

**For information**

**Legislative Council Panel on Transport**

**Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome  
Relief Measures for the Taxi Trade and Other Transport Modes**

**Purpose**

This paper informs Members of our plan to relax general stopping restrictions for taxis to provide immediate relief to the trade. Other relevant measures to help the taxi trade and the other transport modes are also set out in this paper.

**Background**

2. The transport trades in particular taxis are hard hit by the outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Indications are that business has dropped by over 50% for night-shift taxis and some 10%-20% for day-shift taxis. Fare receipts of taxi drivers reduced drastically despite longer working hours. A number of taxis are also left idle despite reduction of taxi rental up to 15% in some cases.

3. Whilst the Government and the taxi trade have made joint efforts to conduct campaigns involving taxi drivers to step up the cleansing of taxis and to promote good practice of wearing masks, the impact of SARS on taxi business remains acute and may last for a while. On this basis, we are prepared to introduce some time-limited measures to help the taxi trade tide over this exceptionally difficult period.

4. We have discussed with the transport trades concerned in developing the measures which are explained below.

**The Measures**

5. We will, as an exceptional temporary arrangement, lift the no-stopping restrictions (NSR) for taxis on peak-hour clearways and 7am-7pm clearways on roads with speed limits less than 70 kilometer per hour. In

view of possible traffic implications of such general relaxation, this measure will be implemented for a limited period of three months.

6. In addition, we will shorten the general afternoon peak-hour NSR period from 4pm-7pm to 5pm-7pm. This relaxation applies to all modes of transport and will help improve the operating environment of individual transport modes. We will also reduce the charge for the monthly parking ticket for taxis by 50% for three months and extend the concessionary scheme to nanny vans.

#### Temporary lifting of general stopping restrictions for taxis

7. Under the new arrangement, taxis will be given a 3-month temporary exemption from the restrictions from picking up and setting down passengers at the NSRs concerned. On the basis that taxis will be allowed to pick up and set down passengers but not waiting for passengers in these areas, Transport Department's assessment is that, taking into account the current reduced volume of traffic on the roads in Hong Kong generally as compared with the pre-SARS period, the average vehicle journey time would be increased to a certain extent and there could be congestion at certain busy areas, but the overall traffic impact should be manageable. To ensure smooth implementation of the temporary measure, it is important that taxi drivers should exercise self discipline. Transport Department is making final arrangements for the issue of the exemption permits to the taxi trade. We aim to implement the new measure on 1 May 2003.

#### Relaxation of 4pm-5pm NSR

8. In September 2002, the 7am-8am NSR was lifted and the implementation was smooth without any complaints on traffic. A further review by Transport Department and the Police indicated that it is also feasible to lift the 4pm-5pm restriction period. The general relaxation will apply to all modes of transport and it will be implemented by way of publication of the revised NSR in the Gazette. The 5pm-7pm NSR will be maintained as these are the two busiest hours of the day in terms of traffic flow.

9. We aim to publish the necessary Gazette Notice on 2 May 2003 for implementation of the new arrangement on 3 May 2003. There are about 1,500 road sections concerned and the appropriate traffic signs will be erected in stages from early May to mid June 2003.

#### Concessionary Monthly Parking Tickets for Taxis and Nanny Vans

10. At present, concessionary \$500 monthly parking tickets are available to taxis, subject to quota, at Transport Department car parks. We will implement the following relief measure from 1 May 2003 for a period of three months to :

- reduce the rate by 50% to \$250 per month;
- extend the scheme to cover both taxis and nanny vans; and
- increase the number of concessionary monthly parking tickets by 1,000.

#### Other Measures

11. The Chief Executive announced on 23 April 2003 the Government's decision to waive licence fees for taxis, school buses, public light buses and coaches for one year, and the \$3.5 billion loan guarantee scheme also covers the tourist coach operators licensed by Transport Department. These financial measures will help provide immediate relief to these transport trades. Transport Department will maintain discussions with the transport trades to identify what further assistance can be offered to help them.

#### **Way Forward**

12. Members are invited to note the contents of the paper. Transport Department will make suitable publicity on the changes to the NSR arrangement.