

LCQ18: Facilities for disabled provided by public transport operators and wheelchair accessible taxis

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Following is a question by the Hon Wong Sing-chi and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (November 24):

Question :

It has been reported that a motor trading company wishes to introduce a type of taxi called "London taxis" to Hong Kong; such type of vehicle features a spacious body which is wheelchair accessible, and thus facilitates the use by people with disabilities (PWDs). Yet, the motor trading company has criticised that even though it has applied to the Transport Department (TD) to introduce "London taxis" for several months, TD has not yet given any positive response with regard to relevant formalities and field testing procedures, etc., hence, "London taxis" can only be used as private cars in Hong Kong at the moment and cannot become a legitimate type of taxi in Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows in the past three years the concessions and facilities provided by the various public transport operators in Hong Kong for PWDs, the resources injected, as well as the utilisation by PWDs, together with a breakdown by name of the operator;

(2) of the current application procedures for a certain type of vehicles to be the legitimate type of taxis in Hong Kong; the time usually taken by TD to process applications from motor trading companies for introducing new types of taxis and conducting field testing procedures, etc.; the progress of TD in processing the aforesaid application for the introduction of "London taxis";

(3) given that the Government has indicated that it supports the introduction of wheelchair accessible taxis, and that it will liaise with the taxi trade to help the trade find suitable types of vehicles and understand the established standards and procedures, of the details of the Government's liaison with the taxi trade regarding the introduction of wheelchair accessible taxis in the past three years, as well as details of the Government's work in assisting the trade in finding suitable types of vehicles and understand the established standards and procedures; and

(4) whether there is any plan at present for the Government to introduce "London taxis" to assist PWDs in using taxi service; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply :

President,

(1) The Government has been working closely with the public transport operators to study and introduce enhanced facilities for people with disabilities (PWDs) to facilitate their access to public transport services. Relevant measures of major public transport operators are summarised as follows:

(a) Currently, all stations (including Light Rail stops) of the MTR Corporation Limited ("MTRCL") provide barrier-free access (except Racecourse Station of East Rail Line) (with facilities such as lifts, ramps, wide gates, tactile guide paths etc). According to the information provided by the MTRCL, the Corporation has spent over \$600 million in the past ten years to improve barrier-free transport facilities. Over the past three years, the MTRCL has been continuously retrofitting lifts and stair lifts at its stations, and has plans to install lifts at seven stations.

(b) The franchised bus companies are gradually replacing the old buses with low-floor buses, and have installed bus stop announcement systems and other facilities to support PWDs, such as textured handrail with sharp colour contrast, anti-skid floors, electronic information display etc. In the past three years, the number of wheelchair accessible buses has increased by more than 400 to nearly 3,200 (accounting for about 55% of the entire bus fleet), whereas the number of buses equipped with bus stop announcement systems has increased to nearly 4,300 (accounting for about 75% of the entire bus fleet).

(c) As regards public light buses, as at August 2010, 1,056 (or about 35%) of green minibuses have been installed with call bells.

(d) All the 18,136 liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) taxis have been installed with Braille and tactile vehicle registration number plates on the rear left door. About 9,700 LPG taxis have been installed with talking taxi meters which can announce simple messages (including the vehicle registration number and the fare for the trip) in

Cantonese, Putonghua and English.

(e) Tactile guide paths and call bells are installed at the gate entrances of most ferry piers. Landing ramps with vertical grooves are provided at the piers to facilitate smooth movement of wheelchairs. Besides, some ferries have been equipped with facilities such as wheelchair spaces and Braille plates, and the gangplanks on the ferries are coated with anti-skid surfacing.

Since July 2008, the Government has been providing a monthly transport supplement to recipients of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) aged between 12 and 64 with 100% disability and to recipients of Disability Allowance in the same age group with a view to enhancing their full integration into the society. To reduce the travelling expenses of the general public (including PWDs), the Government has been encouraging public transport operators to introduce fare concessions as far as possible, having regard to factors such as the overall economic environment, market situation, operating conditions of the operators and the demands of passengers. At present, major public transport operators are offering different types of fare concessions, including those for PWDs.

Since December 22, 2009, the MTRCL has offered fare concessions to recipients of CSSA aged between 12 and 64 with 100% disability and to recipients of Disability Allowance in the same age group. PWDs can also enjoy fare concessions on some ferry routes and green minibuses routes.

Besides, the major public transport operators, including the MTRCL, franchised bus operators, major ferry operators, tram and peak tram companies as well as some public light bus operators, support the annual "International Day of Disabled Persons", offering PWDs a free-ride day. This year's free-ride day took place on November 21.

As regards PWDs' utilisation of such public transport services, the Government does not have the related information.

(2) In order to have a vehicle type registered for use as taxis in Hong Kong, the statutory requirements on vehicle safety and environmental protection have to be met. On vehicle safety, the vehicle concerned must comply with the provisions on the construction of vehicles stipulated in the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374) and its subsidiary legislation. On environmental protection, the vehicle concerned must

comply with the provisions on noise control stipulated in the Noise Control (Motor Vehicles) Regulation (Cap. 400I), and on emission stipulated in the Air Pollution Control (Vehicle Design Standards) (Emission) Regulations (Cap. 311J). If the vehicle under application is fuelled with LPG, the LPG system of that vehicle must comply with the gas safety standards stipulated in the Gas Safety Ordinance (Cap. 51) and its subsidiary legislation. The Transport Department (TD), Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) and Environmental Protection Department (EPD) will process the applications separately to assess whether the specifications of the vehicle concerned comply with the respective statutory requirements.

Prior to the introduction of the vehicle to Hong Kong (for use as taxis), the taxi company may apply to EMSD and EPD direct, or via TD, for approval of the LPG system, and the emission and noise standards respectively. TD will examine the technical submission relating to vehicle safety. Upon the issue of approval documents by EMSD and EPD, TD will arrange for examination of the concerned vehicle at its vehicle examination centre. Generally speaking, if all the required documents are in order and the vehicle passes the examination, the above-mentioned approval process will take about six to eight weeks in total.

TD has not received any application for the introduction of the "London taxi" model as taxi under reference in the question.

(3) Over the past few years, TD has been assisting the taxi trade in introducing wheelchair accessible taxi types. In 2007, two new vehicles which allow convenient use by wheelchair users were approved by TD for registration as taxis. Besides, with the assistance of TD and EMSD, a vehicle supplier has recently succeeded in altering a petrol model of wheelchair accessible light goods vehicle into a LPG model. That model passed the emission test of EPD in December 2009 and obtained approval from EMSD on its LPG system. In March 2010, the vehicle supplier arranged for a vehicle examination of the vehicle type, and subsequently obtained TD's approval of vehicle construction. That vehicle supplier has promoted the model for use as taxis to the major taxi groups.

Separately, in view of the fact that early this year, a taxi company expressed interest to introduce another petrol-powered wheelchair accessible vehicle model from Japan for use as taxis, TD has been liaising with the vehicle supplier concerned, explaining the technical requirements for granting approval to the vehicle type. TD is now processing the application in respect of vehicle safety to ensure that the model

can meet the vehicle construction requirements.

(4) Introducing which model of "wheelchair accessible taxi" is a commercial decision for the taxi trade. Nonetheless, the Government is in support of the introduction of "wheelchair accessible taxis". TD has therefore been liaising with the taxi trade and the vehicle suppliers, assisting the trade to identify suitable models and helping the vehicle suppliers to better understand the relevant standards and approval procedures for introduction of the concerned vehicle types.

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