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>

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cc sjyuen@legco.gov.hk, wcheng@legco.gov.hk

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Subject Re: Transport Panel: Invitation for written/oral views

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Friday, 10 August 2007

Dear sir/madam,

In reference to  
(a) *Package I*

*Ferry services between Central and Cheung Chau/Peng Chau/Mui Wo and the inter-islands services will form one package to be operated by one ferry operator. The Central-Peng Chau and Central-Mui Wo services will be merged into the Central - Peng Chau - Mui Wo service. The inter-islands services will be shortened and transformed into a shuttle service between Mui Wo and Cheung Chau, with some sailings calling at Chi Ma Wan.*

The Humanist Association of Hong Kong cannot see any reason for changing the present service, which was developed over the years to fit with resident's requirements and the operating company's need to make a fair profit.

The merger and reduction in numbers of the ferries on the Central - Peng Chau - Mui Wo route, Outlying Islands, and the likely price hike of the inter-island service as a consequence works against efficient commuting and inter-island travel and trade.

We see government weakness in front of the business community, in particular, New World First Ferry Services Limited. The fear of non-take up of the tender unless special provisions are made reminds us of SEZ's with their tax holidays and lack of labour laws that protect labour - with the real profits exported along with the goods.

Any decent Hong Kong company knows how to squeeze maximum profits from a deal. Please just state exactly what we, the people, want as the best service in the tender document and let the market get on with it.

We want proper, speedy and timely means of transportation for islanders and visitors to the islands. Transport is an essential public service and should not be looked at from the point of view of a business opportunity where profitability comes first. People are first not profits.

Ferries are the lifelines of places like Mui Wo and Peng Chau. Ease of travel is a major plus for residents and businesses alike. Any retrograde step has to be very carefully considered, particularly when there is no crisis.

The winning tender holder would also win the hearts of everyone if that company could bring a more efficient and pleasant travelling experiences to the Islanders because, whatever the problems with the old Yaumati ferry service, at least we got an hourly, timely service with a snack bar selection of foods and drinks, resulting in much better value-per-ride and that firm provided such service for many years.

In this new world of the impermanent and changing, a reliable and affordable ferry service would offer something extra beyond the statements in any cash-and-carry book.

Moderate fare hikes are acceptable when in line with rising wages and incomes. That fare price-point can be determined and negotiated as always. What is needed is better services not curtailed services. The more regular and quicker arriving the ferries the more visitors can reach the islands, then everyone gains. The government should not think backwards, but move forwards.

With our best intentions.

Your truly

Tony Henderson  
Chairman, Humanist Association of Hong Kong