

LCQ10: Waiting time of driving test centres

Following is a question by the Hon Martin Liao and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (October 30):

Question:

It has been reported that from time to time, certain driving test centres (DTCs) under the Transport Department are closed during opening days due to a shortage of driving examiners. As a result, candidates have to wait for a long time before they can take road tests of driving tests (road tests). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the average number of opening days per week on which the various DTCs were closed, in each of the past three years, as well as the major reasons for the closure;

(2) of the staffing establishment, number of vacancies and wastage (broken down by the cause of wastage (e.g. retirement and resignation)) of driving examiners, in each of the past three years, as well as the estimated figures for each of the coming three years (set out in a table);

(3) of the respective numbers of persons who took road tests for (i) non-commercial vehicles and (ii) commercial vehicles in each of the past three years, as well as the respective average, lowest and highest numbers of calendar days for which they had waited before taking the road tests (set out in a table);

(4) as some members of the transport trade have relayed that there has been a serious shortage of commercial vehicle drivers in recent years, whether the Government has assessed if the long waiting time for candidates to take road tests for commercial vehicles has aggravated this problem; and

(5) whether it will consider converting sites of DTCs with low utilisation rates to other uses, so as to optimise the utilisation of land resources?

Reply:

President,

The Transport Department (TD) has been closely monitoring the demand for driving tests and has deployed resources to provide driving test services. My reply to the various parts of the Hon Martin Liao's question is as follows.

(1) The average number of opening days per week for driving test centres (DTCs) in the past three years (2016-2018) is tabulated at Annex 1. The number of opening days of DTCs is subject to a host of factors, including the

geographical conditions of the venues, the traffic conditions of the nearby areas, the test demands for various vehicle types, the availability of TD's manpower resources, etc. Taking the four DTCs in government designated driving schools (DDS) as examples, DDSs in Sha Tin and Yuen Long are relatively spacious, such that both driving test training and driving tests can be provided concurrently. Also, since the demand for driving tests is relatively high in these two areas, these two DTCs are open for driving tests on every working day. On the contrary, the DDSs in Ap Lei Chau and Kwun Tong can hardly handle driving training and driving tests at the same time due to their smaller venues and nearby traffic restrictions. Therefore, the DTCs in these two DDSs only open for two to three working days per week for driving tests.

In addition, some DTCs are not suitable for use as driving test venues for other types of vehicles owing to their geographical conditions and frequent traffic of the nearby areas. For example, Yuen On Driving Test Centre and Container Port Road South Driving Test Centre conduct driving tests for articulated vehicles (AV) only due to the site constraints. Coupled with the relatively low test demand for the DTCs for commercial vehicles, their number of opening days is thus relatively lower than other DTCs.

(2) The staffing establishment, number of vacancies and wastage of driving examiners of the TD in the past three years are set out in Annex 2. The estimated staffing establishment, number of vacancies as well as number of retirees of driving examiners in 2019 and the coming three years are set out in Annex 3.

(3) Commercial vehicles generally refer to taxi, medium and heavy goods vehicles, private and public light buses, private buses, public buses, franchised buses, AVs as well as special purpose vehicles, while private cars (PC), light goods vehicles (LGV) and motor cycles are non-commercial vehicles. The waiting time for road tests hinges on a number of factors, such as the test demand for different vehicle types and parts of the driving tests, as well as the scheduling of tests, etc. The number of road tests arranged, as well as the average waiting time, shortest and longest average waiting time of road tests for non-commercial and commercial vehicles in the past three years are tabulated at Annex 4.

(4) The Government has always been concerned about the shortage of commercial vehicle drivers. In this connection, the TD has pledged to keep the average waiting time for road tests for commercial vehicles to 82 days or shorter through flexible deployment of resources. In fact, the average waiting time of commercial vehicles in the past three years was shorter than 60 days. The TD will continue to monitor the demand for road tests of commercial vehicles and deploy resources to meet the demand as far as possible according to actual circumstances.

As at end-2018, the total number of valid full driving licences for different types of commercial vehicles is more than 870 000. To attract more entrants into the commercial driving industry, the Government is preparing a legislative amendment exercise to relax the requirements for applications for

commercial vehicles to have held a valid driving licence of PC or LGV for a period of at least three years to at least one year, and will introduce it into LegCo as soon as possible.

(5) The TD does not have any plan to convert DTCs with relatively low utilisation rates (such as Yuen On Driving Test Centre and Container Port Road South Driving Test Centre) to other uses because they are currently the only suitable venues for conducting driving tests for AVs, among all driving test sites. Moreover, Yuen On Driving Test Centre is located on a public road and the mobile driving test centre (i.e. the vehicle which serves as the office) is only placed at Yuen On Street during driving tests and will not take up any road space when no test is scheduled. As regards the Container Port Road South Driving Test Centre, it is used by other Government departments for designated uses when no test is scheduled, including vehicle inspection by the Fire Services Department, and temporary parking of vehicles of the Hong Kong Police Force.