

LCQ6: Ad hoc quotas for cross-boundary private cars

Following is a question by the Hon Cheung Hok-ming and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (December 17):

Question:

It is learnt that the daily two-way vehicular flow of Shenzhen Bay Port ("SBP") has been lower than expected since its commissioning in July last year. Regarding the issue of increasing the vehicular flow of SBP, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) as the Government has advised that it will set up an expert group with the Guangdong Provincial Government ("GPG") at the end of this year to study the issue of increasing the permanent quotas for "Hong Kong private cars to enter and leave the Mainland" and implementing a temporary quota system, and using northbound vehicles of SBP as a pilot scheme, of the anticipated time required for the relevant study, and when it will announce the details and implement the scheme;

(b) whether it will study with GPG the issuance of designated number of temporary quotas, e.g. 500 quotas per day, to mainland residents for them to drive their private cars via SBP to Hong Kong for consumption, so as to increase the vehicular flow of SBP and boost the economy of Hong Kong; if it will not, of the reasons for that; and

(c) as the Government advised in its report to the Council in May this year that it was studying the relaxation of the restrictions on the use of cross-boundary vehicular permits to allow vehicles with Lok Ma Chau, Sha Tau Kok or Man Kam To cross-boundary vehicular permits to use SBP, of the latest progress of the study?

Reply:

President,

With the commissioning of new land boundary control points, we consider that there is room to proactively consider the relaxation of the control on cross-boundary private cars. In particular, we plan to allow private car owners, who cannot meet the eligibility criteria for regular quotas, to apply for one-off ad hoc quotas to provide them with another choice on the means to cross the boundary, as well as to facilitate the economic, social and cultural flows between Guangdong and Hong Kong. We believe that the level of ad hoc quotas should be set having regard to the capacity of the road networks of both sides, as well as environmental, road safety and security considerations, etc. In this regard, we have already had preliminary exchange of views with the relevant authorities of the Guangdong province. Both sides have agreed to set up an expert group to examine the feasibility of the proposal with the view to formulating an overall implementation plan. Both sides have also initially agreed to implement the proposed scheme in two phases, starting with the issue of ad hoc quotas to Hong Kong private cars first, to be followed by Guangdong private cars at a later stage upon satisfactory implementation of the proposal for Hong Kong private cars.

Our reply to the specific questions are as follows -

(a) We consider that a trial scheme on one-off ad hoc quotas may be implemented at the Shenzhen Bay Port (SBP) first, and will convene the first expert group meeting with the relevant Guangdong authorities within this month. Experts from both sides will need to consolidate the concept and consider an overall implementation plan, e.g. the number of one-off ad hoc quotas, issuing criteria, application procedures, mutual recognition of vehicle licences, requirements on environmental protection, motor vehicle insurance and traffic enforcement, etc. Our preliminary target is to announce the arrangements for the first phase (i.e. issuing one-off ad hoc quotas to Hong Kong private cars) within one year, while the actual implementation date will be worked out subject to the progress of discussions of the expert group.

We are of the view that ad hoc quotas should not replace the existing basic quotas for cross-boundary private cars as the latter provide investors in the Mainland with a regular and reliable means to cross the boundary. We will continue to review the number of basic quotas with the relevant Guangdong authorities from time to time having regard to the traffic conditions at the control points.

(b) The proposed one-off ad hoc quota scheme will provide specified quota limits to allow Mainland residents to drive their private cars to Hong Kong. The number of ad hoc quotas may increase incrementally over the years in a gradual and controlled manner, or be adjusted flexibly having regard to seasonal demand. We will take into account the operational experience of implementing ad hoc quotas for Hong Kong private cars when drawing up the implementation details for ad hoc quotas for Mainland private cars.

(c) At present, the average daily vehicular traffic flow at SBP has already exceeded 6,500 trips per day, though it is still on the low side. All goods vehicles of cross-boundary freight companies can freely use SBP without going through any formalities. To encourage private car owners to use SBP, the Hong Kong and Guangdong governments have agreed to allow cross-boundary private cars with Man Kam To, Sha Tau Kok and Lok Ma Chau (LMC) quotas to continue to choose SBP for commuting purpose until end September 2009. In addition, both governments have also agreed to allow holders of SBP private car quotas to use LMC during the hours when SBP is not in operation (i.e. from midnight to 6.30am) with effect from May 26, 2008, so as to facilitate them to cross the boundary during the small hours. Both governments will continue to keep the traffic flow at SBP under close monitoring and review the arrangement in due course.

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