

Progress Report

Motion Debate on “Facing up to the transport needs of people with disabilities” Legislative Council Meeting on 20 October 2010

Background

At the Legislative Council meeting on 20 October 2010, 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 and Hon Paul CHAN Mo-po was carried:

“That, as the Government advocates the cultivation of a people-oriented, loving and caring social culture, and in retrospect, this Council passed motions on a number of occasions over the past few years calling for improvement to transport facilities for all people with disabilities in Hong Kong 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 even though some public transport operators have given effect to the motions, they only do so in an unfair and selective manner, 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 take the lead to make improvements; this Council strongly demands the Administration to take the lead in implementing in those public transport operators with the Government as the major shareholder and set an example for 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 more effectively:

- (a) to formulate a policy on fare concessions on public transport which covers all people with disabilities in Hong Kong, including those with different degree of disability;
- (b) 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 all people with disabilities in Hong Kong;
- (c) 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 in Hong Kong, so as to help them integrate into society and improve their life;
- (d) 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;
- (e) to set aside a certain percentage of the cash dividends received from the MTR Corporation Limited each year to subsidise the transport fares of people with disabilities;
- (f) to request the MTR Corporation Limited to expeditiously install facilities such as platform screen doors, platform gates and automatic mechanical gap fillers for all its rail lines in order to strengthen platform safety, and improve station facilities with a view to creating a barrier-free environment;
- (g) to request various public bus companies to expeditiously replace their buses with low floor type buses to cater for the transport needs of people with disabilities, and when a bus makes stops, inform passengers of the routing arrangement through its public address system for the convenience of the blind, and at the same time incorporate provisions in the new franchise agreements on public bus services to require bus companies to offer concessionary fares to people with disabilities;

- (h) to study subsidising people with disabilities in need to purchase electrical wheelchairs so as to facilitate them to use public transport;
- (i) to request the Transport Department (TD) 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, subsidise 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
- (j) to step up consultation with people with disabilities to fully realise 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 on the follow-up actions taken by the Administration.

Provision of Fare Concessions on Public Transport for Persons with Disabilities

3. Regarding the fare levels of major public transport services, we have put in place fare adjustment mechanisms to effectively regulate the basic fares. With a view to helping reduce the travelling expenses of passengers (including persons with disabilities), the Administration has also been encouraging public transport operators to reduce fares or introduce concessions as far as possible, taking into account various factors including the operating and financial conditions of the public transport operators, overall economic environment of the society, market condition, passenger needs, etc. So far, all major public transport operators have provided passengers with various fare concessions, including those for persons with disabilities.

4. The MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) has listened to the society's views and introduced fare concessions for recipients aged between 12 and 64 of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) with 100% disability

and Disability Allowance. Persons with disabilities holding Personalised Octopus cards with “Persons with Disabilities Status” can enjoy fare concessions of about 50% on all MTR commuter lines (except Airport Express Line), Light Rail routes and MTR Bus services. Besides, persons with disabilities can enjoy fare concessions on some ferry routes and green minibus routes. At present, 19 ferry routes offer 10% to 50% fare discount to persons with disabilities, and three green minibus routes offer about 15% fare concessions to persons with disabilities.

5. Moreover, all major public transport operators, including MTRCL, franchised bus operators, major ferry service operators, and operators of tram, peak trams and some public light bus support the annual International Day of Disabled Persons where a free-ride day is offered to persons with disabilities. In 2010, the free-ride day took place on 21 November.

6. The Administration will continue to encourage public transport operators to introduce fare reductions or concessions as far as possible, taking into account various factors. That said, in line with the spirit of free enterprise, whether and what fare concessions are offered are commercial decisions of individual public transport operators. If the Administration mandates the operators to provide specific fare concessions for specific groups of passengers, the financial impact on the operators will eventually be reflected in the basic fares.

7. Aware of the wish of persons with disabilities for half-fare concessions by franchised bus companies, the Administration has discussed with various franchised bus companies and asked them to assess the potential financial implications should half-fare concessions be offered to persons with disabilities holding Personalised Octopus cards with “Persons with Disabilities Status” similar to MTRCL’s practice mentioned in para. 4 above. Separately, some Member(s) suggested that a certain proportion of the cash dividends the Government received from MTRCL each year be set aside to subsidise the travelling expenses of persons with disabilities. Pursuant to section 3 of the Public Finance Ordinance (Cap. 2), the cash dividends received by the Administration from MTRCL shall form part of the general revenue. Such revenue will be used in various policy areas on the general public. The Administration will consider resource utilisation as a whole before appropriate allocation. To provide fare concessions with public money requires strong

justification, and consideration must also be given to funding constraints and priorities of various services as a whole.

Facilities for Convenience of People with Disabilities

8. All MTR stations and Light Rail stops, except Racecourse Station of the East Rail Line, provide barrier-free access (with facilities such as stairlifts, lifts, ramps and wheelchair aids, etc). In fact, since 1992, MTRCL has launched a station improvement project under which pre-1990 station facilities have been improved gradually. Up to now, MTRCL has spent over \$600 million on the project and has committed another \$200 million from 2011 to 2015 to further enhance barrier-free transport. MTRCL has already planned to carry out the works at nine stations to retrofit lifts connecting with the ground level.10. On the retrofitting of platform screen doors and platform gates, the Transport and Housing Bureau has reported the situation and progress to the Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways of the Legislative Council Panel on Transport in January 2011.

9. Regarding franchised buses, all franchised bus companies will procure wheelchair-accessible buses as far as possible when purchasing new buses. As at November 2010, there were more than 3,200 wheelchair-accessible buses, representing about 56% of all buses. All buses operated by The Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited (about 3,830 buses) and Long Win Bus Company Limited (about 160 buses) have been provided with the Bus Stop Announcement System. As for Citybus Limited, more than 120 buses of its fleet were installed with the system from September 2010 to November 2010 under a contract granted by the company in the second quarter of 2010. The remaining 640 or so buses in its fleet operated under the Franchise for Hong Kong Island and Cross-harbour Routes are planned for installation of the system within 2011. If the system proves to work well, the fleet operated by the Citybus Limited under the Franchise for North Lantau and Chek Lap Kok Airport Routes (about 170 buses) and the fleet of the New World First Bus Services Limited (about 700 buses) will also be retrofitted with the system in phases.

Additional Resources to Improve the Rehabus Service

10. Over the past three financial years, the Administration has allocated additional resources to procure 20 new Rehabuses and replace 37 old ones. In 2010-11, additional funding has been allocated to procure 4 new buses, thereby increasing the Rehabus fleet size to 119 vehicles in January 2011. We also replaced 6 old buses and the average vehicle age has been reduced from 5.8 years in 2006 to 4.7 years. Apart from strengthening the Dial-a-ride service, the new buses have been deployed for providing scheduled route service to meet the needs of persons with disabilities on the waiting list, including those residing in new towns and remote areas.

11. 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 persons with disabilities who still have difficulties in using public transport.

Subsidising Persons with Disabilities in Need to Purchase Electrical Wheelchairs

12. 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 persons with disabilities 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 and Other Relief Measures

13. According to TD, about 20 to 40 disabled drivers have registered private cars with over five seats annually since 2001. As at end-November 2010, 369 disabled drivers are registered owners of such vehicles, accounting

for 23.6% of registered disabled drivers. Broadly speaking, TD's statistics indicate that this type of vehicles has not been widely used among persons with disabilities to meet their basic transport needs.

14. Currently, vehicles with a cylinder capacity not exceeding 1,500 c.c. can carry wheelchair users and foldaway wheelchairs. In addition, hatchback vehicles, which can carry bulkier foldaway wheelchairs, are available in the market. In general, this type of vehicles can meet the basic transport needs of disabled drivers using wheelchairs. Therefore, the current practice of waiving the licence fee of vehicles with a cylinder capacity not exceeding 1,500 c.c. is considered appropriate.

15. At present, disabled drivers can enjoy toll-free passage through the Lantau Link and various government tunnels in Hong Kong. Such concessions provide disabled drivers with adequate choices in using the tunnels. They may choose their driving routes according to their personal needs and affordability, just like ordinary drivers.

16. Disabled drivers currently enjoy half-fare parking concession at TD's 14 multi-storey car parks and two 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.

17. As at end-November 2010, there were a total of 331 designated on-street parking spaces across the territory for Permit holders, representing an increase of about 120 parking spaces over 2002. At the same time, there were 1,444 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 as well as the supply and demand of parking spaces at those sections.