

LCQ10: Government public transport fare concession scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Jeffrey Lam and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (November 11):

Question:

Under the "Government Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities" (the Concession Scheme), eligible persons may travel on public transport modes, such as general MTR lines and franchised buses, at any time at a concessionary fare of \$2 per trip. It has been reported that more than four million Elder Octopus Cards are currently in circulation, and such number is far higher than the elderly population, arousing suspicion that quite a number of ineligible persons are abusing the Concession Scheme. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) Among the average daily number of public transport passenger journeys broken down by public transport operators in each month of the past two years, of the numbers and percentages of those in which Elder Octopus Cards were used (set out in a table);

(2) Whether it has studied if the social incidents and the epidemic, which have occurred successively since last year, have impacted on the numbers of journeys made by various types of passengers of public transport modes (e.g. elders, students and persons with disabilities) as well as on their percentages in the total number of passenger journeys in 2019 and 2020;

(3) Of the number of suspected cases of the Concession Scheme being abused, and the respective numbers of persons prosecuted of and convicted for the relevant offences, in each of the past three years; and

(4) Of the new measures put in place to curb the abuse of the Concession Scheme, for instance, whether it will require persons purchasing Elder Octopus Cards to produce proof of age, require elderly persons to use Personalised Octopus Cards for enjoying the Concession Scheme, and raise the relevant penalties?

Reply:

President,

The Government Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities (\$2 Scheme) has been implemented since 2012 to enable the elderly aged 65 or above and eligible persons with disabilities to enjoy a concessionary fare of \$2 per trip to travel on the general Mass Transit Railway (MTR) lines, franchised buses and ferries, as well as green minibuses which were subsequently covered by the \$2 Scheme.

My reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) The Elder Octopus Cards currently in circulation include about 3.6 million anonymous Elder Octopus Cards (A-Cards) used by the elderly aged 65 or above and about 0.4 million Personalised Octopus Cards (P-Cards) which contain registered personal data. The average daily passenger journeys taken by the elderly (including those using A-Cards and P-Cards) under the \$2 Scheme, as well as their ratios against the average daily total passenger journeys taken on the public transport modes concerned in the past two years are tabulated at Annex. In short, the average daily passenger journeys taken by the elderly and eligible persons with disabilities under the \$2 Scheme accounted for about 10 per cent and about one per cent respectively of the daily total passenger journeys taken on all public transport modes.

(2) The ratios of the elderly and eligible persons with disabilities travelling on public transport modes remained at the levels of about 10 per cent and about one per cent respectively. There was no significant change to the two figures during the social incidents last year or the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic this year. The Government does not have breakdowns by type of passengers who are not involved in the \$2 Scheme.

(3) and (4) The Transport Department (TD) has asked public transport operators (PTOs) to step up ticket inspection and passenger identity verification, and has proactively arranged site monitoring surveys on the usage of the \$2 Scheme. Should there be any ineligible passengers found travelling at the concessionary fare, they will be required by PTOs to pay a surcharge and/or the shortfall. Depending on the circumstances, PTOs may prosecute or refer individual cases to the Police for follow-up actions. During TD's site monitoring surveys, there were 143, 185 and 11 suspected abuse cases (Note 1) found in 2017, 2018 and 2019 respectively. During the same period, there were respectively 21, 25 and eight prosecutions instituted by the Mass Transit Railway Corporation Limited with 28, 17 and 21 cases convicted (Note 2). The Government is conducting a comprehensive review of the \$2 Scheme, including examining in detail the effectiveness of anti-abuse measures. The review is still in progress and there will be a formal announcement in due course.

Note 1: The number of suspected abuse cases found in 2019 was less than those in the previous years as the monitoring surveys conducted in the MTR were severely disrupted by the social incidents in the second half of the year.

Note 2: Prosecution cases instituted each year may not have their trials/legal proceedings completed in the same year, and their court rulings may be given in the following year. Hence, there may be more convicted cases than prosecution cases in a year.