

**For discussion on  
29 April 2008**

**Subcommittee to Study the Transport Needs  
and Provision of Concessionary Public Transport Fares for  
Persons with Disabilities**

**Introduction of a New Mode of Accessible Public Transport Service  
for Persons with Disabilities**

**PURPOSE**

The Subcommittee at the meeting on 24 July 2007 discussed the issues about the introduction of wheelchair accessible taxis (“WATs”) and accessible hire cars, and passed a motion requesting the Administration to follow up. This paper reports the latest position on the above issues.

**WHEELCHAIR-ACCESSIBLE TAXI SERVICES**

2. The Administration supports the introduction of wheelchair-accessible taxis in Hong Kong as it is in line with our policy of promoting “barrier-free transport for persons with disabilities (“PWDs”)”. As the regulatory authority, the Administration has ensured that the existing regulatory framework does not impede the introduction of WATs in Hong Kong. The Road Traffic (Construction and Maintenance of Vehicles) Regulations (Cap. 374A) specifies the dimensions of a taxi can be up to 6.3 metres (length), 2.3 metres (width) and 2 metres (height) with a weight of up to 3 tonnes. These specifications have already permitted the use of larger types of vehicles to accommodate wheelchairs. Besides, the Air Pollution Control (Vehicle Designing Standards) (Emission) Regulations (Cap. 311J) allow taxis to be liquefied petroleum gas (“LPG”)-driven or petrol-driven vehicles. At present, there are both LPG-driven and petrol-driven vehicle types available in the world market that can accommodate wheelchairs.

3. Prior to the Subcommittee meeting in July last year, the Transport Department (“TD”) already took proactive steps to liaise with vehicle suppliers to facilitate the introduction of WATs in Hong Kong. Transpiring from this communication effort, a vehicle supplier, Geely Automobile Holdings Limited (“Geely”), has expressed interest to develop LPG-driven “London Taxis” for

operation in Hong Kong. Geely shipped a “London Taxi” which can accommodate a wheelchair to Hong Kong for demonstration in May 2007 and together with Hong Kong Productivity Council, which is its technical consultant, held a seminar for the taxi trade to collect views on the new vehicle model. In the meantime, another vehicle supplier, Crown Motors Limited, also has the intention to import a prototype of LPG-driven van-type vehicle model to Hong Kong for operation as WAT on a trial basis to test the market response. TD has throughout facilitated vehicle suppliers to help them understand the required standards in developing LPG-driven WATs for Hong Kong.

4. While TD is prepared to assist the taxi trade and the vehicle suppliers to exchange views on developing suitable models of LPG-driven taxis for Hong Kong, the exact model and timing for the introduction of this service remains a business decision. For vehicle suppliers, there are concerns about Hong Kong market’s demand for WATs as selling prices for LPG-driven WATs should be more expensive than normal LPG-driven taxis. As regards the taxi trade, a New Territories taxi operator has introduced two petrol-electric hybrid WATs equipped with wheelchair accessible ramps to provide hiring as a whole service. However, the taxi trade is generally concerned about the financial viability of WATs due to the substantially higher vehicle purchase costs and recurrent operating costs of WATs when compared with those of ordinary taxis. Besides, the taxi trade is concerned that operating WATs would require more complicated procedures such as specific techniques in loading and unloading wheelchairs as well as manipulating the wheelchair restrain system, which would result in a longer time to complete a trip and might incur additional operating expenses.

5. The fare level for WAT services is another aspect that the taxi trade is concerned about. Some taxi trade members consider that the current fare level may not be sufficient to maintain the long-term financial viability of the service while they are also aware that charging a higher fare level may adversely affect the demand for the service. On this, the taxi trade notes that PWDs have expressed the view that the fare level of WATs should be within their affordability. The Administration is open-minded about the fare level. TD is willing to assist the taxi trade and PWDs to further explore this aspect.

## **TAXI VOUCHER SCHEME**

6. As reported at the Subcommittee meeting on 24 July 2007, a pilot Taxi Voucher Scheme was launched in April 1987 to subsidize the taxi fares of wheelchair-bound taxi passengers. The one-year trial scheme was sponsored by

the Hong Kong Jockey Club. The scheme came to an end following the trial period as it was not well-received by the PWDs and taxi trade.

7. That notwithstanding, throughout the past two decades, in order to meet the basic transport needs of PWDs, the Administration has, in addition to the provision and enhancement of rebus service, provided PWDs with financial assistance under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (“CSSA”) Scheme and Disability Allowance (“DA”) payment. The total recurrent government expenditure in this respect for 2008-09 is estimated at about \$7 billion. As to the rebus service, the current fleet comprises 101 buses, providing 63 scheduled routes, three feeder routes and Dial-a-ride (“DAR”) service. The Administration will allocate an additional \$22 million in 2008-09 to acquire eight new buses and replace 24 old buses, thereby increasing the number of rebuses to 109. Assuming the demand for scheduled route services remains at the present level, TD expects that the additional buses will be able to fully accommodate the scheduled route service demand of PWDs on the current waiting list.

8. Furthermore, the Administration has proposed to provide a monthly transport supplement of \$200 each to recipients under the CSSA Scheme aged between 12 to 64 with 100% disability<sup>1</sup> and recipients of DA in the same age group to further encourage PWDs to participate in activities away from home, thereby enhancing their contact with and integration into society. As the supplement will be paid directly into the recipients’ bank accounts, the PWDs concerned are free to decide how to make the best use of the additional supplement to meet their transport needs having regard to individual circumstances. The proposal is expected to benefit about 96,000 PWDs and the estimated annual expenditure for the provision of transport supplement will be about \$230 million. Subject to securing funding support from the Legislative Council, we intend to effect payment of the transport supplement with effect from 1 July 2008.

9. In tandem, we will continue to take appropriate measures to meet the basic transport needs of PWDs, including further enhancing the rebus service and improving public transport facilities for PWDs. Having regard to other measures already in place, funding constraints and competing priorities for rehabilitation services, the Administration has no plan to introduce any Taxi Voucher Scheme using public funds.

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<sup>1</sup> Recipients under the CSSA Scheme with 100% disability include those PWDs requiring constant attendance.

## **ACCESSIBLE HIRE CAR SERVICES**

10. The demand for rebus service is increasing and there were over 9,100 reject orders for DAR service in 2007 despite efforts to add rebus in recent years. With the staging of Olympics and Paralympics Equestrian Events, there will be surge in demand from PWDs for accessible transport. As there is imminent need to meet the upsurge demand and relieve the pressure on rebus service, TD has decided to issue hire car permits to Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation (“HKSR”) to operate the accessible hire car services. HKSR will start commencing the accessible hire car services around May to June to allow enough gearing up time to serve the equestrian events commencing in August.

11. The taxi trade has raised concern that the accessible hire car service might compete with taxis whereas PWDs also worry about their affordability to use the service. HKSR has taken into account the above views and will set the fare level to be around 20% above the taxi fares to balance taxi trade’s concern and PWDs’ affordability. TD will issue 20 hire car permits to HKSR and will state in the permit conditions that the accessible hire car service must be pre-booked and only wheelchair-bound passengers and their companions can use the service.

12. In view of the considerable demand that has yet to be met by rebus service as mentioned in paragraph 10 above, there is room for different modes of transport services to be developed to meet this demand. TD will critically assess the need for these accessible hire cars when renewing their permits<sup>2</sup>, taking into account the availability of similar transport services in the market including the development in introducing WATs to Hong Kong.

13. Members are invited to note the above.

**Transport and Housing Bureau  
Labour and Welfare Bureau  
Transport Department  
April 2008**

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<sup>2</sup> Hire car permits will be valid until the vehicle licence expires. Thus, the validity of a hire car permit is 12 months maximum.