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May 2008

Mr Henry TANG, GBS, JP  
Chief Secretary for Administration  
Government Secretariat  
Central Government Offices  
Lower Albert Road  
Central, Hong Kong.

Dear Mr TANG,

**Introduction of New Modes of Accessible Public Transport Service  
For Persons with Disabilities**

On behalf of the Subcommittee to Study the Transport Needs of and Provision of Concessionary Public Transport Fares for Persons with Disabilities (the Subcommittee), I write to convey to you the Subcommittee's disappointment at the Administration's failure to formulate a comprehensive public transport service policy for persons with disabilities (PwDs). The Subcommittee considers that the Government should take immediate action to formulate specific plans and timetable to facilitate the introduction of accessible taxis in Hong Kong for use by PwDs.

Formed under the House Committee of the Legislative Council in November 2005, the Subcommittee was tasked to study the transport needs of and the provision of concessionary public transport fares for PwDs. At its meeting on 24 July 2007, the Subcommittee met with PwD groups, the relevant policy bureaux and the taxi trade to study the introduction of new modes of accessible public transport service for PwDs. The Subcommittee noted the strong aspirations of PwD groups to see early provision of the new accessible hire care (AHC) service by Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation and the introduction of wheelchair accessible taxis (WATs) by the taxi trade with a view to promoting barrier-free transport for PwDs to enhance their integration into society. The Subcommittee also noted that there were concerns about unfair competition posed by AHC service and the high fares for both AHC and WAT services. The Subcommittee passed a motion at the July 2007 meeting urging the Government to draw up specific plans and timetable for the introduction of

WAT service, ascertain the fees charged for and the long-term position of AHC service, as well as consult relevant parties with a view to formulating a policy with specific action plans for the provision of the new transport services for PwDs.

When the Subcommittee re-visited the subject at its meeting on 29 April 2008, members noted that other than undertaking to continue assisting the taxi trade and the vehicle suppliers in exploring suitable models of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG)-driven or petrol-driven WATs for Hong Kong, the Transport Department had not addressed the concerns about financial viability of WATs and the high fares of the service. The Subcommittee noted that due to restrictions of the Air Pollution Control (Vehicle Designing Standards) (Emission) Regulations (Cap. 311J), only LPG-driven or petrol-driven WATs were allowed in Hong Kong, and this had discouraged the taxi trade from introducing WATs driven by other types of fuel in Hong Kong which involved substantially lower capital and operating costs. The Subcommittee stressed the need for the Government to work out the long-term positions of AHC and WAT services as new modes of transport for PwDs and devise feasible charging policies. The Subcommittee was disappointed that the Government had not formulated a comprehensive transport policy to facilitate the introduction of accessible public transport services for PwDs. The segmented approach taken by the Government in pursuing the matter had also resulted in a lack of co-ordination among policy bureaux and departments in resolving related issues. In this connection, the Subcommittee endorsed the Equal Opportunities Commission's views that it was of paramount importance for the Government to adopt a "disability mainstreaming" strategy in policy making. With such strategy, PwDs' needs would be taken into account throughout the policy formulation and programme development process, instead of adding a rehabilitation or integration component in the late stage of a development project. This would enhance co-ordination among Policy Bureaux and departments and achieve more effective results in meeting PwDs' special needs in a timely manner. The Subcommittee passed the following motion at the meeting on 29 April 2008:

“That this Subcommittee expresses regret at the Government’s persistent refusal to formulate a transport service policy for persons with disabilities (“PwDs”) and its evasion of the responsibility to put forward specific plans and timetable for the introduction of taxis suitable for use by PwDs;

this Subcommittee strongly requests the Government to

- (a) formulate within 6 months plans and timetable for the introduction of taxis which are for PwDs;
- (b) actively consider relaxing the restrictions under Cap.311J of the Laws of Hong Kong and adopting other measures which facilitate the introduction of wheelchair-accessible taxis; and

(c) consult various stakeholders, including PwDs groups, the transport industry, non-governmental organizations, etc, to ascertain Accessible Hire Car's long-term position as a mode of transport service and the details of its operation before issuing licences to this type of vehicles.”

As the formulation of a comprehensive policy for the introduction of new modes of accessible public transport service for PwDs involves a number of policy bureaux and departments, the Subcommittee hopes that you could look into the matter personally. In view that the Subcommittee will be reporting its deliberations to the House Committee, I look forward to receiving a substantive reply from you soon.

With best regards,

Yours sincerely,

(Hon LEE Cheuk-yan)  
Chairman of the Subcommittee

c.c. Ms Eva CHENG, JP, Secretary for Transport and Housing (Fax no: 2523 9187)  
Mr CHEUNG Kin Chung, Matthew, GBS, JP, Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Fax no: 2523 1973)