

LCQ11: Drivers' driving behaviour, health issues and working and rest time arrangements

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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 (February 23):

Question:

Regarding drivers' driving behaviour, health problems and working and rest time arrangements, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the number and location of traffic accidents caused by drink driving, drug driving and drivers having health problems while driving in each of the past three years, as well as the casualties involved and the percentage of these accidents which involved professional drivers, broken down by type of vehicle; whether it has compiled statistics on traffic accidents involving "discount gang" taxis, including the number and location of such accidents as well as the casualties involved; if it has, of the number and location of such accidents in the past three years as well as the casualties involved; if not, the reasons for that;

(b) of the measures implemented by the Government at present to safeguard the health of professional drivers; whether it has reviewed the effectiveness of such measures; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; whether the Government has made reference to how other places safeguard the health of professional drivers; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(c) whether it had, in the past three years, studied the introduction of legislation to require all professional drivers to undergo regular medical check-up; if it had, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(d) whether the Government had, in the past three years, considered undertaking relevant studies (e.g. selecting a number of bus captains as subjects and recording the changes in their physical conditions while on duty) for the purpose of understanding the relationship between bus safety and rest time of bus captains; if it had, of the details; if not, the reasons for that, and whether the Government has adopted other methods to study the working and rest time arrangements for bus captains; and

(e) of the number and percentage of bus termini not provided with facilities such as toilets and rest rooms, etc. in Hong Kong at present; whether the Government and various franchised bus companies have any plan to suitably enhance the facilities at these termini; if they have, of the details and the timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to various parts of the question is as follow:

(a) The number of traffic accidents and casualties involving drink driving, drug driving and drivers having health problems while driving as well as breakdowns by districts where the accidents took place and vehicle types involved in the past three years are tabulated at Annex I. The Administration has been using driving behaviour, such as driving too close to the vehicle in front, careless lane changing, speeding and drink driving as one of the criteria in classifying traffic accidents. The Administration does not have statistics on traffic accidents involving the so-called "discount gang" taxis.

(b) and (c) To ensure driving safety, the Transport Department (TD) has been encouraging commercial vehicle drivers to receive regular health checks and enhancing alertness on their health conditions through publicity and education by such means as holding trade conferences, launching publicity campaigns and arranging free check-ups. Subsequent to the Safe Driving and Health Campaign for Professional Drivers organised from late December 2009 to early February 2010, the TD has launched the Safe Driving and Health Campaign in early 2011 to promote road safety by enhancing safe driving and health awareness of commercial vehicle drivers. Apart from free simple health checks (including measurement of health indicators such as height, weight, body mass index and blood pressure), participating commercial vehicle drivers will also be given assessment, analysis and advice on their health by registered Chinese medicine practitioners. Over 2,000 drivers are expected to benefit from the whole campaign. In the months following the health checks, they will also receive SMS messages with health tips via mobile phones from health check providers. To cater for the operation mode of commercial vehicle drivers, TD has also arranged to disseminate health information and providing drivers with timely tips on driving safety through radio programmes. In addition, commercial vehicle drivers may participate in seminars and workshops to obtain more information on safe

driving and health matters.

Separately, employers of commercial vehicle drivers and operators of public transport are obliged to ensure that their drivers are physically fit to provide safe transport services. Currently, some major public transport operators require their drivers to undergo regular medical check-ups. For instance, apart from providing staff with medical allowances, franchised bus companies require new bus captains to pass pre-employment health checks and serving ones aged 50 or above to undergo annual health checks. The MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) also requires new train captains to pass pre-employment health checks, all serving ones to undergo regular health checks and those aged 45 or above to undergo annual health checks. These health checks are provided free by the bus companies and MTRCL.

On the proposal of requiring all professional drivers to undergo regular health checks, we must consider the potential impact on the community and the operation of the trade when examining the proposed measures. As at January 31, 2010, there were about 1.25 million holders of valid commercial vehicle and light goods vehicle driving licences, far exceeding the number of corresponding licensed vehicles (about 149,000). This indicates that the majority of such driving licence holders are not engaged in driving as their main occupation. If it is a mandatory requirement for these drivers to produce medical reports when applying for or renewing their driving licences, many of those who are not engaged in driving commercial vehicles as an occupation will be affected.

From time to time the TD makes reference to the practices of other places and reviews the effectiveness of existing arrangements, such as exploring further improvement to the procedures and requirements for driving licence application and renewal.

(d) In response to the public concern on bus safety and bus captains' rest times, the TD has issued the Guidelines on Bus Captain Working Hours, Rest Times and Meal Breaks (the Guidelines) to franchised bus companies and reviews the Guidelines from time to time.

Considerable improvements have been incorporated in the revised Guidelines in 2010, such as extending the break between successive working days for bus captains and further defining rest times and the duration of their meal breaks. The Guidelines are shown at Annex II.

Every year, the TD engages an independent consultant to conduct a random survey on franchised bus captains' working hours for monitoring compliance of the Guidelines by franchised bus companies. If non-compliance is identified, the TD will require explanations and corresponding adjustments from the bus companies concerned.

(e) The Government is very concerned about and understands the bus captains' requests regarding amenity facilities at bus termini, and has been following up with franchised bus companies in this regard. As at the end of 2010, more than 70% of the bus termini were provided with rest rooms/rest areas for use by bus captains and other frontline staff. Toilets were available at over 90% of the bus termini or in the vicinity (within a walking distance of about three minutes) for use by bus captains. The TD, together with the relevant bus companies, departments and organisations, are following up on the applications for providing toilets at the remaining bus termini, with a view to improving the amenity facilities at more bus termini.

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