

For discussion
on 29 June 2010

**Joint Meeting of the
Legislative Council Panel on Transport and Panel on Welfare Services**

**Provision of Support for Meeting the Transport Needs
of Persons with Disabilities**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the provision of support for meeting the transport needs of persons with disabilities (PwDs) under the welfare programme of the Labour and Welfare Bureau.

Provision of Support for Meeting the Transport Needs of PwDs

2. It has all along been the objective of the Government's rehabilitation policy to provide suitable support and necessary facilities to PwDs to help them develop their potentials so that they can participate in various activities on an equal basis with others, thereby facilitating their full integration into society.

3. In this connection, the Government has taken special care of the basic transport needs of PwDs, such as the provision of Rehabus service for those who have difficulties in using public transport, offering financial assistance through the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme and the Disability Allowance, including the monthly transport supplement for eligible PwDs. Details of the Rehabus service and transport supplement are set out in the ensuing paragraphs below.

Rehabus Service

4. Under the welfare programme, we have subsidised a non-governmental organisation in the operation of Rehabus to provide point-to-point transport services for those PwDs who have difficulties in using normal modes of public transport. The Rehabus offers scheduled routes service to carry PwDs in need to office, school and receive rehabilitation training. Rehabus also has a dial-a-ride service to facilitate PwDs in attending medical appointments and taking part in other social activities.

5. The Government is mindful of the great demand for Rehabus service for PwDs. We review annually the service demand and bid for additional resources to increase the number of rehabuses as required.

6. The Rehabus fleet currently comprises 115 buses, providing 73 scheduled routes, three feeder routes and dial-a-ride service. In fact, over the past three years, the Government has added 20 new vehicles to the Rehabus fleet. In 2010-11, we will allocate funding for the procurement of four new rehabuses, thereby increasing the fleet to 119 vehicles. Apart from enhancing the dial-a-ride service, three of the four rehabuses will be deployed to run scheduled routes service to meet the needs of PwDs on the waiting list. The passenger volume of the Rehabus fleet has increased from 590 000 passenger trips in 2006 to around 680 000 in 2009. With the expansion of the Rehabus fleet, it is estimated that the passenger volume of Rehabus will increase to over 710 000 passenger trips in 2010.

7. Apart from increasing the number of rehabuses, the Government is also replacing the old single-arm tail-lifts and older rehabuses. Rehabuses with single-arm tail-lifts have difficulty in carrying the increasing number of electrical wheelchair users. During the past three years, the Government has replaced 37 rehabuses and completed the replacement of all rehabuses with old lifts. In 2010-11, we will continue to replace six old rehabuses. By then, the average age of Rehabus fleet will fall from 5.8 years in 2006 to 4.7 years, and the service quality of rehabuses will be further upgraded.

8. Apart from purchasing new rehabuses and replacing old ones, the Government also subsidises the operating expenses of the Rehabus service. In 2010-11, the Government will allocate \$38.75 million to subsidise the recurrent expenditure of the Rehabus service, representing around 80% of its operating cost. The Transport Department, which is tasked to oversee the operations of the Rehabus service, will continue to make use of their expertise and experience to review from time to time the size, the routes and mode of service delivery of the Rehabus fleet, and make suggestions for improvement to ensure the continued enhancement of its service quality.

Transport Supplement

9. We note that the financial burden arising from transport expenses may reduce the opportunities and incentive of PwDs with lower financial capacity to go out for activities. Hence, we appreciate that the provision of financial assistance will enhance their integration into society. To this

end, a monthly transport supplement has been provided under the welfare programme to recipients of Disability Allowance aged between 12 and 64, and recipients under the CSSA Scheme in the same age group with 100% disability since July 2008. In addition to existing measures in meeting the basic transport needs of PwDs, the purpose of providing transport supplement is to encourage PwDs to participate in activities away from home, thereby facilitating their integration into society.

10. The amount of transport supplement is subject to annual review with reference to the Social Security Assistance Index of Prices and the current amount is \$210 per month. In 2009-10, the number of recipients for transport supplement was 114 757 while the total expenditure amounted to \$275 million. The estimated expenditure in 2010-11 is \$293 million.

Fare Concessions Offered by Public Transport Operators for PwDs

11. To build an inclusive society, cross-sectoral collaboration in providing a barrier-free environment to facilitate the integration of PwDs is necessary. Through the provision of transport supplement, the Government has taken an important step forward in helping PwDs integrate into society. We expect that public transport operators would also favourably consider offering fare concessions to PwDs, having regard to their operational circumstances and economic environment, in order to fulfill their corporate social responsibility and work together towards building an inclusive society.

12. The MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) has launched a fare concession scheme since 22 December 2009 for recipients of CSSA with 100% disability aged 12 to 64 and recipients of DA of the same age group. To facilitate the implementation of this fare concession scheme, the Labour and Welfare Bureau, in response to the request of MTRCL, has revised Schedule 5 of the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO) in order to ensure that the fare concession scheme would not constitute a contravention of the DDO. The Social Welfare Department has also provided full support for verifying the relevant particulars of the applicants for fare concessions.

13. If other public transport operators are willing to offer fare concessions to PwDs and require the support of the Government in the provision of data on PwDs and verification of the relevant particulars of the applicants, the Government would be pleased to provide the required assistance where appropriate.

Advice Sought

14. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
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