

First batch of three new vessels procured under Phase I of Vessel Subsidy Scheme will come into service from March 2024 (with photos)

The Transport Department (TD) announced today (February 27) that the first batch of three fully government-subsidised new vessels procured under Phase I of the Vessel Subsidy Scheme (VSS) will be gradually deployed to provide services from March 2024, operating Central – Cheung Chau, Central – Mui Wo and Central – Peng Chau routes.

The Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, said when attending the launching ceremony of the new vessels, "The Government has launched the VSS to fully subsidise outlying island ferry operators to purchase new vessels, which feature the newly designed promotional logo for government-funded projects. We hope the VSS can enhance the experience of passengers while promoting environmental protection. As the 22 new vessels under Phase I of the VSS gradually arrive, we will continue to work hand in hand with the trade to provide quality ferry services for the public."

A spokesman for the TD said, "The VSS aims to improve the fleet quality and promote environmental protection, as well as enhance the experience of passengers." The new vessels will provide more comprehensive facilities, including additional breastfeeding areas and dedicated seats for passengers with pets, double or more the number of wheelchair seats as compared with existing vessels, provision of accessible toilets and mobile phone-charging facilities for some of the seats. Moreover, the new vessels were built with lightweight materials such as aluminium alloy and carbon fibre to reduce the weight of the vessels. They are also equipped with environmental-friendly engines which comply with the highest International Maritime Organization Tier III standard to reduce emission of nitrogen oxides.

The Government announced in the Chief Executive's 2019 Policy Address that it would implement the VSS to fully subsidise 10 ferry routes to replace the entire existing fleet with greener vessels and newer facilities in two phases. Under Phase I of the VSS, 22 vessels will be procured for the the six major outlying island routes (including Central – Cheung Chau, Central – Mui Wo, Inter-islands, Central – Peng Chau, Central – Yung Shue Wan and Central – Sok Kwu Wan). About half of the new vessels are expected to arrive by the end of this year.

