

LCQ13: Promoting the popularisation of electric buses

Following is a question by the Hon Frankie Yick and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (June 19):

Question:

The Chief Executive (CE) proposed in the 2022 Policy Address to promote green transport and indicated that the Government would introduce about 700 electric buses by the end of 2027. In the 2023 Policy Address, the CE indicated that support would be provided to realise the goal. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that in its reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on May 22 this year, the Government indicated that as at the end of April this year, there were 90 registered electric franchised buses and the Government was discussing with the franchised bus operators the roadmap and timetable for implementing green transformation, of the preliminary outcome of discussion; whether the Government has, based on such outcome, assessed if it can achieve the aforesaid goal by 2027; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the negative, whether it will adjust the goal; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) given that some members of the transport sector have relayed that in promoting the popularisation of electric buses, franchised bus operators are responsible for the expenses incurred from research, development to actual operation, but the high interest rates and the operating situation where bus patronage has yet to recover have affected the desire of such operators to procure electric buses, of the new measures put in place by the Government to encourage them to procure more electric buses in order to achieve the aforesaid goal; and

(3) given that some members of the transport sector have relayed that apart from procuring electric buses, the operators concerned also need to invest a considerable amount in providing additional ancillary facilities (including charging facilities and repair and maintenance equipment) and training of technical staff in order to enable the smooth and safe operation of electric buses, and to maintain the standard of service, the operators concerned even need to retain and maintain the relevant ancillary facilities for diesel buses at the same time until all diesel buses are retired after a decade or so, of the measures put in place by the Government to assist the operators concerned in acquiring relevant ancillary facilities for electric buses?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Transport and Logistics Bureau, my reply to the question raised by the Hon Frankie Yick is as follows:

(1) In respect of implementing a green transformation roadmap and timetable, the Government has all along been liaising with the franchised bus operators (FBOs) closely to understand their actual operational needs and views, including the relevant information such as FBOs' forecasted bus procurement needs in the coming years. The FBOs have a positive attitude towards the gradual transition to electric buses (e-buses). We are currently exploring different options with the four FBOs to promote e-buses. The target of introducing about 700 e-buses by end-2027 remains unchanged.

(2) and (3) Since 2015, the Government has been subsidising the FBOs to purchase 36 single-deck e-buses and install relevant charging facilities for trial run on a number of routes, with a view to comprehensively testing and assessing their operational performance in Hong Kong's road environment. The findings of the trials showed that the passenger carrying capacity and driving performance of the single-deck battery e-buses are comparable with those of the conventional single-deck buses. This verified the technical feasibility of adopting battery e-buses on a large scale in Hong Kong, and provided valuable experience and data for the FBOs in respect of fleet management, e-buses routing, charging arrangements and the supporting facilities, etc.

Today, the FBOs have recognised the relevant technology for e-buses. The market development of e-buses has also become more mature in recent years and their wider adoption would hopefully drive down prices. That said, there is no doubt that financial affordability and budgeting are imperative for achieving the green transformation for more than 10 000 public buses in Hong Kong. The transformation will also necessitate many supporting facilities and training of technical staff. Therefore, the trade must be allowed sufficient time to prepare, and the Government also needs to look into the feasibility of providing financial support. As mentioned above, the FBOs have a positive attitude towards the gradual transition to e-buses, and we are currently exploring different options with the four FBOs to promote e-buses. We plan to finalise a concrete proposal within this year and make timely announcement, with a view to assisting the FBOs in the gradual green transformation while accommodating their actual operational conditions.