

LCQ14: MTR fare concessions for cross-boundary students

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (May 11):

Question:

Some students who cross the boundary from the Mainland to attend schools in Hong Kong relayed to me earlier that the fare they have to pay with their Octopus cards to take the MTR Lok Ma Chau Spur Line to attend schools in the North District of Hong Kong is higher than the adult fare; they pointed out that the half-fare concession offered to students by the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) is not applicable to journeys via the cross-boundary spur lines, and they are unable to enjoy the HK\$3 fare discount offered via the MTR "Fare Saver" machine installed at the Shenzhen Metro Fu Tian Kou'an Station as such discount is applicable to adult Octopus card holders only. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council whether it knows:

(a) why the existing half-fare concession offered by MTRCL to students is not applicable to journeys via the cross-boundary spur lines;

(b) the average number of students in each of the past three years who had to take the MTR cross-boundary spur lines from the Mainland to attend schools in Hong Kong; whether it will request MTRCL to review the existing arrangement of not offering fare concession to such students and make improvement shortly; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(c) why the fare discount offered via the MTR "Fare Saver" machine at the Shenzhen Metro Fu Tian Kou'an Station is applicable to adult Octopus card holders only; which factors MTRCL will take into account in setting up various "Fare Saver" and determining the fare discounts to be offered at present; whether the authorities will request MTRCL to offer such fare discounts to cross-boundary students, increase the number of stations with "Fare Saver" and raise the fare discount rates in response to the aggravating inflation; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

For the various parts of the question, our reply is set out below:

(a) As early as 1981, the pre-merger MTR Corporation Limited began offering fare concessions of about 50% discount to eligible students studying full-time at a recognised institution in Hong Kong. After the rail merger, MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) extended the student concessionary fares to the pre-merger KCR system on September 28, 2008, so that the scheme applied to the entire MTR network.

MTRCL's objective in offering student concessionary fares in the whole MTR network in 2008 is to make it more convenient for local students to travel to and from school within Hong Kong, as well as to encourage them to use the MTR to take part in more extra-curricular activities and to become more involved in the community. The concession has not been applicable to cross-boundary train service.

(b) and (c) Currently the MTR system can only identify a passenger as a student by his/her Personalised Octopus Cards with student status, but it is not possible to discern whether such trips are made for the purpose of going to school, hence MTRCL does not have figures for the number of students who use the MTR cross-boundary spur line to travel to Hong Kong for attending school. According to the information provided by MTRCL, over the past three years, fewer than 100 passengers a day use Personalised Octopus Cards with student status to travel to Hong Kong via Lok Ma Chau Station between 6am and 9am on a weekday (the time when most students go to school).

According to MTRCL, discounts currently offered at all "MTR Fare Saver" are applicable to adult journeys only. For MTRCL, the "MTR Fare Saver" is a business promotion scheme designed to encourage more people to walk to nearby MTR stations to use the railway.

Generally speaking, the criteria in setting up "Fare Saver" and setting the level of fare discounts for individual "Fare Saver" include the distance between the location of the "Fare Saver" and the nearest MTR station, whether new passengers can be attracted, and whether MTRCL is already offering intermodal discounts jointly with other connecting public transport for the location concerned. Furthermore, basic facilities should be available at the location where the "Fare Saver" is to be set up, including sufficient space to accommodate the "Fare Saver" machine and the

availability of electricity supply.

The "Fare Saver" located at Shenzhen Metro Futian Kou'an Station is the first "Fare Saver" that MTRCL has placed outside Hong Kong. The objective of setting up this "Fare Saver" is to attract more passengers to travel to Hong Kong using the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line. Promotional discounts offered by "Fare Saver" have all along been applicable only to adult journeys, providing fare discounts to passengers using adult Octopus cards. MTRCL conducts regular review of "Fare Saver" promotions.

In general, the Government encourages MTRCL to provide various promotional schemes to the public as far as possible having regard to its operational situation, the market circumstances and passenger demand.

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