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By email (ssylau@legco.gov.hk)

Ms Sophie LAU
Clerk to Panel on Transport
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central
Hong Kong
(Fax no.: 2840 0716)

27 May 2020

Dear Ms LAU,

Panel on Transport

Letter from Hon Alvin YEUNG requesting to include “provision of subsidies to public transport under the Anti-epidemic Fund” on the agenda

I refer to the Secretariat’s letter dated 13 May 2020 to the Secretary for Transport and Housing regarding the captioned subject. Our reply is as follows.

The local economy is hard hit by the novel coronavirus epidemic. The Government has earlier responded to the needs of the public and society and rolled out a package of relief measures through the Anti-epidemic Fund (“AEF”), including a number of one-off measures covering all modes of public transport and catering for various needs of commuters, so as to ease the fare burden borne by the public.

We understand Members' concerns about the fares of public transport. With a view to easing the fare burden of MTR passengers and promoting business activities in general, the MTR Corporation Limited will offer fare concession to passengers, including topping up the current 3.3% fare concession to a 20% fare concession, and allowing passengers to enjoy a flat reduction of \$100 for each purchase of "MTR City Saver" and five types of "Monthly Pass Extras" during the six months starting from July 2020. The Government will bear half of the cost required, subject to a cap of \$0.8 billion.

Taking into account the current business situations of other public transport operators, such as franchised bus companies and green minibus operators, and the financial hardship faced by them, even if the Government is willing to bear half of the cost required, it is not possible for them to bear the other half of the cost required at this stage to roll out fare concession measures. Thus, through the second round of AEF, the Government will temporarily relax the monthly threshold of the Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme ("PTFSS") from \$400 to \$200 in the latter half of 2020 in order to further relieve commuters' fare burden during and after the epidemic. Between July and December this year, the Government will provide a subsidy amounting to one-third of the monthly public transport expenses in excess of \$200, subject to a maximum of \$400 per month. The estimated number of beneficiaries under PTFSS will increase from around 2.14 million to around 3.8 million per month. Commuters can collect the enhanced subsidy from mid-August this year onwards.

In addition, to help the transport sector cope with the operating pressure in the prevailing environment, the Government has rolled out a package of support measures under the two rounds of AEF to provide financial support to various transport trades (including the affected frontline drivers), including providing subsidies to public transport operators, implementing measures to help keep jobs of employees and providing financial support directly to taxi and red minibus drivers, etc., with a view to alleviating the heavy operating pressure and fare increase pressure of public transport operators, while striving to maintain the livelihood of frontline staff and drivers so that they can tide over the difficult times together.

The Government will continue to closely monitor the business and financial situations of public transport operators, and continue to encourage employers to maintain good communication with employees in a spirit of mutual understanding so as to ride out the difficulties together.

Yours sincerely,
[signed]
(Ann CHAN)
for Secretary for Transport and Housing