

## LCQ16: Government public transport fare concession scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Yang Wing-kit and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (May 29):

Question:

The latest Budget proposes to review the Government Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities (commonly known as the \$2 scheme), and the Secretary for Labour and Welfare has indicated earlier on in a television interview that the Government hopes to continue the policy without changing the existing target beneficiaries and scope, and that it will step up publicity on how to make good use of the concession and combat abuses of the scheme. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will ask franchised bus companies and public light buses (PLBs) to fully implement two-way section fares and require beneficiaries to tap their cards when alighting in order to enjoy the \$2 concessionary fare, otherwise they will have to pay the normal fare, so as to avoid the problem of "taking long-haul routes for short journeys"; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will propose to the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), franchised bus companies, PLB operators and ferry operators to install closed-circuit televisions (CCTVs) at locations such as exit gates or card machines for alighting passengers, and provide subsidies to the aforesaid organisations to facilitate the Government's monitoring of the implementation of the \$2 scheme; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether it will apply facial recognition technology and artificial intelligence to analyse the CCTV footage, so as to determine whether the persons enjoying the \$2 concessionary fare are eligible persons; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) whether it will discuss with the MTRCL and ferry operators the provision of special passageways for use only by beneficiaries of the \$2 scheme to prevent abuse of the \$2 scheme by ineligible persons; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Transport and Logistics Bureau, the reply to the question raised by the Hon Yang Wing-kit is set out below:

(1) The Transport Department (TD) has all along been encouraging franchised bus and green minibus (GMB) operators to provide fare concessions, including one-way or two-way section fares, as far as possible to help reduce passengers' travelling expenses, taking into account their commercial considerations, including operating and financial conditions, overall economic environment, passenger needs and impact on vehicle resources.

At present, one-way or two-way section fares are available on about 80 per cent of the franchised bus routes. As most of the remaining 20 per cent of the routes are short-haul, the fares of these routes are already relatively low owing to their short journey distance, and section fares are thus considered infeasible.

Besides, there are currently about 60 per cent of the GMB routes offering section fares. During the TD's regular assessments of the overall service performance of a GMB route, the offer of new concessionary section fares to passengers by the operator is one of the considerations for the TD to further extend the period of the operator's Passenger Service Licence.

Regarding whether to request the franchised bus and GMB operators to provide section fares, the TD needs to give due consideration to the overall transport services and planning matters, including how to address and balance different travel needs of short-haul and long-haul passengers; and the feasibility and specific arrangements for individual routes are also subject to the actual situation of the routes. Full implementation of section fares may result in more short-haul passengers travelling on long-haul routes, taking up the capacity of long-haul routes and affecting long-haul passengers; if franchised bus operators have to increase the trip frequencies of their long-haul routes, it would aggravate the burden on road traffic. Moreover, when short-haul passengers alight midway, the occupancy rates of long-haul routes may become too low to make effective use of public transport resources. Introducing more section fares may also lead to duplication of resources with existing short-haul routes or other public transport services, upsetting the delicate balance among various public transport services. Hence, the TD will carefully assess the feasibility of providing section fare of individual routes.

The Government has rolled out TV and Radio Announcements in the Public Interest and posted posters at major public bus and public light bus termini as well as public light bus compartments on the routes for which two-way section fares are offered to encourage beneficiaries of the Government Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities (\$2 Scheme) to make appropriate use of short-haul routes and to assist passengers to understand the operation of two-way section fare, so as to reduce the differential fares under the \$2 Scheme and save public funds.

(2), (3) and (4) The Financial Secretary announced in the 2024-25 Budget to review the mode of operation of the \$2 Scheme with a view to maintaining the financial sustainability of the Scheme. In the review, the Government would take into account the effectiveness of different options in containing the growth of expenditure and factors including the practicability of these

options.

To combat abuse of the \$2 Scheme, the TD has all along been requesting Public Transport Operators (PTOs) to strengthen ticket inspection and passenger identity verification work and to strictly enforce the penalty as set out in relevant legislation and by-laws to prevent abuses of the \$2 Scheme by ineligible persons. The TD also conducts surveys and monitors the situation, and will continue to conduct joint special inspection and enforcement actions with PTOs and refer suspected abuse cases to the Police for follow-up and criminal investigation where there is sufficient evidence so as to ensure that the resources of the \$2 Scheme are spent on target beneficiaries.

Besides, the Government has reminded persons aged 60 to 64 that they must use JoyYou Cards to benefit from the \$2 Scheme through TV and Radio Announcements in the Public Interest and posters. The Government has also stressed that it is an offence for an ineligible person to abuse the \$2 Scheme. Any person who is convicted is liable to imprisonment.