



## 1. Introduction

1.1 In Hong Kong, taxis play a key role in the public transport network by providing personal, point-to-point mode of public transport service. At present, all taxis in operation are broadly the same in terms of seating capacity and services provided. In recent years, there is a slowly growing fleet of wheelchair-accessible taxis catering for passengers such as elderly and disabled people.<sup>1</sup>

1.2 In 2014, the Government announced to carry out the Public Transport Strategy Study to look into important issues relating to various public transport modes to ensure that they would continue to complement each other in the wake of an expanding railway network. The Study will review, among other things, if the existing supply of taxi service can meet demand, having regard to the implications for other public transport services. The Panel on Transport will discuss this issue at its meeting to be held on 16 June 2015. To facilitate Members' deliberations, this information note studies the taxi service in Seoul, Singapore, Taipei and the state of Victoria in Australia. Taipei's taxis are fairly standard with limited options, while the other three places have made available taxi service that caters for passengers of different needs.

## 2. Seoul

2.1 In Seoul, the taxi industry is regulated by the Seoul Metropolitan Government. Taxi operators are licensed to run taxi service. There are over 72 000 taxis<sup>2</sup> in Seoul, of which about 23 000 are operated by corporate taxi

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<sup>1</sup> Subject to the vehicle design, taxis in Hong Kong are licensed to carry a maximum of four or five passengers (driver excluded). In addition, there are currently six wheelchair-accessible taxis in Hong Kong. A maximum of two wheelchair users can be accommodated on a single trip with their two carers.

<sup>2</sup> The numbers do not include wheelchair-accessible taxis.

operators and about 49 000 by individual taxi operators who drive the taxis themselves.

### Types of taxis

2.2 Taxis in Seoul are broadly categorized into (a) regular taxis, (b) deluxe taxis, and (c) jumbo taxis. In addition, there is a fleet of wheelchair-accessible taxis which are operated directly by the Seoul Metropolitan Government. The features and taxi fare structures of these four types of taxis are summarized in **Table 1** below.

**Table 1 – Features and fare structures of taxis in Seoul**

<b>Regular Taxis</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Features – the most common type of taxis in Seoul with a seating capacity up to four passengers (driver excluded); typically silver or white-coloured but new taxis deployed in recent years are in orange for matching the urban design.</li> <li>Taxi fare – 3,000 Won (HK\$21) for the first 2 km, and 100 Won (HK\$0.7) per 142 m thereafter<sup>(1)</sup>; taxi fares are 20% higher if the service is provided after mid-night (12:00 am to 4:00 am).</li> </ul>
<b>Deluxe taxis</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Features – black-coloured taxis with the same seating capacity as regular taxis but more spacious; taxi drivers are more experienced, with at least 10 years of accident-free driving experience as a regular taxi driver.</li> <li>Taxi fare – higher than regular taxis, charging 5,000 Won (HK\$36) for the first 3 km, and 200 Won (HK\$1.4) per 164 m thereafter.<sup>(2)</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Jumbo taxis</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Features – black-coloured taxis used to accommodate groups up to eight passengers (driver excluded), serving as a popular choice for larger passenger groups.</li> <li>Taxi fare – same as deluxe taxis.</li> </ul>
<b>Wheelchair-accessible taxis</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Features – yellow-coloured taxis modified from vans and especially designed for people with severe disabilities; service must be booked in advance.</li> <li>Taxi fare – the lowest among different taxi types, charging 1,500 Won (HK\$11) for the first 5 km, 300 Won/km (HK\$2/km) for the next 5-10 km, and 35 Won/km (HK\$0.2/km) thereafter.</li> </ul>

Notes: (1) A time-based fare of 100 Won (HK\$0.7) per 35 seconds is applied when the speed is less than 15 km/h.

(2) A time-based fare of 200 Won (HK\$1.4) per 39 seconds is applied when the speed is less than 15 km/h.

2.3 In Seoul, some regular, deluxe and jumbo taxis carry an "International Taxi" sign on their taxi roofs. These taxis are known as international taxis which are designed to serve tourists speaking English, Chinese or Japanese. There are currently about 400 international taxis in Seoul and their drivers must have undergone the required foreign language training and passed the relevant oral tests. International taxis can be requested at the airport, or by reservation via phone call or internet. To maintain the service quality, the operation of the call centre is managed directly by the Seoul Metropolitan Government.

2.4 Taxi fares of international taxis are generally meter-based.<sup>3</sup> However, where the taxi trips are between the Incheon International Airport and the city downtown, a fixed flat fare is applied and the amount depends on the destination area.<sup>4</sup> International taxis can also charge on an hourly or full-day basis if they are used for tourism purpose.

2.5 Apart from a wider variety of taxis in operation, Seoul differs from Hong Kong on the introduction of an electronic payment system and technology-based initiative to provide more convenience to passengers.

#### Electronic payment system

2.6 All taxis in Seoul are equipped with an electronic payment system to allow passengers to make payment with debit/credit cards. According to the Seoul Metropolitan Government, when the service was introduced in 2007, only 3.5% of taxi fare payments were settled with credit cards. The usage rate has kept rising and reached a high of 60% in 2014.<sup>5</sup>

#### Technology-based safety initiative

2.7 The Seoul Metropolitan Government has made concerted efforts to improve passenger safety, especially women who take taxis at night. As such, it has in recent years made use of a wireless-based technology – the near field communication ("NFC") technology – for sharing of taxi information. Every

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<sup>3</sup> International taxis that are regular type are 20% more expensive than standard regular taxis, whereas for deluxe and jumbo taxis, taxi fares are the same regardless of whether they are international taxis.

<sup>4</sup> The flat fee ranges from 55,000 Won (HK\$390) to 75,000 Won (HK\$530) for regular-typed international taxis, and 80,000 Won (HK\$570) to 110,000 Won (HK\$780) for deluxe/jumbo-typed international taxis.

<sup>5</sup> See Seoul Metropolitan Government (2015a).

taxi in Seoul is fitted with an NFC data chip in passenger seats. The chip contains the taxi information including the driver's name, contact and plate number. When passengers touch on the NFC chip with their mobile phones that are installed the NFC mobile application, the data in the chip will be transferred wirelessly to the mobile phones. The taxi information will then be sent from the passengers' mobile phones to their designated family or friends via text message. The real-time location of the taxi can also be tracked during the ride.

### 3. Singapore

3.1 In Singapore, taxi service is predominantly operated by six licensed corporate taxi operators which are distinguished by the colour and design of their taxi fleet. These six operators together operate about 28 520 taxis in Singapore. In addition, there are a small number of taxis (about 180) run by individual taxi operators who are also the taxi drivers themselves. These individually-operated taxis are known as yellow-top taxis. The Ministry of Transport has established the Land Transport Authority as a statutory board responsible for regulating the land transportation systems including the taxi operators and taxi service in Singapore.

#### Types of taxis

3.2 In Singapore, about 95% of taxis are standard taxis providing regular taxi service. These taxis have a seating capacity of four passengers excluding driver.<sup>6</sup> The remaining 5% are categorized as premium taxis. The vehicle types used for premium taxis differ among taxi operators. Broadly speaking, there are (a) premium taxis with the use of more spacious vehicles to carry up to four passengers as standard taxis, and (b) larger-sized premium taxis for larger passenger groups. To enable taxi operators to flexibly respond to market conditions, taxi operators are given the freedom to set their own taxi fares.<sup>7</sup> Major taxi features and taxi fare structures are summarized in **Table 2** below.

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<sup>6</sup> A standard taxi can seat more than four passengers if there are children under the age of 12. For example, it can accommodate up to three adult passengers with two children, or two adults with three children.

<sup>7</sup> While taxi operators are free to set their taxi fares, the Singaporean government has proposed to standardize some parts of the taxi fares. For instance, each taxi operator will be required to have only one set of unit fares and booking fees for all its standard taxis, and one set of unit fares and booking fees for all its premium taxis. The proposed change is expected to come into force in the second half of 2015.

**Table 2 – Features and fare structures of taxis in Singapore**

<b>Standard taxis</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Features – the most common type of taxis in Singapore with a seating capacity up to four passengers (driver excluded).</li> <li>• Taxi fare – (a) flag-down fare ranging from S\$3.2 (HK\$18) to S\$3.9 (HK\$22) for the first 1 km, (b) uniform distance and time-based unit fare<sup>(1)</sup>, (c) time and location surcharges<sup>(2)</sup>, and (d) booking fee for advance booking<sup>(3)</sup>.</li> </ul>
<b>Premium taxis</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Features of four-seater premium taxis – same seating capacity as standard taxis but more spacious vehicle models are used.</li> <li>• Features of larger premium taxis – designed to accommodate groups up to six or seven passengers (driver excluded), depending on the vehicle model; some vehicle models can be used to carry passengers using wheelchairs.</li> <li>• Taxi fare – (a) flag-down fare ranging from S\$3.5 (HK\$20) to S\$5.0 (HK\$29) for the first 1 km, (b) distance and time-based unit fare<sup>(4)</sup>, (c) time and location surcharges, and (d) booking fee for advance booking. For larger premium taxis, an additional passenger fee may be charged. Taxi fare subsidies are offered to eligible disabled people.</li> </ul>

Notes: (1) All standard taxis charge a uniform rate of S\$0.22 (HK\$1.3) per 400 m for 1-10 km and S\$0.22 (HK\$1.3) per 350 m thereafter, plus S\$0.22 (HK\$1.3) for every 45 seconds of waiting time.

(2) Time surcharges refer to peak-period and mid-night surcharges, while location surcharges refer to surcharges levied at specific locations or areas, e.g. airport. The surcharges vary among operators.

(3) Third-party taxi booking service providers (i.e. those who are not taxi operators) with over 20 participating taxis are required to register with the Land Transport Authority under the *Third-Party Taxi Booking Service Providers Act* passed in May 2015.

(4) Most premium taxis charge a rate of S\$0.3 (HK\$1.7) per 400 m for 1-10 km and S\$0.3 (HK\$1.7) per 350 m thereafter, plus S\$0.3 (HK\$1.7) for every 45 seconds of waiting time.

Sources: Land Transport Authority (2015b) and respective websites of corporate taxi operators.

3.3 In a bid to ensure taxi availability, corporate taxi operators are required to ensure that 85% of their taxis are on the roads during peak hours<sup>8</sup> and are able to achieve the minimum daily mileage of 250 km. In addition, the Singaporean government launched a one-year trial scheme in November 2014 to save waiting time of taxi commuters.

<sup>8</sup> Peak hours are from 7:00 am to 11:00 am and 5:00 pm to 11:00 pm.

3.4 Under the trial scheme, the Land Transport Authority has installed at seven selected taxi stands each an information system that can detect the passenger demand in the taxi queue. The system is set to alert the call centres of the taxi operators when (a) there are 15 or more people in the taxi queue, and (b) the average waiting time for a taxi exceeds 15 minutes. Upon receiving the alert, the call centres will broadcast the information to their taxi drivers and channel available taxis to those taxi stands with high demand. This helps reduce the waiting time of taxi commuters while better utilizing the vacant taxis.

## 4. Taipei

4.1 In Taipei, there are approximately 30 000 taxis in operation which account for more than one-third of the taxis in Taiwan. Taxis are operated by three types of licensed operators: (a) taxi companies which hire taxi drivers or engage them as self-employed persons to provide taxi service, (b) taxi co-operatives run by a group of taxi drivers<sup>9</sup>, and (c) individual taxi operators who are also the taxi drivers themselves. They respectively operate about 63%, 20% and 17% of the taxis in Taipei. The taxi industry is jointly regulated by the Taipei City Government, and the Taipei City Motor Vehicles Office of the Ministry of Transportation and Communications.

### Types of taxis

4.2 Similar to Hong Kong, taxi types in Taipei are rather limited. Taxis in Taipei are yellow-coloured, and they are required to be four-door sedan vehicles<sup>10</sup> that can generally seat up to four passengers excluding driver. All taxis provide regular service and apply uniform taxi fare structures and rates. Apart from meter-based fares, there are extra charges for using taxis during night time and Chinese New Year.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Taxi co-operatives are formed by a group of taxi drivers who own their taxi vehicles and operate taxi service as a member of the co-operative.

<sup>10</sup> See 監理法規檢索系統 (2012).

<sup>11</sup> Meter-based fares are NT\$70 (HK\$18) for the first 1.25 km, and NT\$5 (HK\$1.3) per 250 m thereafter. Extra charge of NT\$20 (HK\$5) is imposed during 11:00 pm to 6:00 am. During the Chinese New Year period (two days before Chinese New Year till end of holiday), extra charge of NT\$20 (HK\$5) or NT\$40 (HK\$10) is imposed, depending on the time of travel.

4.3 In addition to standard taxis, there is also a fleet of wheelchair-accessible taxis operated by taxi operators. These taxis have the capacity to carry one wheelchair passenger and up to four other non-wheelchair passengers at the same time. Wheelchair-accessible taxis charge the same fares as standard taxis.

4.4 In recent years, the Taipei City Government has launched two initiatives to improve the quality of taxi service. They are the subsidy scheme for eligible senior citizens and disabled people to use taxi service, and taxi tour service available to both domestic and international tourists.

#### Subsidies to senior citizens and people with disabilities

4.5 The Taipei City Government has worked with 11 taxi operators to launch an initiative to provide subsidized taxi service to senior citizens aged over 65 and people with disabilities. To be entitled to receive the service, they must hold a deposit-based payment card, known as senior citizen/handicapped EasyCard specifically issued by the Taipei City Government, and make payment with the card.<sup>12</sup> The government will subsidize NT\$32 (HK\$8) for every taxi trip costing over NT\$100 (HK\$25), and the maximum amount of subsidy is capped at NT\$480 (HK\$122) per month.

#### Taxi tour service

4.6 To promote tourism and taxi service, the Taipei City Government has recently collaborated with some taxi operators to introduce the taxi tour service. Tours are customized and feature three major journey themes: culture tour, recreational tour and scenic tour. Taxi tour fees are charged on an hourly basis.<sup>13</sup> Foreigners may request taxi drivers who can speak foreign languages.

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<sup>12</sup> They may simply pay for taxi fares by scanning their EasyCard using the card reader installed at the back of the driver's seat. In order to be eligible for the senior citizen/handicapped EasyCard, they must have resided in Taipei for one year.

<sup>13</sup> Tour fees should not exceed NT\$2,400 (HK\$610) for the first four hours. Thereafter, the hourly rate should not exceed NT\$500 (HK\$127).

## 5. State of Victoria, Australia

5.1 In Victoria, a taxi operator (also known as a permit holder) is an individual or corporation that owns one or more taxi vehicles. Some operators own their taxi licence, while others have rented a licence from another licence holder. There are also operators who do not drive their own taxis but employ others as lease-drivers. Indeed, a majority of taxi drivers in Victoria work with taxi operators as self-employed persons. Victoria's taxi industry has in recent years undergone a series of reforms implemented by an independent body, the Taxi Services Commission. The Commission was established in 2013 to replace the Victorian Taxi Directorate as the regulator of the taxi industry.

### Types of taxis

5.2 There are different types of taxis operating in Victoria, namely (a) conventional taxis, (b) peak service taxis, (c) premium service taxis, (d) high occupancy taxis, and (e) wheelchair-accessible taxis. Their features and taxi fare structures are given in **Table 3**.



**Table 3 – Features and fare structures of taxis in Victoria<sup>(1)</sup>**

<b>Conventional taxis</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Features – the most common type of taxis in Victoria with a seating capacity up to four passengers (driver excluded).</li> <li>• Taxi fare – meter-based fares, plus a booking fee capped at A\$2 (HK\$12)<sup>(2)</sup> if the taxi service is booked in advance.</li> </ul>
<b>Peak service taxis</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Features – introduced in 2003 to provide service in the metropolitan taxi zone daily from 3:00 pm to 7:00 am, and 24 hours during special events such as Melbourne Cup Day.</li> <li>• Taxi fare – same as conventional taxis.</li> </ul>
<b>Premium service taxis</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Features – better service than conventional taxis in terms of more spacious vehicles used and experience of drivers.<sup>(3)</sup></li> <li>• Taxi fare – meter-based taxi fare, plus (a) a premium service surcharge capped at A\$11 (HK\$66) and (b) a booking fee capped at A\$2 (HK\$12) for advance booking<sup>(2)</sup>.</li> </ul>
<b>High occupancy taxis</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Features – known as maxi-taxis which are able to carry up to 11 passengers (driver excluded).</li> <li>• Taxi fare – meter-based taxi fare, plus (a) a high occupancy fee capped at A\$14 (HK\$84) and (b) a booking fee capped at A\$2 (HK\$12)<sup>(2)</sup> for advance booking.</li> </ul>
<b>Wheelchair-accessible taxis</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Features – designed to carry passengers using wheelchairs; some vehicles are large enough to accommodate two wheelchair users.</li> <li>• Taxi fare – disabled people are charged meter-based fares only; those with severe and permanent disabilities and in financial hardship are offered subsidized taxi fares.</li> </ul>

Notes: (1) The taxi fare structures are for the metropolitan and some urban areas. Basic taxi fares are meter-based varying with distance and time of travel. Higher rates are applied during specified night time, peak hours and public holidays.

(2) A booking fee capped at A\$13 (HK\$78) is applied when the booked taxi trip is from or to airport.

(3) Authorized service providers, known as Taxi Booking Services, are responsible for developing their own requirements on premium service taxis. Taxi operators who wish to operate premium service taxis should meet the service requirements and seek endorsement from the Taxi Booking Services.

Source: Taxi Services Commission.

5.3 All taxis in the Melbourne metropolitan zone, except peak service taxis<sup>14</sup>, are subject to the yellow-paint requirement. This requirement does not apply to taxis operating in areas outside Melbourne-metropolitan zones, where taxi operators can use their own colour for their taxis.<sup>15</sup> As part of the reforms in Melbourne metropolitan zone, taxi operators operating five or more taxi vehicles can apply for an exemption to the yellow-paint requirement and use a different colour to distinguish their business and build a professional image.

5.4 Due to the shortage of supply and unsatisfactory services in the taxi and hire car industry, the Victorian government conducted a major independent inquiry into the industry in 2011 and a number of recommendations were made after the inquiry. The Taxi Services Commission has accepted most of the recommendations and devised a reform package to refine the industry. The planned and implemented reform measures aim to transform the taxi and hire car industry into the one with greater competition and better service standards.

#### New type of taxi licences

5.5 In the past, the Victorian government capped the number of taxi licences issued in the state. People who wished to operate taxi business could either buy an existing perpetual licence in the open market or rent a licence from a licence holder. In 2014, the Victorian government introduced a new type of taxi licences available to eligible applicants at a fixed annual fee.<sup>16</sup> One of the conditions for the granting of new licences is that licence holders must operate the taxi themselves and cannot assign or lease the licence to third parties for operation. The Taxi Services Commission may decide to suspend issuing new licences under circumstances such as the issuing of more licences will have a detrimental impact on taxi drivers.

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<sup>14</sup> Peak service taxis have distinctive green roofs and thus are commonly referred to as "Green Tops".

<sup>15</sup> There are four taxi zones in Victoria, which are: (a) Melbourne metropolitan zone, (b) urban and large regional zone, (c) regional zone, and (d) country zone which encompasses all other areas of Victoria.

<sup>16</sup> The current annual fee for a conventional taxi licence in the metropolitan zone is A\$22,494 (HK\$135,000), subject to annual price adjustment linked to inflation.

## Knowledge test for drivers

5.6 The Taxi Services Commission has developed a knowledge test for taxi and hire car drivers, with an aim to improve their geographical knowledge, English literacy, customer service skills and disability awareness. The test comprises three modules, namely general driving assessment, driver behaviour assessment and geographical assessment. All people who wish to become a taxi driver in specified zones<sup>17</sup> must undertake and pass the knowledge test. Those existing drivers who have held the accreditation for less than five years will also need to pass the relevant modules when they renew their accreditation.<sup>18</sup>

## Central booking service for wheelchair-accessible taxis

5.7 The Taxi Services Commission is planning to set up a central booking centre to accept bookings of wheelchair-accessible taxis, thereby reducing the waiting time of the disabled and providing them with more reliable and accurate services. The Commission will consider requiring all operators of wheelchair-accessible taxis in the metropolitan zone be affiliated to the central booking centre and accept bookings from the centre.

## Public register

5.8 The Taxi Services Commission is developing an online public register as a database of taxi and hire car industry participants. The register allows people to search the participants' information, including the names and accreditation status of taxi drivers, operation conditions of taxi vehicles, business contact of permit holders and Taxi Booking Services<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Specific zones comprise the metropolitan taxi zone, and the urban and large regional taxi zone.

<sup>18</sup> Driver accreditation is renewed every year or every three years.

<sup>19</sup> In Victoria, taxi booking service is a regulated service which can only be offered by Taxi Booking Services.

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