

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

**Information Paper for Meeting on 24 July 2007**

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this paper is to report on the Administration's follow up actions on improving the Rehabus service.

**PLANS TO IMPROVE REHABUS SERVICE**

2. As requested by Members at the Subcommittee Meeting on 22 May 2007, the Transport Department (TD) has updated the information on the utilization of the Rehabus service at Annex I. Taking into account the latest information on demand of Rehabus service provided by Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation (HKSR) and the vehicle procurement and replacement plan for 2007/08, new Rehabus services required to meet the demand in 2007 and 2008 are summarized in paragraphs 3 to 11 below, with detailed analysis given at Annex II.

*Scheduled Route Service (SRS)*

3. As at end May 2007, there were 43 applicants on the waiting list for the SRS. Having regard to the past trend, it is forecast that the waiting list at end 2007 and 2008 would be 54 and 72 respectively assuming no increase in buses deployed for such service. Subsequent to the last Subcommittee Meeting and on the request of LegCo Members, the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) has agreed to allocate funds to purchase two more rehabuses in 2007/08. With one of these two new buses being deployed for SRS, the waiting list is expected to be reduced to 52 at end 2008. If the waiting list is to be removed in 2008, 6 more new rehabuses would need to be acquired. The proposed additional vehicles will incur a capital expenditure of \$4.2M and a recurrent expenditure of \$2.3M each year.

### *Dial-a-Ride Service (DAR)*

4. In 2005 and 2006, the number of rejected orders for DAR was 6 657 and 8 173, representing an increase of 19.6% and 22.8% over previous years. Assuming similar trend, the number of rejected orders in 2007 and 2008 is projected to be about 9 800 cases and 11 800 cases respectively.

5. Recently, the HKSR has received a grant from Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust to procure 20 accessible hire cars for carrying wheelchair passengers. The service will be introduced in 4 phases, i.e. in December 2007, February, April and June 2008. 5 additional wheelchair accessible hire cars will be introduced in each phase. The new hire cars are expected to absorb some of the demand from DAR. With the new hire cars, the number of rejected orders in 2008 is expected to reduce to 5 000 cases.

6. We recommend to keep watch the service provided by the accessible hire cars and review the need for more DAR rehabuses, say, in mid 2008.

### *Feeder Service (FD)*

7. In response to the increasing number of requests to hospitals/rehabilitation centres for medical treatment, HKSR and TD are exploring the feasibility for a feeder service plying between Sandy Bay in Southern District and the nearest railway station; details are being worked out in consultation with PWDs. In addition, HKSR would adjust the schedule and routing of the existing trial feeder service for Princess Margaret Hospital with a view to further improving its efficiency. TD will also continue to review the demand for all the existing feeder services and consider further adjustments if necessary. To facilitate and encourage more PWDs to use the feeder services, HKSR has sent relevant service information to the Hospital Authority, the Hong Kong Joint Council for People with Disabilities, special schools and Tsuen Wan District Council; and uploaded such information on its webpage, telephone hotline and newsletter.

8. Currently, vehicles operating feeder services are also deployed on SRS and DAR. Such arrangement has affected the level of service provision of SRS and DAR during peak hours. To improve the service, we recommend to add 2 more rehabuses to the fleet in 2008/09, which would incur about a capital cost of \$1.4M and a recurrent cost of about \$0.8M per annum.

#### *Service to Remote Areas*

9. With the recent improvement of the service catchments of railway network and the facilities of bus services, NT areas are becoming more and more accessible. Both railway and bus services provide PWDs with more choices apart from relying on rebus services.

10. At present, HKSR operates 61 SRS routes, of which 46 are serving NT areas. On the waiting list for SRS, 20 out of 43 waiting passengers are from NT. The additional SRS buses proposed in paragraph 3 could help meet the demand of these people.

11. As for DAR services to hospitals or rehabilitation centers, the figures from HKSR show that about 26% of the orders for DAR service are in NT areas while the rejection rate is about 17%, which is lower than that those in Kowloon (24%) and Hong Kong Island (22%). The Rebus service for NT would be improved by the trial MTR feeder service for Princess Margaret Hospital and the proposed additional vehicles for DAR.

#### **REVIEW ON REHABUS OPERATION AND FARE ARRANGEMENT**

12. HKSR has reviewed the operation and fare arrangements together with its User Liaison Group (ULG). As a result of the review, HKSR plans to implement the following measures:

### *Service Arrangement during Black Rainstorm warning or Typhoon Signal No. 8*

13. Previously, for the use of pooled DAR service (say, for commuting school children to and from home or school) HKSR will cancel all bookings for the period when Black Rainstorm Warning or a Typhoon Signal No. 8 is hoisted. Now HKSR has agreed to only suspend the service and will resume the service once signal is off.

14. As for the provision of rehasub when Black Rainstorm Warning or Typhoon Signal No.8 is in force, HKSR, after consultation with its ULG, has decided to maintain the current arrangement of suspending Rehasub service during such period. The reason being that rehasub is for use by PWDs and not abled passengers. Since PWDs have mobility problems, they must be assisted by the driver when boarding and alighting. This will pose danger to PWDs, the driver and other road users under such inclement weather conditions.

### *Fare Charges of DAR*

15. After review, HKSR has decided to revise the existing 4-hour minimum charge for DAR during Sundays and public holidays to one-hour minimum charge; same as for arrangement on weekdays. Besides, the fare scale for DAR for 1-3 passengers will be relaxed so that 1-4 passengers will be charged the same fare. HKSR will inform the passengers about the changes. Its target is to implement the new arrangement for minimum charge in the fourth quarter of 2007, and the new fare scale for 1-4 passengers in September, 2007.

### *Individual and Institutional Users*

16. With effect from 1 March 2004, users can make advance booking for Rehasub services whenever they wish, but any subsequent change / cancellation is subject to a surcharge so as to deter abuse of the advance booking system. To minimize the impact of the surcharge on light users, HKSR has introduced a 2-tier surcharge for heavy users and light users. Under the scheme, if individuals book

more than one bus or their booking involving more than one pick up/set down point or more than one passenger, they will be classified as “an institution” and a higher surcharge will be imposed for changes or cancellation of the booking. In view of the concerns of Members of the Subcommittee, ULG discussed the differential surcharges for “an individual” and “an institution”. It was concluded that HKSR should conduct a 6-month review for further discussions with its ULG.

## **USE OF MORE GOVERNMENT RESOURCES AND PRIVATE DONATIONS FOR ENHANCING REHABUS SERVICE**

17. Additional Government resources will need to be committed if the proposed improvements in SRS, DAR and Feeder services mentioned in paragraphs 3 and 8 are to be implemented. In addition, the HKSR has always tried to obtain private donation. For instance, it has applied for funding under the “SK YEE Fund for the Disabled 2006” to improve its computer facilities to enhance the efficiency of rebus allocation and trip planning for shared DAR service.

### *Additional Government Resources for purchasing more rehabuses*

18. As stated in para. 3 above, in response to the Subcommittee’s request at the meeting of 22 May 2007 to explore the feasibility of deploying more Government resources to purchase more rehabuses, extra resource has been secured from the LWB for purchasing 2 additional rehabuses for further improving the service in 2007-08.

### *Rebus Replacement Program*

19. Since mid-2005, the Administration has gradually replaced the single-arm tail-lift rehabuses through a bus replacement programme. There will still be seven such rehabuses by end 2007/08. It is proposed to bid resources for replacing these 7 vehicles and another 14 vehicles (age 10 or above) in 2008/09.

### *Provision of escorts on board rehabuses*

20. LWB and TD have met with representatives from three parents associations of disabled children, namely, the Parents' Association of Pre-school Handicapped Children, the Association of Parents of Severely Mentally Handicapped and the Hong Kong Association for Parents of Reasons with Physical Disabilities in June 2007 to further understand their concerns on escort service for their children while travelling to school. The parents were fully aware that school bus services were provided for meeting the transport needs of their children for attending school. Also, escorts were provided on board school buses to comply with the relevant mandatory licensing requirements, if applicable. However, according to parents, the provision of school bus service by special schools was insufficient. Furthermore, fare charges for rehabus are much cheaper than school bus service: \$184 per month for non-cross harbour route and \$264 per month for cross harbour route as compared with that around \$400 per month for school bus service.

21. Parents' concerns had been conveyed to the Education Bureau (EDB). EDB advised that at present, special school students use various means of transport for travelling to and from school to cope with the diversity of bus routes required. Currently, school bus service may be operated by schools on their own or by private operators. According to EDB, eligible special schools which have secured registered school buses from private donation may apply for a special subsidy to meet the salary of drivers. As regard the provision of escorts, schools operating school bus service are required to comply with the mandatory requirement of escort if the school bus concerned has 17 seats or more and carries primary and kindergarten students. Both the school bus service and Rehabus service would help meet the diverse needs of students and cope with the diversity of bus routes required. We shall continue to follow up on the issue and consider suitable solution to address parents' concern.

### **SUMMARY**

22. In order to meet the rising demand for Rehabus service, the Administration plans to replace the remaining 7 single-arm tail-lift rehabuses, the 14 rehabuses aged over 10 years, and to increase the fleet of rehabuses by 8 buses in

2008-2009 (as shown in Annex IV) subject to funding availability. The Administration will continue to actively encourage the taxi trade and vehicle suppliers to explore the feasibility of introducing multi-purpose wheelchair accessible taxis. HKSR has also reviewed and reduce certain fare charges with a view to facilitating and encouraging more PWDs to participate in social functions.

## **ADVICE SOUGHT**

23. Members are requested to note the contents of this paper.

Transport Department  
Labour and Welfare Bureau  
July 2007

**Utilization of Rehabus Services**

	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007 (up to end May)</b>
<b>(i) Scheduled Route Service</b>				
Number of Pax Trips carried	251 000	250 195	264 887	114 363
Vehicle Allocation	59	59	62 <sup>1</sup>	62 (64) <sup>2</sup>
Names on Waiting List as at end of year <sup>3</sup>	45	45	53	43
<b>(ii) Dial-a-Ride</b>				
Number of Pax Trips carried (including Feeder Services)	296 000	299 623	320 285	134 275
Vehicle Allocation	19	19	24 <sup>4</sup>	24 (28) <sup>5</sup>
Number of Orders Received	84 846	82 392	88 213	36 859
Number of Orders Rejected	5 567	6 657	8 173	3 414

<sup>1</sup> 2 vehicles added in January and 1 vehicle added in December 2006.

<sup>2</sup> 2 additional vehicle planned to be added in late 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Figures include both PwDs and carers.

<sup>4</sup> 3 vehicles added in January and 2 vehicles added in December 2006.

<sup>5</sup> 4 additional vehicles planned to be added in late 2007.



**Number of Rehabuses Required for Meeting the Growing Demand  
from Persons with Disabilities for Rehabuses Services**

Type of Service	Number of Rehabuses						Additional Cost <sup>1</sup>	
	As at 31 May 2007	Required for meeting Projected Passenger Demand <sup>2</sup>		Approved Additional Rehabuses in 2007/2008 (plan to be implemented in late 2007)	Other Additional Buses to be supported by LWB in 2007/2008	Extra Buses Required Apart From the Introduction of Additional Buses in 2007/2008	Capital Cost (in million)	Recurrent Cost per year (in million)
		End 2007	End 2008 (on top of buses required in 2007)					
Scheduled Route Service	62	6	2	1	1	6	\$4.2	\$2.3
Feeder Service	By re-deployment	2	0	0	0	2	\$1.4	\$0.8
<b>Total</b>						<b>8</b>	<b>\$5.6</b>	<b>\$3.1</b>

<sup>1</sup> Cost may be affected by (i) the exchange rate; (ii) the final vehicle price, (iii) inflation rate, (iv) fuel price, etc.

<sup>2</sup> The level of passenger demand may be affected by various factors such as (i) the provision of fare concession for PwDs; (ii) further development of public transport accessibility and services; (iii) the change of economic environment; (iv) the number of activities organized by organizations, etc.

**Replacement and Procurement Program of Rehabuses**

	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>
Number of Rehabuses Replaced	6	10	7	9 <sup>1</sup>
Number of New Rehabuses Procured	0	0	8	6 <sup>2</sup>
Total Number of Rehabuses by year end (including spare vehicles)	87	87	95	101

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<sup>1</sup> Plan to be implemented in late 2007.

<sup>2</sup> 4 rehabuses approved in 2006 RAE and another 2 rehabuses supported by LWB. Plan to be implemented in late 2007.

**Proposed Vehicle Replacement and Procurement Plan in 2008/09**

	Number of Additional Rehabuses	Additional Cost <sup>1</sup>	
		Capital Cost	Recurrent Cost (per year)
Replacement	21 Rehabuses <i>(including 7 rehabuses with single-arm tail-lift and 14 rehabuses with handgrip on one side of the lift and aged over 10 years)</i>	\$14.7M	-
Procurement	8 Rehabuses	\$5.6M	\$3.1M
<b>Total</b>	<b>29 Rehabuses</b>	<b>\$20.3M</b>	<b>\$3.1M</b>

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<sup>1</sup> Cost may be affected by (i) the exchange rate; (ii) the final vehicle price; (iii) inflation rate; (ix) fuel price, etc.