

Introduction of a new mode of accessible public transport service for persons with disabilities

Meeting of Legislative Council on Subcommittee to Study the Transport Needs and Provision of Concessionary Public Transport Fares for Persons with Disabilities on 29 April 2008

~ Submission from the Equal Opportunities Commission~

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to outline Equal Opportunities Commission's view on issues related to the introduction of a new mode of accessible public transport service for people with disabilities (PwDs).

Guiding Principles

2. In introducing a new mode of accessible public transport service for PwDs in Hong Kong, the Commission is of the view that the Administration should adopt the followings guiding principles in its formulation of related policies, plans and programmes:

- ♦ Availability
- ♦ Affordability
- ♦ Reliability
- ♦ Safety

Existing Rehabus Service

Scheduled Route Service (SRS)

3. We would like to reiterates our concern raised in our submission of May 2007 (Paper No. CB(1)1612/06-07(02)) that genuine transport needs of those PwDs on the waiting list of SRS was not met due to insufficient provisions. According to the Administration's "*Information Paper for Meeting on 24 July 2007*" (Paper No. CB(1)2150/06-07(01)), the waiting list was expected to grow to 52 at end 2008 in spite of the fact that the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) had agreed to allocate funds to

purchase one more rebus for SRS in 2007/08. If the waiting list is to be removed in 2008, six more new rebus would need to be acquired and these additional vehicles will incur a capital expenditure of \$4.2M and a recurrent expenditure of \$2.3M each year (i.e. \$44,230 recurrent expenditure per PwD per year).

4. Although there are only 52 PwDs on the SRS waiting list, the situation is unacceptable since in the absence of such facilities their full participation in and integration into society are adversely affected. It is encouraging to learn that the Administration has proposed to purchase six more new rebus in 2008-2009 subject to funding availability. The Commission urges the Administration to speed up its process of procurement of the six more new rebus required since SRS is NOT “available” to all PwDs in need of such service as yet.

Dial-a-Ride (DAR) Service

5. According to the same Information Paper, the number of rejected orders for DAR service in 2008 is expected to “reduce” to 5,000 cases despite 20 accessible hire cars for carrying wheelchair passengers will be introduced in four phases between December 2007 and June 2008. Again, DAR is NOT “available” to all PwDs at the time when they need it (i.e. NOT “reliable”). The Commission urges the Administration to further reduce the number of rejected DAR orders as far as possible by way of facilitating the introduction of wheelchair-accessible taxis as a new mode of accessible public transport service for PwDs as soon as possible.

6. The Commission would also like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation’s recent decision to revise the existing 4-hour minimum charge for DAR during Sundays and public holidays to one-hour minimum charge. The revised fare arrangement would certainly make the DAR service more “affordable” for PwDs.

Wheelchair-accessible Taxis

7. While rebus service provides a point-to-point transport service for PwDs, it is not a “public transport service” as such that has the real effect of enhancing PwDs’ ability to move around unrestrictedly since the routes and schedules are fixed for SRS and advance booking is required for DAR. The best way to afford PwDs the opportunity to truly

experience their able-bodied counterparts' unrestricted movement and to enhance their full participation and integration into the community is to introduce wheelchair-accessible taxis.

8. However, it is noted that regulation 10(3) of the Air Pollution Control (Vehicle Design Standard) (Emission) Regulations (Cap. 311J) requires taxis to use either liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) or petrol as fuel. Moreover, operation of diesel-driven taxis in Hong Kong is prohibited under Cap. 311J. These restrictions make the sourcing of suitable wheelchair-accessible vehicle models by the taxi trade difficult due to the higher capital cost, operating and maintenance cost arising from the development of new LPG-driven multi-purpose taxis (MPTs), or the conversion of existing MPTs using diesel or petrol to LPG-driven vehicles for use in Hong Kong.

9. Although it is encouraging to see that recently a taxi operator has licensed a petrol-electric hybrid MPT targetting to provide pre-booked service for PWDs for trial and that the Transport Department (TD) has undertaken to continue to facilitate the introduction of hybrid MPTs for PWDs in Hong Kong, the Commission is concerned that the higher capital and maintenance costs associated with hybrid MPTs may discourage the taxi operator concerned and other taxi operators from introducing more hybrid MPTs. Thus, the Commission suggests the Administration should consider relaxing the restrictions under Cap 311J should facilitation of introduction of hybrid MPTs and other types of vehicles suitable for use as wheelchair-accessible taxi by TD fails to expand the fleet of wheelchair-accessible taxis at a reasonable pace.

Equal Opportunities Commission
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