

Progress Report

Motion Debate on “Facing up to the transport needs of people with disabilities” Legislative Council Meeting on 21 October 2009

Background

At the Legislative Council meeting on 21 October 2009, the following motion on “Facing up to the transport needs of people with disabilities” moved by Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung as amended by Hon WONG Kwok-hing was carried:

“That, given that this Council passed motions on a number of occasions over the past few years calling for improvement to transport facilities for people with disabilities and offer of concessionary transport fares to them, but the Administration, some statutory transport corporations and other public transport operators still fail to fully face up to and give effect to the motions, and the crux of the problem is the Government’s lack of a specific policy on fare concessions for people with disabilities and determination to make improvements; this Council strongly demands the Administration to take the lead in implementing and pushing various public transport operators to immediately and fully respond as well as give effect to the relevant motions previously passed by this Council and the recommendations in the Report of the Council’s Subcommittee to Study the Transport Needs of and Provision of Concessionary Public Transport Fares for Persons with Disabilities in the last term; in addition, the Government must implement the following concrete measures to more comprehensively address the transport needs of people with disabilities so as to enable them to integrate into society:

- (a) to take the lead in formulating a policy on fare concessions on public transport for people with disabilities;
- (b) to take the lead in setting an example and expeditiously implement the fare concession for people with disabilities as announced earlier by the MTR Corporation Limited;
- (c) in order to effectively assist people with disabilities in integrating into society, to adopt legislative, administrative and financial measures to press various major public transport operators to offer concessionary fares to them;

- (d) to put forth, in the near future, specific proposals and a timetable for introducing half-fare concession on public transport for all people with disabilities, so as to help them integrate into society and improve their life;
- (e) to allocate additional resources to comprehensively improve the Rehabus service and, in particular, enhance such service for people with disabilities living in remote areas and new towns;
- (f) to request the MTR Corporation Limited to expeditiously install facilities such as platform screen doors and automatic mechanical gap fillers for all its rail lines in order to strengthen platform safety and minimize the danger of blind people falling onto the rail tracks;
- (g) to study subsidizing people with disabilities in need to purchase electrical wheelchairs so as to facilitate them to use public transport;
- (h) to request the Transport Department to explore waiving the licence fee for people with disabilities who purchase private cars with a cylinder capacity of over 1 500 c.c. so as to make it convenient for them to carry larger and heavier electrical wheelchair and supporting equipment, provide additional auto-fuel allowances for people with disabilities, subsidize drivers with disabilities for using private tunnels and provide parking spaces for them, so that people with disabilities do not have to pay high transportation fees; and
- (i) to step up consultation with people with disabilities to fully realize the concept of ‘Transport for All’, and strictly regulate public transport operators in providing barrier-free facilities, so as to enable more people with disabilities to use public transport and integrate into society.”

2. This report briefs Members of the follow-up actions that have been taken by the Administration.

Provision of Concessionary Public Transport Fares for People with Disabilities

3. Regarding the levels of fares of major public transport services, we have put in place fare adjustment mechanisms to effectively regulate the basic fares. Besides, with a view to helping reduce passengers’ travelling expenses, the Administration has encouraged public transport operators to introduce fare

reductions or concessions as far as possible, taking into account various factors including the overall economic environment of the society, their respective operating conditions, market conditions and the needs of passengers. In fact, all major public transport operators are providing passengers with several kinds of fare concessions to help reduce their travelling expenses. We hope that public transport operators can keep the fares at reasonable levels, and continue to provide efficient and proper public transport services at the same time.

MTR Corporation Limited Provides People with Disabilities with Fare Concessions

4. The MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) would launch the fare concession scheme for recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) with 100% disability aged between 12 to 64 and recipients of Disability Allowance of the same age group. The scheme will help encourage people with disabilities (PWDs) to participate in outdoor activities and establish closer links with the community, thereby facilitating their integration into the society. From 22 December 2009 onwards, eligible parties holding Personalised Octopus cards marked with “Persons with Disabilities Status” can enjoy fare discount up to 50% on all MTR commuter lines (except Airport Express), Light Rail routes and MTR bus services.

Additional Resources to Improve the Rehabus Service

5. Over the past three years, the Administration has allocated additional resources to procure 17 new Rehabuses and replace 41 old ones. All old buses equipped with obsolete single-arm tail-lift in the Rehabus fleet have also been replaced. In 2009-10, additional funding has been allocated to procure 6 new buses whereby the Rehabus fleet size will be increased to 115 vehicles in January 2010. We will also replace 4 old buses so that the average vehicle age will be reduced from 5.8 years in 2006 to 3.5 years. Apart from strengthening the Dial-a-ride service, the new buses will be deployed for providing scheduled route service to meet the needs of PWDs on the waiting list, including those residing in new towns and remote areas.

6. While the Administration is putting into practice the concept of “Transport for All” in various modes of public transport, the Labour and Welfare Bureau will continue to bid for resources under the welfare programme to procure new buses and replace old ones to further enhance and improve the Rehabus service having regard to the transport needs of PWDs who still have difficulties in using public

transport.

Platform Screen Doors at MTR Stations

7. The former MTR Corporation completed the installation of platform screen doors at 30 underground stations in 2006. For the remaining eight at-grade and above-ground stations, the MTRCL has completed the tender exercise as scheduled and preliminary design for the works is underway. The MTRCL has indicated that the retrofitting works will be completed one year ahead of schedule in 2011.

8. As for East Rail stations, the MTRCL has to test and examine the effectiveness of mechanical gap fillers to ensure passenger safety before commencing a study on the installation of such device. 98 mechanical gap fillers were installed at all platforms in Lo Wu Station and the test was completed in mid-October 2009. The MTRCL will complete its review in early 2010.

Subsidizing PWDs in Need to Purchase Electrical Wheelchairs

9. Under the CSSA Scheme, a special grant is payable to disabled recipients to cover the costs of medical, rehabilitation, surgical appliances and hygienic products (including electrical wheelchairs) to meet their special needs, subject to medical assessment. For PWDs who are not receiving CSSA, they can apply for assistance under various trust funds such as the Yan Chai Tetraplegic Fund, Samaritan Fund, Ho Kam Yung Fund, Li Po Chun Charitable Trust Fund, Tang Shiu Kin and Ho Tim Charitable Fund, Kwan Fong Trust Fund for the Needy and Brewin Trust Fund, etc. to purchase rehabilitation equipment (including electrical wheelchairs) if they meet the application criteria.

Licence Fee Exemption for Larger Vehicles

10. According to the Transport Department (TD), about 20 to 40 disabled drivers have registered private cars with over five seats annually since 2001. As at end-September 2009, about 350 disabled drivers are registered owners of such vehicles, accounting for 23.8% of registered disabled drivers. Broadly speaking, TD's statistics indicate that this type of vehicles has not been widely used for the purpose of meeting the basic transport needs of PWDs.

11. Currently, vehicles with a cylinder capacity not exceeding 1,500 cubic centimeters can carry wheelchair users. In addition, hatchback vehicles, which can carry bulkier foldaway wheelchairs without occupying the rear seat, are available in the market. This type of vehicles can generally meet the needs of disabled drivers using wheelchairs. Therefore, the current practice of waiving licence fee of vehicles with a cylinder capacity not exceeding 1,500cc is considered appropriate.

Additional Limit for Duty Exemption on Petrol, Subsidizing Use of Private Tunnels and Providing Parking Spaces for Disabled Drivers

12. According to the Customs and Excise Department, over the last five years, the average monthly consumption of petrol by disabled drivers has decreased annually from 126 litres in 2004 to 113 litres in 2009, which is significantly lower than the 200 litres exempted under the current legislation. Statistics reveal that the current exemption quota of 200 litres can meet the basic transport needs of disabled drivers. Therefore, it is not necessary to further raise the limit.

13. Under the current arrangement, disabled drivers can enjoy toll-free passage through the Lantau Link and various government tunnels in Hong Kong. This allows disabled drivers to choose their driving routes according to their personal needs and affordability.

14. At present, disabled drivers enjoy half-fare parking concession at TD's 14 multi-storey car parks and 2 open-air car parks (including monthly, daily and hourly rental). Furthermore, holders of Disabled Person's Parking Permit (Permit) can park at on-street metered parking spaces and designated on-street parking spaces for free.

15. As at end-September 2009, there were a total of 314 designated on-street parking spaces for Permit holders across the territory, representing an increase of about 110 parking spaces over 2002. At the same time, there were 1,389 Permit holders. TD will review the number of designated on-street parking spaces for Permit holders from time to time, taking into account social needs, traffic conditions at individual road sections and the supply and demand of parking spaces at those sections.

Stepping up Consultation with PWDs

16. To understand the transport needs of PWDs, TD convenes meetings of the Working Group on Access to Public Transport by PWDs every three to four months. Public transport operators and representatives from 18 PWDs' organisations attend these meetings to exchange views so as to formulate proposals for stepwise implementation. Some of the facilities and services introduced by the Administration and public transport operators in these recent years are the results of the discussions at such meetings. Separately, the MTRCL holds communication meetings with PWDs' organisations every six months to listen to their views. The Administration welcomes specific suggestions from relevant organisations and individuals. We will listen carefully, examine the feasibility of suggestions raised and allocate appropriate resources to take forward the concept of "Transport for All" to help PWDs integrate into the society.

Improvement to Public Transport Facilities

17. To enhance the accessibility of public transport services by PWDs, the Administration will continue to promote the concept of "Transport for All". In fact, public transport operators are supportive of this concept. Through enhancing public transport facilities, they aim to provide better services to disabled passengers. The progress made by major public transport operators in this respect is set out at **Annex**. The Administration will continue to work with public transport operators in enhancing facilities to benefit more PWDs.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
Transport and Housing Bureau
December 2009

**Improvement to Public Transport Facilities by
Public Transport Operators**

Railways

1. All railway stations (except Racecourse Station) are equipped with barrier-free access.
2. Except Racecourse Station, all stations are equipped with tactile guide paths.
3. Portable ramps are provided at all stations (except Racecourse Station and Light Rail stops) for easy boarding and alighting by wheelchair users.
4. All railway stations are equipped with wide gates to ensure smooth entrance and exit of wheelchair users.
5. Audible devices, which announce the fare charged and remaining values of the Octopus cards, have been installed in the exit gates led by tactile guide paths at all stations of Tsuen Wan Line, Island Line, Kwun Tong Line, Tseung Kwan O Line, Tung Chung Line and Airport Express as well as Austin Station and most East Rail Line stations to benefit visually impaired passengers.
6. Flashing neon lights have been installed at East Rail Line stations with wider platform gaps to caution passengers.
7. Ticket vending machines with an interactive voice message function are provided at all stations of East Rail Line, Ma On Shan Line and West Rail Line to benefit visually impaired passengers.
8. All stations are equipped with escalator audible devices to help passengers on platforms and/or concourses locate the escalators.
9. Multi-purpose spaces are provided in all trains.

10. Ramp access is available at all Light Rail stops. Lifts are provided at all Light Rail interchanges with West Rail Line. In addition, low-height Octopus entry/exit/enquiry processors are installed at Light Rail stops to facilitate the use by wheelchair users. All Octopus entry/exit processors are equipped with brailles to facilitate the use by visually impaired passengers.
11. InfoPanels displaying information on the next station and other operational messages have been installed in all trains running on East Rail Line, Kwun Tong Line, Tsuen Wan Line, Island Line, Ma On Shan Line, Tseung Kwan O Line, Airport Express and Light Rail whilst Newline Express screens displaying similar information have been installed in trains running on East Rail Line, West Rail Line and Ma On Shan Line.
12. Induction loops to assist hearing aid users have been installed at all Customer Service Centres, Ticket Offices and selected public payphones.
13. Information cards to facilitate communication between staff and passenger are available at the Customer Service Centres of all stations (except Light Rail stops).
14. Tactile station layout maps have been installed at all stations of East Rail Line, West Rail Line, Tseung Kwan O Line and Ma On Shan Line as well as some stations of Kwun Tong Line, Tsuen Wan Line, Island Line and Airport Express.
15. Installation works of audible devices at the Octopus exit processors of all Light Rail stops are underway. All works are expected to be completed by 2010.
16. In 2008, stairlifts at Tsim Sha Tsui, Mei Foo, Diamond Hill, Admiralty and Jordan Stations are put into service. Two passenger lifts connecting station concourse and street level are provided at Mei Foo Station. The staff lift at Admiralty Station linking the concourse and platform levels is converted to passenger lift as well.

17. The MTRCL will install lifts connecting with the ground level wherever practicable. Stations to be installed with such device include Sham Shui Po, Wong Tai Sin, Jordon, Yau Ma Tei and Tsim Sha Tsui Stations.

Franchised Buses

1. Franchised bus operators will continue their programmes to replace older buses with low-floor buses -
 - All franchised bus companies except New Lantao Bus Company Limited (NLB) agreed that all the new buses to be purchased would be wheelchair accessible. As regards NLB, its operation is largely on Lantau Island and deployment of wheelchair accessible buses is not suitable for most of its routes due to constraints of the terrain. However, NLB has planned to purchase wheelchair accessible buses for deployment on routes where the terrain permits so as to cater for the transport needs of PWDs as far as possible.
 - The number of wheelchair accessible bus has increased from 2,329 in 2003 to 2,951 in October 2009.
2. The franchised bus operators will continue to install bus stop announcement system where feasible. The number of bus installed with bus stop announcement system has increased from 2,825 in 2003 to 4,284 in October 2009 (accounting for 74% of the total bus fleet).