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Panel on Welfare Services

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 14 May 2012**

**Public transport concessions for the elderly
and persons with disabilities**

Purpose

This paper gives a brief account of past discussions of the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") on the proposal to provide fare concessions for the elderly and persons with disabilities ("the concession scheme").

Background

2. At present, a monthly transport supplement of \$200 has been provided to recipients under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") Scheme aged between 12 and 64 with 100% disabilities and recipients of Disability Allowance ("DA") in the same age group since July 2008 in order to facilitate their integration into society. The Mass Transit Railway ("MTR") Corporation Limited has also launched a fare concession scheme since 22 December 2009 for the same groups of persons with disabilities.

3. In the 2011-2012 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced that the Administration will use public resources to facilitate the provision of fare concessions for elderly persons aged 65 and above and CSSA recipients aged between 12 and 64 with 100% disabilities and DA recipients of the same age group to travel on the general MTR lines, franchised buses and ferries at a concessionary fare of \$2 a trip on all days and at all times.

Deliberations of the Panel

Implementation timetable

4. At the meeting on 21 October 2011 when the Panel received the Administration's briefing on the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2011-2012, members were advised that the concession scheme would be introduced in the second half of 2012. While welcoming the concession scheme, members were concerned about the implementation timetable and called on the Administration to launch the concession scheme as early as possible.

5. The Administration advised that the Labour and Welfare Bureau ("LWB"), the Transport and Housing Bureau and the Transport Department had proactively kick-started the relevant preparatory work. These include confirming the coverage of the scheme and the continued provision of the existing concessions which had been voluntarily offered by the public transport operators to the elderly and persons with disabilities, and discussing with the Octopus Cards Limited and public transport operators various implementation and reimbursement details with a view to launching the scheme soonest possible in the latter half of 2012.

6. According to the Administration, provisions for the concession scheme would be earmarked under the 2012-2013 Budget, and the funding approval from the Finance Committee would need to be sought. It was expected that the scheme would benefit around 1 100 000 persons, including 130 000 eligible persons with disabilities.

Participating public transport operators

7. Some members held the view that the concession scheme should be extended to a wider range of transport operators such as trams and public light buses. The Administration advised that it aimed to introduce the concession scheme to cover the three major modes of public transportation, i.e. MTR, franchised buses and ferries in the first instance. The fare of \$2 per trip was proposed having regard to the existing fare concessions offered by some public transport operators on specified days. As the elderly tram fare for a single journey was currently lower than the proposed concessionary fare of \$2, the Administration had no intention to include trams in the concession scheme. The Administration stressed that it would review whether there would be a need to extend the scheme to other modes of public transportation after full implementation of the concession scheme.

Eligibility criteria in relation to the definition of disability

8. Some members strongly urged the Administration to extend the concession scheme to persons with less than 100% disabilities (e.g. loss of function of one limb), and in a broader perspective to review the definition of "severely disabled" under the DA Scheme.

9. The Administration advised that the eligibility criteria for the provision of fare concession to persons with disabilities were in line with the Government's rehabilitation policy to enable persons with disabilities to lead an independent life so that they could participate in various activities on an equal basis with others. The Administration further advised that the policy objective of non-means-tested DA was to provide financial support for the severely disabled to help them meet their special needs. Under the DA system, "severely disabled" was defined as being medically certified to be broadly equivalent to a 100% loss of earning capacity, with reference to the percentages stipulated in Schedule 1 to the Employee's Compensation Ordinance (Cap. 282). The definition of "severely disabled" is also applicable to the means-tested CSSA Scheme. As CSSA recipients were not limited to the severely disabled, the CSSA Scheme provided different standard rates for persons with disabilities at three levels (i.e. medically certified as 50% disabled, 100% disabled and requiring constant attendance respectively), and special grants and supplements.

10. Concern was also raised about the ineligibility of holders of the registration card for people with disabilities ("RC") for the concessionary fares. The Administration explained that the purpose of issuing RC to persons with disabilities by the Central Registry for Rehabilitation under LWB was to enable the cardholder to produce, when necessary, as a documentary proof of his/her disability status to facilitate the provision of prompt and appropriate assistance to them. The RC was not associated with provision of any welfare benefits. The objective, target service users and eligibility threshold of RC were different from those of the DA Scheme.

Latest development

11. The Administration would brief members on the details of the concession scheme at the forthcoming Panel meeting on 14 May 2012 before seeking the funding approval of the Finance Committee.

Relevant papers

12. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
8 May 2012

**Relevant papers on public transport concessions
for the elderly and people with disabilities**

| Committee | Date of meeting | Paper |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Panel on Welfare Services | 21 October 2011 (Item I) | Agenda Minutes |
| Panel on Welfare Services | 14 November 2011 (Item III) | Agenda Minutes |
| Panel on Welfare Services | 12 December 2011 (Item III) | Agenda Minutes |
| Legislative Council | 14 December 2011 | Official Record of Proceedings (Question 19) |
| Legislative Council | 15 February 2012 | Official Record of Proceedings (Question 5) |
| Legislative Council | 29 February 2012 | Official Record of Proceedings (Question 3) |

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