

LCQ1: Devices for enhancing traffic safety of taxis

Following is a question by the Hon Luk Chung-hung and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (March 27):

Question:

Some members of the taxi trade are of the view that installing closed-circuit television cameras and dash cameras in taxi compartments will be conducive to deterring "black taxis", reducing disputes between passengers and drivers, and strengthening the safeguard for traffic safety. However, it is learnt that the installation and maintenance of such devices involve certain expenses, and as the Government has not provided the trade with financial assistance, the installation of such devices has not been popular yet. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will consider modelling on the practices of the Mainland and Macao to make it mandatory for all taxis to install a central cloud-based camera system, and stipulate that the relevant footages are restricted to the access of authorised persons only in handling complaints or traffic accidents, and can be adduced as evidence in court where necessary; if it will consider, of the timetable, and whether it will provide the trade with financial assistance; if it will not consider, the reasons for that;

(2) as the Government proposed in July last year that all fleet taxis would have to be installed with traffic safety-related devices (such as dash cameras, global positioning system and safety devices that monitored drivers' driving performance), of the authorities' measures in place to encourage the installation of the same type of devices in non-fleet taxis; and

(3) whether it will discuss with the insurance trade the provision of concessionary premiums for taxis installed with in-vehicle camera systems and dash cameras, so as to further increase the incentives of vehicle owners for installing such devices; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

After consulting the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, the reply to the Hon Luk Chung-hung's question is as follows.

The Government has all along been highly concerned about taxi services, and has introduced a number of measures to encourage the trade to enhance service quality and driving safety of taxis, thereby strengthening the protection of passengers and other road users.

(1) and (2) In response to the views of the community that the Government should strengthen the regulation of taxi services, the Government has earlier reviewed the overall taxi operation and management, and put forward a series of measures to enhance the personalised point-to-point transport services and promote the healthy development of the taxi trade in the long run. These measures include introducing a taxi fleet regime, as well as a Taxi-Driver-Offence Points System and a two-tier penalty system for certain taxi-driver-related offences that are of a more serious nature. The relevant Bills were passed by the Legislative Council (LegCo) in December 2023. With the relevant legislation coming into force, various new measures have been implemented in phases with a view to enhancing the overall safety standard and service quality of taxis.

Among the aforesaid measures, the taxi fleet regime is a new licensing regime, under which taxi owners may assemble existing taxis and apply to the Transport Department (TD) for a Taxi Fleet Licence. The TD will regulate the operation and management of the taxi fleets through licence conditions, and specify the devices to be installed on the fleet taxis, including dash cameras, closed circuit television systems, and technological devices relating to the enhancement of driving safety, so as to improve driving safety and service standards of fleet taxis. The TD is actively carrying out the preparatory work and plans to invite the trade to apply for Taxi Fleet Licences in April this year, so that fleet taxis may commence operation as soon as possible. We believe that fleet taxis would set a leading and exemplary role in the trade, thereby encouraging non-fleet taxis to have similar devices installed. Meanwhile, the introduction of the taxi fleet regime will also foster healthy competition in the trade and gradually change the trade's ecology through market evolution.

Apart from the taxi fleet regime, the Government has been encouraging the trade to make good use of technology to improve taxi driving safety. For example, the Government launched the \$1 billion Smart Traffic Fund (the Fund) to provide funding support to local organisations or enterprises for conducting researches and applications of vehicle-related innovation and technology. As of today, the Fund has approved three projects relating to taxi driving safety, including the trial of installing driving safety monitoring systems in taxis to monitor the driving condition and behaviour of drivers, and to issue alerts to remind the drivers when necessary. We will continue to support the study of relevant technological applications and provide appropriate assistance in the process.

The TD will continue to make use of different channels to remind taxi drivers to comply with the law, and pay attention to road safety and service quality. At the same time, the TD will work with the Police to raise taxi drivers' awareness of driving safety and combat malpractices of black sheep in the trade by means of law enforcement, publicity and education. To enhance safety and quality of taxi services, since October 1, 2020, all applicants for a full taxi driving licence must attend and complete a taxi driver pre-service course and obtain a course certificate within a specified period of time, in addition to passing the relevant test, before they can be issued

with a full driving licence. Such course helps increase taxi drivers' awareness of driving safety and equip them with knowledge of passenger service and skills in customer service. We believe that the package of measures mentioned above is conducive to improving taxi safety and quality, thereby offering better protection for passengers and enhancing their riding experience.

During the earlier discussion of the taxi-related Bills at the LegCo Bills Committee meetings, some Members advised that the Government should consider mandating the installation of a central cloud-based camera system in all taxi compartments, so as to facilitate the retrieval of relevant video files by law enforcement authorities as objective corroborative evidence to protect the interests of both drivers and passengers in case of disputes, and help improve the driving safety of taxis. In view of the above, the Government has commenced a study earlier this year to explore the feasibility of such recommendation and other related matters. We plan to consult the taxi trade within this year with a view to reaching a consensus on whether this mandatory measure should be implemented.

(3) The Government supports the taxi trade in taking appropriate measures to enhance its safety standard and management quality, thereby reducing the risk associated with underwriting taxi insurance at source. If taxi owners or companies install and use cameras, safety monitoring devices and dash cameras in their taxis, and provide full records to insurers when making insurance claims, this may facilitate insurers' risk differentiation for making underwriting decisions and setting premium levels for individual policies more accurately.

To this end, all parties concerned have been in close communication and collaboration. Relevant bureaux and departments, together with the Insurance Authority, met with LegCo Members and representatives of the insurance industry earlier to discuss the use of technology to reduce the risks associated with taxi traffic accidents with a view to easing the burden of insurance premium on the taxi trade.

We note that some insurance companies have already been offering discounts on insurance premiums and lower deductibles, etc, for taxis equipped with driving safety devices. However, the insurance industry reflected that not many taxis have accepted such offers, and submission of inaccurate or insufficient information and records was also observed. The Government will continue to engage with all parties and encourage the taxi trade to step up their efforts in enhancing driving safety and reducing the risk of taxi accidents at source, so as to foster the long-term and sustainable development of both the taxi trade and taxi insurance industry.

Thank you, President.