

LCQ22: Enhancing service quality and improving operating environment of taxi industry

Following is a question by the Hon Frankie Yick and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (February 20):

Question:

Some taxi trade organisations have relayed that there are serious succession and ageing problems of taxi drivers. According to their estimation, about 10 per cent of the taxis are currently left idle due to a lack of drivers, causing a decrease in taxi services. As the charges of illegal private car hire services (commonly known as "white licence car services") are not subject to any regulation and tax evasion is possible for the income from such services, some taxi drivers have, in recent years, become drivers of white licence cars so that they can earn a higher income and have a greater freedom in deciding their business hours, thereby aggravating the taxi drivers' wastage. Those organisations are also concerned that the franchised taxis scheme that the Government plans to implement will aggravate the wastage of drivers of conventional taxis. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of holders of a valid taxi driving licence and, among them, the number of those who were issued the driving licence for the first time, at the end of each of the past five years, with a tabulated breakdown of such numbers by the age group (i.e. 29 or below, 30 to 39, 40 to 49, 50 to 59, 60 to 69, 70 to 79 and 80 or above) to which the holders belonged at that time;
- (2) of the measures taken by the Government in the past five years (including those for combating white licence car services) to improve the business environment of the taxi trade, so as to increase the income of taxi drivers and attract new blood to the trade, together with the details and effectiveness of each of these measures;
- (3) as the Government has plans to relax one of the requirements for applying for commercial driving licences (including taxi licence), namely by shortening the minimum period for which an applicant has held a valid driving licence for private car or light goods vehicle before making the application from three years to one year, whether the Government will consider lowering at the same time the minimum age requirement for applying for such type of licences from 21 to 19, in order to attract young people to join the taxi trade as soon as practicable; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) whether it will consider shelving its plan of introducing franchised taxis; if so, of the details; if not, how the Government will prevent the

franchised taxis from aggravating the problems of wastage and manpower shortage of drivers of conventional taxis?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been highly concerned about the manpower situation of the transport industry, including the taxi trade, and has been striving to assist the trade in enhancing the service quality and improving the operating environment so as to attract new blood and alleviate the problem of manpower shortage. My reply to the various parts of the Hon Frankie Yick's question is as follows:

(1) The number of holders and new holders of a valid full driving licence for taxis by age group as at December 31 in each of the past five years is tabulated at Annex.

(2) The Transport Department (TD) has been striving to enhance the operating environment of the trade and has implemented various trade facilitation measures, so as to foster the long-term healthy development of the taxi trade. To further strengthen its interaction and co-operation with the taxi trade and other stakeholders, the TD established the Committee on Taxi Service Quality (CTSQ) in January 2018, which serves as a multi-party platform for discussing various reform strategies and measures under the existing taxi licensing regime. To this end, the measures took forward by the TD, in collaboration with the CTSQ, include (i) updating the "Hong Kong Taxi Service Standard" and "Hong Kong Taxi Service Guidelines" by the TD in July 2018 to clearly set out the conduct and obligations of taxi drivers, taxi owners, agents and passengers under the law; (ii) launching an online training course for in-service taxi drivers by the TD in November 2018 to improve drivers' customer service skills; and (iii) rolling out the enhanced Taxi Driver Commendation Scheme by the TD in October 2018 and organising a prize presentation ceremony in January 2019 to recognise taxi drivers with outstanding service performance, so as to enhance the professional image and service quality of taxi drivers.

Furthermore, the CTSQ has also strived to push TD to enhance the existing mechanism for handling complaints relating to taxi services, with a view to taking actions against drivers who are the subjects of repeated complaints and assisting the taxi trade in setting up a system for self-monitoring and regulation. The TD and CTSQ have also encouraged the trade to leverage on technology to enhance the operational efficiency and service quality, such as setting up or integrating taxi hailing application platforms so as to improve the operating environment.

Meanwhile, the Government extended the validity period of the taxi driver identity plates to ten years in November 2018, so that the drivers need not renew their plates annually, thereby slightly reducing the operating costs. Starting from December 2018, the Government has progressively installed supplementary traffic signs displaying "except taxi pick up or drop off" beneath traffic signs with a no-stopping restriction erected in

restricted zones across the territory. This will spare the taxi trade the need to renew the restricted zone permits annually in the future.

The Government approved the taxi fare increase in April 2017 with a view to attracting new blood to the industry by increasing income and to encourage the trade to improve its service and invest more in new facilities, so as to enhance the overall service quality of the taxi industry. The taxi trade has recently submitted a new round of fare increase applications to the Government. The Government will process the applications in accordance with the established mechanism, taking into account factors such as income and expenditure of drivers, and public acceptability, etc.

Regarding the illegal carriage of passengers for hire or reward by motor vehicles, the Government has been taking a multi-pronged approach comprising enforcement, education and publicity in combating such illegal acts. On enforcement, the Police will continue to take action against such offences through targeted operations, including collecting intelligence, conducting decoy operations, and investigating and following up on complaint cases. Between January 2015 and December 2018, the Police undertook enforcement actions on 195 cases concerning illegal carriage of passengers for hire or reward by private cars or light goods vehicles. Over the same period, there were 75 vehicles on which the TD imposed suspension of vehicle licence and impoundment due to conviction of illegal carriage of passengers for hire or reward.

On publicity and education, the TD has been making use of various channels, including broadcasting announcement of public interest on radio, displaying samples of Hire Car Permits on its webpage, etc. to promote the knowledge on how to distinguish illegal hire services. It has also set up an online enquiry system for the public to check whether a vehicle has been issued with a valid Hire Car Permit. The TD has also reminded the public that the third party risks insurance for any vehicle used for illegal carriage of passengers for hire or reward may be invalidated.

To further increase the deterrent effect against the related offence so as to enhance the protection of the safety and interests of passengers and road users, the Government plans to consult the Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Transport on the proposal of raising the penalties for illegal carriage of passengers for hire or reward at the meeting of the Panel in March 2019.

(3) To attract more young drivers to join the industry, the Government proposes to relax the current requirement for applications of learners' and full driving licences for commercial vehicles to have held a valid driving licence of private car (PC) or light goods vehicle (LGV) for a period of at least three years to at least one year (Note). Earlier on, the Government consulted the transport industry, the LegCo Panel on Transport and the Road Safety Council on the proposal and their views were generally positive. The Government will introduce the relevant legislative proposal into the LegCo within the 2018-19 legislative session.

In respect of the proposal of lowering the age requirement for

applicants of driving licences for commercial vehicles, having considered the traffic accident statistics in Hong Kong in recent years and made reference to the general overseas practices of setting higher basic age requirements for drivers of commercial vehicles, the Government proposed to maintain the minimum age requirement for applicants of driving licences for commercial vehicles, i.e. 21 years old, at the present stage. After the implementation of relaxation of the period for holding a valid driving licence for PC or LGV from at least three years to at least one year, the TD will review the minimum age requirement for applicants of driving licences for commercial vehicles on the basis of actual situation and need.

(4) In view of the result of consultation with the LegCo Panel on Transport as well as the general supportive views from the community, the Government has proposed introducing 600 franchised taxis to meet the new demand in the community for personalised and point-to-point public transport service of higher quality and fare as well as with "online hailing" features. The Government is actively preparing the bill for the introduction of franchised taxis, and seeks to submit it to the LegCo in the 2018-19 legislative session.

The upcoming 600 franchised taxis will only account for around 3 per cent of the 18 000-odd taxis in Hong Kong and this should not cause a big impact on the current manpower situation of the taxi trade. Moreover, we propose that when assessing the applications for franchised taxi operators, applicants who propose to maintain an employer-employee relationship with their drivers will be given a higher score in the assessment. An employer-employee relationship should enhance the protection of labour rights of the drivers, provide a more stable job and income, and therefore help attract more new entrants.

As mentioned above in the second part of the reply, the Government has, in recent years, taken a series of measures to improve the operating environment of the taxi industry, enhance the taxi service quality and image of taxi drivers, with a view to attracting more new blood into the industry. Meanwhile, the TD will continue to maintain communication with the taxi trade to listen to and consider their proposed measures, so as to attract more new entrants to the taxi industry.

Note: If an applicant needs to undergo the probationary driving period, he/she will be eligible to apply for a learner's or full driving licence for commercial vehicles immediately upon issue of the full driving licence for PC or LGV after completion of the minimum one-year probationary driving period; if the applicant does not need to undergo probationary driving period (for example, persons who obtained full driving licences by direct issue), he/she will be eligible to apply for the two aforementioned types of commercial driving licences after having held the full driving licence for PC or LGV for at least one year.

LCQ5: Regulation of e-sports venues

Following is a question by the Hon Jeremy Tam and a reply by the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Nicholas W Yang, in the Legislative Council today (February 20):

Question:

While the Chief Executive said last month that the Government would kick start its efforts in fostering the development of the e-sports industry, some e-sports venue operators have relayed that they have encountered quite a number of operating difficulties. Amusement Game Centre Licences are required for operating e-sports venues and convicted offenders will have a criminal record. However, the relevant licensing conditions are stringent. For instance, an amusement game centre must not be located in premises where another amusement game centre or an educational institution is within a radius of 100 metres from its main entrance. This requirement has made it difficult for them to find venues suitable for operating e-sports venues. Secondly, amusement game centres are categorised into two types: "children's centres" which must deny entry by persons aged 16 or above and "adult centres" which must deny entry by children aged below 16. Substantial investments are involved in operating e-sports venues, but this categorisation requirement has reduced the clientele of e-sports venues and affected their income. As a result, it is likely that the investments made by the operators will go down the drain. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of persons arrested, prosecuted and convicted in each of the past five years for operating an amusement game centre without a licence; the penalties imposed on those convicted, and the number of such convictions involving e-sports venues;

(2) in respect of e-sports venues, entertainment machine centres and other amusement game centres, of the respective numbers of persons arrested, prosecuted and convicted for committing criminal offences in each of such types of venues in each of the past five years (with a breakdown by category of offences), as well as the penalties imposed on those convicted; and

(3) given that the Innovation and Technology Bureau is, in conjunction with the Home Affairs Bureau and related government departments, formulating a set of guidelines to help e-sports venue operators apply for licences, whether the Government will, when vetting and approving applications for licences submitted by those operators, exempt e-sports venues from complying with the two aforesaid requirements; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Having regard to its development around the world in recent years, we consider e-sports to be an emerging industry with certain economic potential. With our advanced information and communications technology infrastructure and experience in hosting large-scale international competitions, Hong Kong is well-equipped to develop e-sports. In recent years, quite a number of local e-sports players received accolades in international competitions. In his 2018-19 Budget Speech, the Financial Secretary earmarked \$100 million for Cyberport to promote early stage development of the e-sports industry.

In terms of business operating environment, since e-sports venues can operate in various modes and involve a wide array of activities, these venues may be subject to regulation under different ordinances depending on the actual operation. Operators may hence be required to apply for licences under ordinances such as an Amusement Game Centre Licence under the existing Amusement Game Centres Ordinance (AGCO) (Cap. 435).

According to the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB), the legislative intent of the AGCO was not to promote the business development of amusement game centres but to regulate them by law in order to minimise the nuisance to nearby residents, ensure their operation is safe for customers, and to avoid posing serious and harmful effects on the youth, especially students. We consider that applying squarely the AGCO to the local e-sports industry is not appropriate and applying some of the licensing requirements of amusement game centres to e-sports venues may also hinder the long-term development of the e-sports industry. Hence, in terms of improving business environment and removing red tape and barriers for the e-sports industry, we will adopt an appropriate mechanism to exempt e-sports venues from the requirement of obtaining an Amusement Game Centre Licence. Having consulted HAB and the Security Bureau, our reply to three parts of the question is as follows:

(1) In accordance with Section 4 of AGCO, any person who operates, keeps, manages or otherwise has control of an amusement game centre in regard to the operation of which a licence is not in force commits an offence and shall be liable, on first conviction, to a fine of \$100,000 and to imprisonment for six months; and on a second or subsequent conviction, to a fine of \$200,000 and to imprisonment for one year.

According to the information provided by the Police, between 2014 and the third quarter of 2018, two persons were prosecuted in connection with the offence under Section 4 of AGCO (excluding cases prosecuted by way of summons). They were convicted and sentenced to a fine of \$3,000 and imprisonment for two months (suspended for 15 months) respectively. The Police do not keep other figures related to the above offence mentioned in the question.

(2) The Police do not keep the figures in respect of offences occurred at those venues mentioned in the question.

(3) Provided that an e-sports venue operator can satisfy the specific conditions, we consider that such a venue can be exempted from the

requirement of obtaining an Amusement Game Centre Licence under section 3 of AGCO. In considering whether individual e-sports venues can be exempted, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer will assess factors such as the e-sports venue's detailed operation and equipment specifications, and make a recommendation to the Secretary for Home Affairs for granting an exemption order under section 3 of AGCO. The guidelines being formulated will clearly define the specific conditions for e-sports venues as well as the application procedures and conditions for exemption. For example, the venue should be used mainly for staging e-sports competitions, equipped with the software and hardware configurations, as well as the venue facilities and layout required for relevant e-sports activities, such as team competition stages and information technology equipment for live online broadcast and real-time competition commentary. We will inform the industry of the details within the first quarter of this year.

Regardless of whether a venue is exempted from requirement of obtaining an Amusement Game Centre Licence by satisfying certain conditions, an e-sports venue operator is also required to apply for other licences depending on the actual operation. Generally speaking, a Places of Public Entertainment Licence is required for e-sports competitions which are open to members of the public, so as to safeguard public order and safety. For events which involve the provision of food and beverages or retail elements, operators are required to apply for other relevant food licences.

[LCQ2: The overloaded public healthcare system](#)

Following is a question by the Hon Wilson Or and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (February 20):

Question:

It is learnt that the public healthcare system has been overloaded for a long period of time, resulting in deterioration in the quality of healthcare services and healthcare workers being overstretched. During the recent influenza surge in Hong Kong, the number of medical inpatients in public acute hospitals exceeded the number of medical inpatient beds by 10 per cent in total and even by 20 per cent in respect of the two acute hospitals in the Kowloon East Cluster. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the new measures put in place to tackle influenza outbreaks so as to alleviate the overcrowding situation in public hospitals and shorten the waiting time of patients, as well as to lower the death rates arising from

influenza-related complications;

(2) whether it knows if the Hospital Authority (HA) has taken targeted measures to solve the overcrowding problem in the acute hospitals in the Kowloon East Cluster; if HA has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it has formulated long-term plans and measures (e.g. enhancing the medical public-private partnership programmes and allocating resources to provide additional beds and healthcare manpower in public hospitals) to alleviate the pressure on the public healthcare system and to enhance both the quality and quantity of public healthcare services?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Wilson Or is as follows:

(1) The Hospital Authority (HA) has formulated a series of measures to enhance service capacity, increase manpower and expedite the turnover of hospital beds to meet the service demand during the winter surge in 2018-19.

To enhance service capacity, the HA opened 574 regular beds under its Annual Plan 2018-19, and will open time-limited beds and ad hoc beds in response to the increased service demand. To provide additional manpower, the HA launched the Locum Recruitment Website in November 2018 to enhance the flexibility and efficiency of recruitment, with a view to attracting more healthcare professionals to provide part-time services in public hospitals. The HA also implemented additional relief measures, including increasing the rate of the Special Honorarium Scheme (SHS) allowance by 10 per cent, to address the manpower shortage during the period from January 28 to April 30, 2019.

To expedite the handling of cases and shorten the waiting time of patients, the HA provides rapid flu test for patients with influenza symptoms seven days a week and provide test results within 24 hours so as to expedite patient management decisions. Moreover, extra healthcare staff have been recruited through the Accident & Emergency (A&E) Support Session Programme to handle semi-urgent and non-urgent cases categorised under the A&E Triage System. Different clusters have also set up discharge lounges for centralised management of patients who are suitable for discharge to complete the procedures and wait for non-emergency ambulance transfer service, so that more beds can be vacated as soon as possible for admission of other patients. The HA has also collaborated with various government departments and external parties, including transferring suitable patients to private hospitals with low-cost hospital beds for completion of treatment.

(2) The Kowloon East Cluster (KEC) of HA has implemented a series of measures to enhance service capacity during the winter surge, including opening 126

regular beds under its Annual Plan 2018-19 and 2 750 service quotas of General Outpatient Clinics, as well as providing extra clerical and supporting staff by extending the SHS so as to allow healthcare staff to focus more on clinical work. The KEC has also been actively recruiting part-time and temporary healthcare staff to cope with the additional demand during the winter surge period.

In addition, discharge lounge in the KEC has undergone renovation in 2018/19 to expand the space and increase service capacity. The scope of discharge lounge service has extended from medicine to surgery and orthopaedics departments, and the service hours have also been extended to Saturdays and public holidays.

The HA is implementing the First Ten-year Hospital Development Plan (HDP), which includes the expansion of United Christian Hospital and Haven of Hope Hospital in the KEC. It is anticipated that the KEC could better cope with the demand for public hospital services upon the completion of the HDP and recruitment of the necessary additional manpower.

(3) To increase healthcare manpower, the Government will, in the 2019/20 to 2021/22 University Grants Committee triennium, further increase the number of healthcare-related publicly funded first-degree intake places by over 150 each year in order to alleviate the shortage of healthcare professionals. The Government has also been closely liaising with the HA to formulate other short, medium and long term measures, including hiring full-time and part-time healthcare professionals and agency nurses, rehiring suitable retired healthcare staff, increasing the number of Resident Trainee posts and hiring of non-locally trained doctors to work in public hospitals under limited registration. The Government will continue to provide the HA with sufficient and appropriate resources to attract and retain staff.

As regards healthcare facilities, the Government has earmarked a dedicated provision of \$200 billion for the implementation of various hospital development projects in the next ten years. Over 5 000 additional public hospital beds will be provided under the First Ten-year HDP. The Government has also invited the HA to commence planning for the Second Ten-year HDP, which will involve about \$270 billion. Upon the completion of the Second Ten-year HDP, there would be over 9 000 additional beds and other healthcare facilities that would more or less meet the projected service demand up to 2036.

The HA has also introduced a number of public-private partnership (PPP) programmes in recent years to offer more choices of healthcare services to patients. The HA will continue to utilise the investment returns of the Hospital Authority Public-Private Partnership Fund to implement various PPP programmes. The HA will also continue to communicate with the public and patient groups and work closely with stakeholders in exploring the feasibility of introducing other PPP initiatives to meet the public's demand for healthcare services, and enhance the overall quality of healthcare services in the community.

LCQ4: Medical and nursing manpower in the public healthcare system

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Helena Wong and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (February 20):

Question:

In recent years, the shortage of medical and nursing manpower in the public healthcare system has been acute. According to the projection in the Report of Strategic Review on Healthcare Manpower Planning and Professional Development of 2017, there will be shortfalls of over 1 000 doctors and 1 600 nurses in Hong Kong by 2030. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will consider permitting doctors who have graduated from recognised medical schools in Commonwealth countries to come to Hong Kong, without going through examinations and internship, to practise in public hospitals, so as to increase the manpower of doctors in the public healthcare system; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it knows if the Hospital Authority (HA) will transfer the senior management work currently undertaken by staff members from the medical and nursing grades to administrators who do not belong to such grades, so that staff members with medical and nursing professional knowledge can have more time to perform clinical duties; if HA will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will implement new measures to reduce the wastage of doctors and nurses in the public healthcare system, and explore the stipulation of a minimum number of years for which locally trained doctors and nurses are required to serve in the public healthcare system upon graduation; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the various parts of the question raised by Dr the Hon Helena Wong is as follows:

(1) The Government has been striving to strengthen medical workforce. The University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded medical training places have been substantially increased over the past decade. The number of places was 470 in the 2016/17 academic year, representing an increase of 90 per cent when

compared with 250 in the 2005/06 academic year. In the 2019/20 to 2021/22 UGC triennium, the Government will further increase the number of UGC-funded medical training places by 60 each year. We expect that increasing the number of medical training places will alleviate the manpower shortage of doctors in the medium to long term.

Meanwhile, upon commencement of the Medical Registration (Amendment) Ordinance 2018, the validity period and renewal period of limited registration have been extended from not exceeding one year to not exceeding three years. It is expected that more eligible non-locally trained doctors, particularly those who are Hong Kong people, will be attracted to serve in the public sector in Hong Kong through limited registration, thus alleviating the manpower shortage problem.

For non-locally trained doctors who have passed the licensing examination and worked in the Hospital Authority (HA) for three years under limited registration, the Medical Council of Hong Kong is exploring if their internship requirement could be exempted. This is to provide more incentive for eligible non-locally trained doctors to serve in the public healthcare system in Hong Kong.

The Government will take into account the effectiveness of extending the period of limited registration and responses from the healthcare sector before deciding on the way forward. In the meantime, HA will continue to roll out measures, including recruitment of part-time doctors and implementation of Special Honorarium Scheme (SHS), to increase manpower at public hospitals.

(2) The head office of HA has announced that in response to the winter surge, the head office and all clusters will minimise the number of meetings or postpone non-urgent meetings as far as practicable, so as to allow healthcare staff to focus more on clinical work. HA will also review the frequency and efficiency of meetings on a regular basis. Additional ward clerks and ward assistants are also recruited with a view to easing the workload of healthcare staff.

(3) The Government and HA are very concerned about the healthcare manpower situation in public hospitals. HA will recruit all qualified locally trained medical graduates and provide them with relevant specialist training. There will be a total of over 2 000 medical graduates becoming registered doctors in the coming five years. The Government has no plans to stipulate the required length of service of local medical graduates in the public healthcare system upon graduation. Nevertheless, HA has been proactively implementing various human resources measures to retain professionals and alleviate the shortage of manpower.

To enhance manpower support in the short term, HA actively recruits part-time and temporary healthcare staff, as well as agency nurses and supporting staff. In addition to the establishment of the Locum Office, HA launched the Locum Recruitment Website in November 2018 to expedite the process for recruiting part-time staff. As at February 10, 2019, over 90

locum healthcare staff were hired. HA has also further enhanced the flexibility of SHS to meet service demand.

Among the staff who left HA each year, some of them were retiring staff. To alleviate the manpower shortage and assist in knowledge transfer, HA implemented the Special Retired and Rehire Scheme to hire the retiring healthcare professionals and supporting staff to continue to perform clinical duties on a full-time basis.

To retain doctors, HA set up the centrally co-ordinated additional Associate Consultant Promotion Mechanism in 2011-12 to create more promotion opportunities. Meanwhile, HA provides its doctors with more training courses and overseas training opportunities.

To retain frontline nursing staff, HA reinstated the annual increment mechanism in April 2018 to boost staff morale. Besides, HA has enhanced training and promotion of nursing staff. HA created the post of Nurse Consultant in 2008-09 to enhance the development prospects of the nursing profession. A total of 1 476 nurses were promoted in the past three years. In addition, HA also provides subsidies each year for over 100 experienced nurses to undergo further studies and training overseas. To enhance preceptorship support for newly recruited nurses, HA recruits experienced nurses under the Preceptorship Programme to serve as preceptors and provide guidance for newly recruited nurses in the actual clinical setting, and to alleviate the work pressure of other experienced nursing staff in coaching new nurses.

HA will continue to introduce medium to long term measures, including actively considering providing more flexible options in work arrangements to retain staff, such as allowing frontline professionals who are temporarily unable to work full-time due to special needs, or for health or family reasons to work on a part-time basis under special work arrangements.

LCQ12: Retrofitting noise barriers on existing roads

Following is a question by the Hon Kwok Wai-keung and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (February 20):

Question:

Regarding the retrofitting of noise barriers on existing roads to alleviate the traffic noise nuisance caused to nearby residents, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of noise barriers retrofitting works projects that were (i) completed, (ii) in progress and (iii) under planning, in each of the past five years; whether it has studied what factors have contributed to the year-on-year changes in those numbers;

(2) of the following information (if applicable) on the works projects referred to in (1): (i) the (expected) commencement dates of the works, (ii) the (expected) completion dates of the works, (iii) the progress of the works, (iv) the traffic noise levels at the road sections concerned, (v) the (estimated) project costs, and (vi) the (expected) numbers of persons benefitting from the works;

(3) of the order of commencement of those noise barriers retrofitting works projects currently under planning; the mechanisms adopted by the Government for determining the order and design of the noise barriers; as some residents of Heng Fa Chuen have indicated that they have, for many years, been suffering greatly from the noise nuisance caused by the traffic on Island Eastern Corridor, whether the Government will expedite the retrofitting of noise barriers on the road section concerned;

(4) in respect of those road sections on which noise barriers retrofitting works are needed but have yet to commence, of the short-term measures the Government has in place to alleviate, before the completion of the relevant works, the noise nuisance caused by the traffic on the road sections concerned to nearby residents;

(5) whether it will expedite the planning of noise barriers retrofitting works projects, and set a target for the number of such works projects to be completed per year; and

(6) in view of the completion of two major infrastructure projects last year, whether the Government will seize the opportunity presented by the relatively abundant supply of construction workers at present to expedite the implementation of noise barriers retrofitting works projects?

Reply:

President,

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Kwok Wai-keung is as follows:

(1) The respective numbers of noise barriers retrofitting works that were completed, in progress and under planning in each of the past five years are tabulated below:

Year	Completed	In Progress	Under Planning
2014	7	0	24
2015	0	1	23

2016	0	2	22
2017	0	2	22
2018	0	3	21

Noise barrier retrofitting works on existing roads are public works, the implementation of which follows the procedures of the Public Works Programme. Procedures such as detailed design and tendering work will commence only upon funding approval.

Among the seven noise barriers retrofitting works completed in 2014, six were located at various sections of the Tuen Mun Road. As the retrofitting works were conducted in tandem with the road widening works carried out by the Highways Department (HyD) at those road sections, the six retrofitting works were completed concurrently.

For those works still in progress, they are expected to be completed within the next few years. Details of the retrofitting works are set out in (2) below.

(2) Other information on the retrofitting works referred to in (1) is tabulated as follows:

Retrofitting works completed

Road section	Commencement date (Year)	Completion date (Year)	Works progress	Maximum traffic noise level (dB(A))	Project costs (\$ million)	Approximate number of residents benefitted
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Tuen Mun Road (Tsuen Wan section)	2009	2014	Completed	85	1 257	12 840
Tuen Mun Road (Yau Kom Tau section)	2010					
Tuen Mun Road (Castle Peak Bay section)	2010					
Tuen Mun Road (Anglers' Beach section)	2009					
Tuen Mun Road (Sham Tseng section)	2009					
Tuen Mun Road (Tsing Lung Tau section)	2010					
Tai Po Tai Wo Road (near Po Nga Court)	2012	2014	Completed	78	97	480

Retrofitting works in progress

Road section	Commencement date (Year)	Expected completion date (Year)	Works progress	Maximum traffic noise level (dB(A))	Project costs (\$ million)	Approximate number of residents benefitted
Tuen Mun Road (Town Centre section)	2015	2020	In progress	86	827	5 450
Tuen Mun Road (Fu Tei section)	2016	2019	In progress	80	786	2 580
Tai Po Road (Sha Tin section)	2018	2023	In progress	81	852	6 660
Long Tin Road	2019 (expected)	2023	Funding application under preparation	77	304	1 360

Retrofitting works under planning

Road section (Note)	Maximum traffic noise level (dB(A))	Preliminarily estimated project costs (at September 2018 prices) (\$ million)	Approximate number of residents benefitted
Castle Peak Road (Hung Shui Kiu section)	74	20	50
Castle Peak Road (Ping Shan section)	78	108	180
Chai Wan Road	76	102	470
Fanling Highway (near Tsung Pak Long)	79	111	280
Hoi On Road	79	347	1 900
Island Eastern Corridor (near Heng Fa Chuen)	81	82	420
Jockey Club Road and San Wan Road (near Fanling Wai)	77	83	190
Ma Wang Road	72	82	260
New Clear Water Bay Road	80	321	4 430
Po Lam Road North	74	364	1 150
Po Lam Road North (near Hong Sing Garden and King Ming Court)	76	188	260
Po Ning Road	76	201	2 420
Po Shek Wu Road	81	180	2 140
San Tin Highway	83	476	1 220
Sha Tin Road	79	519	3 170
Sha Tin Road near Wong Uk Village	76	24	50
Tai Po Road (Sham Shui Po)	78	181	1 080
Tam Kon Shan Road	78	201	1 610
Tsuen Wan Road	79	176	2 850
Yuen Wo Road	77	40	920

Note: Listed in alphabetical order of the road sections concerned. As the works are still under planning, details on their expected commencement and

completion dates as well as works progress are unavailable.

(3) When determining the order of noise barriers retrofitting works, the Government will accord priority to road sections with the greatest noise impact and the largest number of residents affected. Moreover, if other road works (e.g. road widening works) will be carried out near the road sections concerned, the relevant departments will explore the feasibility of combining the works to minimise inconvenience caused to road users and nearby residents.

As to the design of noise barriers, due consideration will be given not only to their effectiveness in noise reduction but also to the following technical factors:

(a) whether the noise barrier will obstruct emergency access or fire fighting;

(b) whether the noise barrier will undermine road safety or impede pedestrian and vehicular movements; and

(c) whether there is adequate space and structural capability (applicable to flyovers) for supporting the noise barrier.

(4) In respect of those road sections on which noise barriers retrofitting works are being planned and not yet commenced, the Government will explore whether other feasible traffic noise mitigation measures can be put in place. For example, a section of the Island Eastern Corridor near Heng Fa Chuen has been resurfaced with low noise material to reduce the traffic noise impact on nearby residents.

(5) and (6) The Government has been looking for ways to expedite the planning of noise barriers retrofitting works. To this end, the HyD had engaged a consultant to conduct a feasibility study for a number of noise barriers retrofitting works under planning. The consultancy report has provided preliminary feasible options for the projects and relevant details on the advance design to enable faster and smoother work at the detailed design stage. To save time, the Government is also combining the detailed design work for noise barriers retrofitting works on different road sections. Given that government works must follow the funding procedures, and that due consideration has to be given to all relevant factors, the Government is unable to set a target for the number of works to be completed per year.