

LCQ16: Crackdown on “black taxis”

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Pui-leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (June 19):

Question:

Some members of the taxi trade have pointed out that "black taxis" are a handful of black sheep in the taxi trade and their illegal acts such as overcharging and cherry-picking passengers have not just aroused discontent among members of the public and visitors but also affected the reputation of Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has compiled statistics on the following figures relating to the crackdown on black taxis through decoy operations in various police districts in each of the past five years: (i) the number of law enforcement actions, (ii) the number of cases recorded, (iii) the number of prosecutions, and (iv) the number of persons convicted; whether it has assessed the effectiveness of decoy operations; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it has compiled statistics on (i) the number of complaints received by the Government involving taxi drivers' malpractices (with a breakdown by malpractice set out in Table 1), (ii) the number of taxi drivers prosecuted, and (iii) the number of taxi drivers convicted (set out in Table 2), in each of the past five years; if it has not compiled such statistics, of the reasons for that; and

Table 1

| Taxi drivers' malpractices | (i) | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
| Refusing hire | | | | | |
| Failure to take the most direct route | | | | | |
| Overcharging | | | | | |
| Improper driving behaviour | | | | | |
| Refusing to drive to destination | | | | | |
| Taximeter irregularities | | | | | |
| Other malpractices | | | | | |

Table 2

| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|-------|------|------|------|------|------|
| (ii) | | | | | |
| (iii) | | | | | |

(3) as it has been reported that there are often cases of black taxis having their flag covered and refusing hire in tourist-intensive areas such as the Peak Tram Central Terminus and the Peak, and some of the black taxis are even suspected of operating as a syndicate under the control of triads, whether the authorities know such situation and whether they will consider deploying more police officers to such places to maintain order and step up law enforcement efforts; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

After consulting the Security Bureau, the Transport Department (TD) and the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF), our reply to the Hon Chan Pui-leung's question is as follows:

In response to the widespread views of the community that the Government should strengthen the regulation of taxi services, the Government has earlier reviewed the overall taxi operation and management, and put forward a series of measures to enhance taxi services. Such measures include introducing a Taxi-Driver-Offence Points (TDOP) System and a two-tier penalty system for certain taxi-driver-related offences. The relevant Ordinances were passed by the Legislative Council in December 2023. The two-tier penalty system has taken effect on December 22 last year, and the TDOP System will take effect on September 22 this year. The Government believes that raising the penalty will be conducive to combatting taxi drivers' illegal acts and strengthening the deterrent effect against repeat offenders, thereby enhancing the general quality of taxi services.

(1) The HKPF has been adopting various effective measures to combat the illegal acts of taxi drivers, including launching intelligence-led operations, taking enforcement actions by disguising as passengers, as well as enhancing publicity. The HKPF will continue to conduct enforcement actions based on intelligence and operational priorities.

The HKPF does not maintain breakdown of figures on combatting taxi drivers' malpractices by the mode of the enforcement action. The numbers of enforcement actions taken against the offences committed by taxi drivers (i.e. the number of summons issued or arrests) in each of the past five years are set out in the table below:

| Enforcement actions taken by the HKPF against the offences committed by taxi drivers | | | | | |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|
| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
| | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|--|----|----|----|----|----|
| Overcharging | 51 | 22 | 11 | 17 | 42 |
| Refusing or neglecting to accept a hire | 59 | 16 | 27 | 65 | 85 |
| Refusing or neglecting to drive a taxi to the place indicated by the hirer | 28 | 7 | 9 | 30 | 18 |
| Driving to a destination other than by the most direct practicable route | 22 | 12 | 11 | 13 | 13 |
| Offences involving taximeters | 9 | 13 | 0 | 26 | 16 |

(2) In the past five years, the numbers of complaints received by the TD and the HKPF per year about taxi drivers are set out in the two tables below respectively. The figures cover the complaints referred by the 1823 Call Centre, the Transport Complaints Unit under the Transport Advisory Committee and other government departments or organisations. As the complainants may submit their complaints to different departments or organisations at the same time, the figures in the two tables below may overlap.

| Complaints received by the TD | | | | | |
|--|------|------|------|------|-------|
| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
| Overcharging | 223 | 62 | 108 | 152 | 340 |
| Refusing or neglecting to accept a hire | 152 | 50 | 154 | 207 | 361 |
| Refusing or neglecting to drive a taxi to the place indicated by the hirer | 61 | 26 | 39 | 24 | 28 |
| Driving to a destination other than by the most direct practicable route | 120 | 73 | 163 | 191 | 277 |
| Improper driving behaviours | 269 | 143 | 226 | 254 | 374 |
| Others (Note 1) | 480 | 381 | 492 | 765 | 1 164 |

Note 1: Other complaints include offences involving the taximeters and other malpractices (e.g. refusing to provide receipts, smoking in the vehicle when it has passengers on board), etc.

| Complaints received by the HKPF | | | | | |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
| Overcharging | 567 | 328 | 368 | 443 | 1 034 |
| Refusing or neglecting to accept a hire | 951 | 285 | 683 | 745 | 1 435 |
| Refusing or neglecting to drive a taxi to the place indicated by the hirer | 192 | 55 | 144 | 130 | 180 |
| Driving to a destination other than by the most direct practicable route | 588 | 359 | 470 | 505 | 924 |
| Offences involving taximeters | 26 | 11 | 13 | 7 | 16 |
| Others (Note 2) | 1 843 | 1 382 | 2 271 | 3 843 | 5 995 |

Note 2: Other complaints include the taxi driver not behaving in a civil and orderly manner, soliciting passengers, as well as improper driving behaviours, etc.

Upon receipt of a complaint, the TD will conduct investigation and request the taxi owner concerned to provide an explanation. Depending on the circumstances of the complaints, the TD will write to the taxi owners or drivers concerned to remind them of the need to comply with the law and pay attention to their attitude when providing services so as to maintain service quality. The TD will also provide analysis of the relevant complaints to the HKPF for carrying out appropriate follow-up investigations and enforcement actions.

The HKPF has also been closely monitoring and following up on the complaints about taxi drivers suspected of committing offences. If a member of the public suspects that a taxi driver has committed offences such as refusing to accept a hire or overcharging, he or she can record the name of the driver, vehicle registration mark of the taxi, time and location, etc, and report the matter to the HKPF. If there is sufficient evidence, the HKPF will certainly take enforcement action.

The numbers of prosecutions and convictions for the 22 offences relating to taxi drivers (e.g. overcharging, refusing or neglecting to accept a hire, etc) in the past five years are set out in the table below:

| Number of prosecutions and convictions for the offences relating to taxi drivers (Note 3) | | | | | |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|
| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
| Number of prosecutions | 76 | 14 | 7 | 13 | 57 |
| Number of convictions | 76 | 14 | 7 | 13 | 57 |

Note 3: Such figures do not include the number of prosecutions or convictions of taxi drivers violating offences relating to improper driving behaviour (e.g. careless driving, speeding, etc).

(3) As mentioned above, the HKPF has been adopting different measures to combat taxi drivers' malpractices.

On stepping up publicity, the Police, in collaboration with the taxi trade, the Lan Kwai Fong Association and the Central and Western District Road Safety Campaign Committee (C&W DRSCC), has launched the three-month Lan Kwai Fong Taxi Ambassadors Scheme since April 5 this year. Under the aforementioned scheme, the C&W DRSCC will arrange Taxi Ambassadors at the taxi stands at Lan Kwai Fong in Central and Peak Tram station at designated time to distribute taxi information cards to passengers boarding taxis. The cards will record information such as the estimated fares, the licence plate number of the taxi concerned and the destinations, etc. In addition, the taxi trade will arrange law-abiding and quality taxis to serve at Lan Kwai Fong so as to ensure an adequate supply of taxis during the peak hours at night. Since the launch of the said scheme, more than 7 000 members of the public and tourists have been assisted in taking taxis. The said scheme has successfully enhanced communication between passengers and taxi drivers, and effectively strengthened the deterrent effect against unscrupulous taxi drivers.

On law enforcement front, in view of the Labour Day holiday this year, the HKPF has launched a two-week operation, namely "Kickstarter" and "Cellbreaker", between April 24 and May 8, which have covered popular tourist spots. The main objectives of the relevant operations include combatting malpractices relating to public service vehicles (in particular taxis), with a view to enhancing their service quality, improving the travelling experience of inbound tourists during their stay in Hong Kong, as well as maintaining smooth traffic flow.

The HKPF aims to combat the black sheep of the taxi industry and increase the deterrent effect through a series of enforcement actions. Besides, the HKPF will continue their efforts in education and publicity in various districts, and will distribute souvenirs and publicity leaflets to the public and visitors to raise their awareness towards unlawful behavior of taxi drivers.