus cards can travel in First Class compartments by swiping their cards over the First Class Processors for validation before they enter the First Class compartments. Next to the First Class Processors on platforms and on trains, there are notices to inform Octopus users clearly the arrangements for travelling in First Class on the ERL. Passengers are reminded that they must validate their Octopus cards on First Class Processors before they travel in First Class compartments, or else they are liable to a surcharge of HK\$500. MTRCL staff will ask passengers to produce their Octopus cards or First Class Single Journey Tickets for inspection when performing duty in the First Class compartments.

According to the MTR By-laws and Conditions of Issue of Tickets, all passengers travelling on the MTR must pay the appropriate fares. Passengers travelling First Class without a valid First Class Single Journey Ticket or First Class validation on their Octopus cards will be regarded as failing to pay the First Class Premium and are liable to a surcharge of HK\$500.

(d) The MTR By-law Enforcement Team and By-laws Inspection Unit would enforce the MTR By-laws. Relevant officers and station staff will also carry out ticket inspections at stations and on First Class compartments on the ERL.

(e) & (f) The HK\$500 surcharge has been in force for more than 10 years. During the Rail Merger, MTRCL had reviewed the amount of the surcharge and considered it appropriate as it should carry sufficient deterrent effect.

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