**Subcommittee to Study the Transport Needs
and Provision of Concessionary Public Transport Fares for
Persons with Disabilities**

Second Information Paper for Meeting on 22 May 2007

PURPOSE

This paper sets out the Administration's views on the provision of escort service on board Rehabus, in response to the Subcommittee Chairman's note of 11 May 2007.

REQUEST FOR ESCORTS ON BOARD REHABUS BY PARENTS' ASSOCIATIONS

2.   In early November 2006, three handicapped children parents associations, namely, the Parents' Association of Pre-school Handicapped Children, the Association of Parents of the Severely Mentally Handicapped and the Hong Kong Association for Parents of Reasons with Physical Disabilities, jointly wrote to Transport Department (TD) requesting for a meeting to discuss the provision of escorts on Rehabus.

3.   In early December 2006, TD and the Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation (HKSR), our NGO agent operating the rehabus, met with representatives from the associations. According to parents, some handicapped school children have to use rehabus service due to shortage in school bus service. At the meeting, parent representatives stated that they had conducted a survey, which indicated a need for escort service on Rehabus, as the children would not have the ability to take care of themselves during emergency situation in view of their disabilities. In response, TD requested for further information including details of the survey finding so that the Administration could further study the request.   We are yet to hear from the associations on this.

KEY USERS OF REHABUS SERVICE

4.   Rehabus is a specialized transport service to serve persons with disabilities (PWDs) who have no alternative means of point-to-point public transport in meeting their transport needs.   It is primarily for commuting PWDs to workplace, though requests for service from PWDs for the purposes of education, training, medical treatment and social participation would be entertained, subject to availability of spare capacity.

5.   At present, out of the 764 regular passengers travelling daily on

weekdays on rehabus scheduled route service, there are 254 students under the age 18. HKSR conducts screening beforehand to ensure that all passengers are of reasonable physical conditions and are suitable for travelling on their own on rehabus.

PROVISION OF ESCORTS ON SCHOOL BUSES

6.   School bus services are operated by private operators or in some cases by schools on their own. They have to comply with the guidelines for ensuring safety of pupils on school transport vehicles. The provision of an escort has been made mandatory as a licensing condition for vehicles with 17 or more passenger seats providing student services to primary and kindergarten students as well as vehicles with 16 passenger seats or less serving kindergarten students.

PROVISION OF ESCORTS ON BOARD REHABUS

7.   Presently, most of the vehicles in the rehabus fleet have a seating capacity of 10 to 11, which caters for about 4 wheelchair spaces. All rehabus vehicles are fitted with lifting device for wheelchairs and safety fastening devices for securing wheelchairs. Under the existing arrangement, a rehabus is operated by one driver whose duties include operating the wheelchair lifting device and the wheelchair restraint system on board during passenger boarding and alighting.

8.   Rehabus drivers receive training and are tested annually on their driving skills and their knowledge in the use of safety fastening devices on board their vehicles. All drivers have valid first-aid qualifications. All emergency doors on board vehicles are fitted with alarm, which will be activated whenever the doors are opened. Passengers with special needs may request that they be accompanied by carers during the rehabus trips.

9.   According to TD and HKSR, there were no accidents and injuries involving students travelling on rehabus in the past three years.

Way Forward

10.   With a view to addressing the parents' concern for escorts for their children while travelling to school, we shall follow up with them their concern and then consider suitable solution to the issue in question.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
Transport Department
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