

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

Information Paper for Meeting on 12 May 2006

PURPOSE

At the Subcommittee meeting on 4 April 2006, the Subcommittee urged the Administration to liaise with public transport operators with a view to offering concessionary fares to recipients of Disability Allowance (DA) and Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) with 100% loss of earning capacity in the first instance, to be followed by other groups of persons with disability (PWDs). On the legal side, the Subcommittee called on the Administration to consider introducing legislative amendments to the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 487) (DDO) to put it beyond doubt that selective provision of concessionary fares to PWDs in phases would not constitute a contravention of the DDO. The Administration also undertook to conduct a survey shortly to assess the travelling characteristics of the concerned groups of PWDs.

LIAISON WITH PUBLIC TRANSPORT OPERATORS

2. The Environment, Transport and Works Bureau (ETWB), Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB), Social Welfare Department (SWD) and Transport Department (TD) met with the two railway corporations, five franchised bus companies and the Hong Kong Tramway Limited to urge them to consider favourably the Subcommittee's proposal to offer concessionary fare to recipients of DA and CSSA with 100% loss of earning capacity. ETWB also requested the transport operators to provide estimates of possible financial implications of the proposal.

3. Many operators responded that as an effort to demonstrate their corporate social responsibility, they had invested substantially to improve their facilities with a view to making their services more user-friendly and accessible to the people with disabilities (PWDs). Efforts in this regard will continue. They considered the provision of concessionary fares to PWDs to be a social welfare issue. Some of them expressed that the increasingly difficult operating environment due to factors such as rise in oil prices, increases in wages and tunnel tolls, interest rate hikes, made the companies not in a financial position to provide additional fare concessions, including those for PWDs. In view of the wide definition of disabilities under the Disability Discrimination Ordinance, they were also concerned about the significant financial implication and potential abuse, particularly when the number of beneficiaries of the fare concession were to eventually increase to cover all PWDs.

4. With regard to the assessment of possible financial implications of

providing half-fare concession to recipients of DA and CSSA with 100% loss of earning capacity, the operators stated that they did not have the necessary data to make an accurate assessment. Some stated that they did not have information on the travelling pattern and characteristics of the target beneficiaries or definitive record regarding the utilisation of their services by PWDs and therefore could not provide the financial estimates.

5. To address the lack of specific information on the travel behaviour of the target beneficiaries, HWFB will commission a travel characteristic survey on recipients of DA and CSSA with 100% loss of earning capacity, as explained in paragraphs 8 and 9. The survey will help collate useful information on these groups of PWDs so that more accurate assessment on the financial implication of providing fare concessions to them can be made.

LEGISLATIVE AMENDMENTS

6. We are seeking advice from the Department of Justice (DoJ) for proposals for quick amendments to the DDO, on the understanding that any amendments to be introduced will not diminish protection currently accorded by the DDO to PWDs, and that the amendments should be able to cater for future phases of fare concession to be offered to PWDs.

7. The Administration will keep the Subcommittee informed of DoJ's advice and submit proposals for consideration in two months' time.

SURVEY ON PWD TRAVELLING CHARACTERISTICS

8. We will conduct a survey on the general travelling characteristics of the two groups of PWDs proposed for fare concession in the first instance by the Subcommittee. We are conducting in-house consultation with senior statisticians of the Social Welfare Department, the Transport Department and HWFB on the technical aspects of the survey so as to ensure that useful data with reasonable precision can be acquired. We have also been advised by DoJ that, under the provision of the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap 486), the Administration is obliged to seek consent from the PWDs to be surveyed before passing their personal data to the survey agency for processing.

9. Optimistic assessment by our senior statisticians is that it will take 6 to 8 months, inclusive of the considerable time required for seeking consent from PWDs, before we can submit survey findings to the Subcommittee. We are finalizing details of specifications for a service tender for the survey, which will be issued shortly.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
Environment, Transport and Works Bureau
May 2006