

LCQ12: Electric mobility devices and electric wheelchairs

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (January 8):

Question:

At present, electric unicycles, electric scooters, electric hoverboards and electric bicycles (electric mobility devices) are all prohibited from being used on roads, but electric wheelchairs, which are regarded as medical devices, are not subject to that restriction. Earlier on, two persons died as a result of the traffic accidents that happened when they were using electric scooters on cycling tracks. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it knows the number of electric mobility devices imported in each of the past three years, together with a breakdown of such number by type;
- (2) of the respective numbers of cases, in each of the past three years, in which the Police (i) issued advices to and (ii) instituted prosecutions against persons who used electric mobility devices illegally;
- (3) whether, at present, there are any public places in Hong Kong where members of the public may use electric mobility devices legally; if so, of their locations; if not, the reasons why the Government still allows the importation of such devices and their sale in Hong Kong; and
- (4) as some members of the public have relayed that electric wheelchairs travelling at high speed on pavements and pedestrian crossings might pose safety hazards to the wheelchair users concerned, pedestrians and drivers, whether the Government will review the existing regulation of electric wheelchairs, including conducting studies on (i) the introduction of a licensing regime and a mandatory third-party insurance to be taken out by electric wheelchair users, and (ii) the provision of assistance to such users in need in paying for the licence fees and insurance premiums concerned; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Food and Health Bureau, the Department of Health, the Hospital Authority (HA), the Transport Department (TD), the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) and the Hong Kong Police Force (Police), our consolidated reply to the Hon Chan Han-pan's question is as follows.

(1) According to C&SD, no separate commodity codes are designated to electric unicycles, electric scooters, electric hoverboards and electric bicycles under the Hong Kong Harmonized System. The respective commodity codes are shared with other vehicles (such as mopeds, electric skateboards, electric golf carts/electric golf bag trolleys), hence the import quantity of these devices is not available.

(2) and (3) According to the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374), "motor vehicle" means any mechanically propelled vehicle. Electric mobility devices are mechanically propelled and thus belong to "motor vehicles". All "motor vehicles" must be licensed for use on roads or private roads. Considering from the perspectives of road safety and accessibility, it is the long-standing policy that the TD does not register or license electric mobility devices under the Ordinance.

The Police made 13 arrest cases in relation to the illegal use of electric mobility devices on roads between July and December 2019.

(4) Under section 4(8) of the Summary Offences Ordinance (Cap. 228), it is an offence if any person, in any public place, drives recklessly or negligently or at a speed or in a manner which is dangerous to the public.

To educate wheelchair users on the proper use of electric wheelchairs, the allied health professionals of HA hospitals, when prescribing electric wheelchairs, will teach patients how to use the wheelchairs safely and correctly according to the needs of individual patients. In addition, the Community Rehabilitation Service Support Centre under the HA provides systematic group training for electric wheelchair users so that they could learn the skills and attitudes of using the wheelchairs safely in order to cope with different situations including using public transport and public facilities and handling outdoor obstacles.

Under the "Walk in HK" initiative, the TD is conducting the "Consultancy Study on Enhancing Walkability in Hong Kong", which is expected to be completed within this year. It looks into various issues on encouraging walking, the feasibility of the use of electric mobility devices in Hong Kong, and the prevailing regulatory policies on electric wheelchairs. The Government will make reference to the findings of the study and review the regulation on electric wheelchairs.