

LCQ10: Supporting cross-boundary passenger service sector

Following is a question by the Hon Yiu Si-wing and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (June 16):

Question:

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus disease 2019 epidemic early last year, cross-boundary passenger services have come to a standstill due to the closure of various boundary control points one after another and the plunge in the number of cross-boundary travellers. As there is no definite time for the resumption of normal traveller clearance between Hong Kong and the Mainland and Macao, all the cross-boundary passenger service operators (the operators) have been complaining bitterly about their hardship. In the past ten-odd months, apart from paying the recurrent expenses, they had to meet the repair and maintenance costs of their conveyances. Before resumption of operation in the future, they will need to put in a large amount of capital to repair those conveyances which have been left idle in the open air for a long time to ensure traffic safety, and to recruit drivers and other staff members afresh. Those operators consider that as the cross-boundary passenger service sector has made tremendous contributions to the economies of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao over the years, it is incumbent upon the Government to support the sector to tide over the difficulties. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of trips made by and passenger trips made on the (i) cross-boundary coaches and (ii) cross-boundary ferries, in each year from 2018 to 2020 and in the first quarter of this year;

(2) whether it has, since February this year, implemented special measures to support the cross-boundary passenger service sector; if so, of the details;

(3) given that there is no definite time for the re-opening of the various boundary control points, whether the Government will consider providing the operators with emergency financial support in order to avoid their business being closed down before normal traveller clearance resumes; and

(4) whether it will expeditiously establish a "business resumption fund" for the cross-boundary passenger service sector to facilitate the operators' preparation for the resumption of normal traveller clearance?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the Hon Yiu Si-wing's question is as follows:

(1) According to the information during the period from 2018 to the first

quarter of 2021 of the Immigration Department, the Customs and Excise Department, the Marine Department and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Authority, the numbers of vehicle trips/ferry trips and passenger trips of cross-boundary coaches (CBCs) and cross-boundary ferries are tabulated below:

Year	CBCs (Note 1)		Cross-boundary ferries (Note 2)	
	Vehicle trips	Passenger trips	Ferry trips	Passenger trips
2018	1 492 171	38 868 871	135 319	23 728 030
2019	1 714 442	45 462 237	113 729	14 387 551
2020 (Note 3)	147 645	3 197 558	8 454	842 140
2021 (as at the first quarter) (Note 3)	3 978	28 195	0	0

Note 1: Including Guangdong-Hong Kong and Hong Kong-Macao CBCs and cross-boundary shuttle buses.

Note 2: Including cross-boundary ferries plying between Hong Kong and Macao as well as a number of Mainland cities via the Hong Kong-Macau Ferry Terminal, the China Ferry Terminal and the Tuen Mun Ferry Terminal.

Note 3: The figures are affected by the measures implemented by the Government to contain COVID-19 with effect from late January 2020.

(2) to (4) The Government understands that the ongoing epidemic has seriously affected the cross-boundary passenger transport trade. Due to the measures introduced by the governments of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao under the co-operation mechanism on joint prevention and control of the epidemic, only limited land-based cross-boundary services have been provided since February 2020, while cross-boundary passenger ferry services have been completely halted. The Government fully understands the predicament faced by the cross-boundary passenger transport trade, and has provided subsidies under the Anti-epidemic Fund at different times since 2020 and rolled out as far as practicable a number of measures to ease the pressure on the trade and its employees, some of which have been extended. The various measures include:

(i) each CBC and each cross-boundary hire car having been provided with non-accountable subsidies totalling \$65,000 and \$55,000 respectively;

(ii) each local CBC driver having been provided with subsidies totalling \$23,400;

(iii) land-based cross-boundary passenger transport operators being provided with rental waiver for facilities such as ticket offices, regulator kiosks and passenger waiting halls in government premises until September 30, 2021;

(iv) parking spaces within the Shenzhen Bay Port having been arranged for the

trade to park their CBCs for free;

(v) waivers of Closed Road Permit fees for CBCs and cross-boundary hire cars, vehicle licence and examination fees for commercial vehicles, as well as the fees payable for issue or renewal of Passenger Service Licence and Passenger Service Licence Certificate for CBCs being provided until December 29, 2021;

(vi) each eligible cross-boundary ferry vessel having been provided with non-accountable subsidies totalling \$1,500,000; and

(vii) the Employment Support Scheme, which provides subsidies to eligible employers for paying wages of their employees for six months, having helped alleviate the financial burden of eligible employers in the cross-boundary passenger transport trade and retain their employees.

We have been maintaining close communication with the cross-boundary passenger transport trade and taken note of the views of the trade on support measures. We are glad to learn that while enduring the challenging times at present, the cross-boundary passenger transport operators, which are keen to resume their services as soon as possible, have been making full preparations including encouraging and arranging their frontline staff to receive vaccination early, with a view to ensuring that they can promptly resume operation to provide needed services for meeting public demand when passenger clearance services return to normal. The governments of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao have been maintaining close liaison so that once the epidemic situation is under control, the cross-boundary people flow amongst the three places can be enabled the soonest possible and the cross-boundary passenger transport service trade can also resume its operation in an orderly manner. The governments will also proactively formulate measures pertinent to the trade and render necessary assistance, with a view to ensuring the smooth operation of cross-boundary land-based and ferry passenger services when they are resumed.