

LCQ16: Vehicles registered in Hong Kong being stranded on the Mainland

Following is a question by the Hon Starry Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (October 20):

Question:

Since the outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic early last year, passenger clearance services at most land immigration control points have been suspended one after another whilst cross-boundary passenger transport services have come to a halt. Besides, immigration quarantine measures have made it difficult for Hong Kong and Mainland residents to travel between the two places. It is learnt that some vehicles registered in Hong Kong have since been stranded on the Mainland, rendering the vehicle owners concerned unable to complete for those vehicles the relevant procedures of the two places (e.g. annual vehicle examination and licence renewal). To help vehicle owners cope with the situation, the Office of Port of Entry and Exit of Shenzhen Municipal People's Government has earlier announced that cross-boundary vehicles which have failed to return to Hong Kong from Shenzhen within the prescribed period are to be exempted from penalty. The Gongbei Customs has also rolled out measures allowing Hong Kong and Macao cross-boundary vehicle owners to apply in advance, by phone or email, to the customs of the place where their vehicle's record is filed for completing the procedures for their vehicles to stay on the Mainland. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it knows the number of vehicles registered in Hong Kong which are currently stranded on the Mainland, with a breakdown by vehicle class;
- (2) whether it has received requests for assistance from the owners of such vehicles; if so, of the details; and
- (3) whether it has discussed with the Mainland authorities the introduction of measures to help such vehicle owners to complete the procedures related to such vehicles, including considering allowing vehicles stranded on the Mainland due to the epidemic to return to Hong Kong to complete the relevant procedures; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to the questions raised by the Hon Starry Lee is as follows:

At present, pursuant to the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374) and

related regulations, a vehicle must complete and pass a vehicle examination at a designated vehicle examination centre prior to the issuance of vehicle licence by the Transport Department (TD). Commercial vehicles and goods vehicles must undergo annual examinations, while private cars and light goods vehicles aged more than six years have to be sent to designated vehicle examination centres annually for inspection prior to licence renewal. The existing legislation does not empower the Commissioner for Transport (the Commissioner) to extend the validity period of issued vehicle licences or to exempt any vehicles from the requirements of passing vehicle examinations prior to licence renewal. If no vehicle licence has been in force in respect of a vehicle for a period of two years, the Commissioner will send a notice to registered owner's address appearing on the register of vehicles informing him that, if the vehicle is not licensed within 15 days after the date of such notice, the registration of the vehicle may be cancelled. However, if the registered owner has a reasonable excuse, he can apply to the TD for deferral of the cancellation of vehicle registration.

According to the travel records of the relevant vehicles, as of mid-2021, it is estimated that some 7 000 Guangdong-Hong Kong cross-boundary vehicles aged more than six years have not returned to Hong Kong since they left for the Mainland in mid-2019. Most of these vehicles are private cars and their vehicle licences in Hong Kong have already expired. According to the existing legislation, a vehicle aged more than six years must return to Hong Kong and pass the vehicle examination as prescribed by the TD before applying for renewal of vehicle licence in Hong Kong. We note that some vehicle owners arrange cross-boundary towing services to transport their vehicles from the Mainland back to Hong Kong for examination at designated vehicle examination centres, and apply for licence renewal after the completion of examination.

We understand the concerns about these cross-boundary vehicles stranded in the Mainland. In this connection, the TD approved about 60 eligible applications from Guangdong-Hong Kong cross-boundary vehicles for deferral of cancellation of vehicle registration during the period from January to September 2021, so as to extend their deadlines for renewing vehicle licence. In addition, to further facilitate such stranded vehicles to return from the Mainland to Hong Kong for completing vehicle examination and licence renewal procedures, the TD is actively exploring with the Mainland authorities and relevant government departments in Hong Kong suitable measures with a view to offering relevant vehicle owners an arrangement which is more convenient and less costly for their vehicles to return to Hong Kong for vehicle examination. Upon reaching an agreement with the Mainland authorities and relevant government departments in Hong Kong, the TD will announce the details in due course.