

LCQ20: Barrier-free taxis

Following is a question by the Hon Nixie Lam and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (March 27):

Question:

Regarding barrier-free taxis, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers and percentages of urban, New Territories and Lantau barrier-free taxis in Hong Kong at present;

(2) as it has been reported that electric wheelchairs are relatively large in size and not all barrier-free taxis are electric wheelchair accessible, whether the authorities have kept the number of barrier-free taxis which are electric wheelchair accessible; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) as the Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address proposed that \$50 million would be earmarked to subsidise the trade to purchase wheelchair accessible electric taxis, of the support measures apart from such subsidy the Government has introduced to the taxi trade and drivers respectively to promote the popularisation of barrier-free taxis; whether it will draw up a timetable for increasing the number of barrier-free taxis; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) as there are views that, in the light of the road conditions and topography of Hong Kong, the models of barrier-free taxis which allow wheelchair users to directly board and alight from them via their rear ends are more suitable for use in Hong Kong, but the existing taxi models available in the community are unable to cater for the needs of wheelchair users, whether the Government will strike a balance between road safety and the travel needs of wheelchair users, and consider allowing taxis, by amending the legislation, to be suitably modified to cater for the needs of wheelchair users;

(5) whether it has collaborated with the taxi trade in exploring with the manufacturers concerned the types of barrier-free taxis suitable for use in Hong Kong; if so, of the details; if not, how it meets the demands of wheelchair users for barrier-free taxis; and

(6) in order to facilitate wheelchair users' transfer between buses and barrier-free taxis, whether the authorities will explore the feasibility of setting up taxi pick-up/drop-off points at locations in the vicinity of large-scale bus-bus interchanges; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

â€‹The reply to the Hon Nixie Lam's question is as follows:

The Government is committed to the concept of "Transport for All", and has been improving public transport facilities and promoting a barrier-free transport system in collaboration with various public transport operators to facilitate the accessibility of public transport services for persons with disabilities and elderly persons.

(1) and (2) At present, there are 18 163 taxis in Hong Kong, of which 15 250 are urban taxis, 2 838 are New Territories (NT) taxis and 75 are Lantau taxis. As at end February 2024, about 4 700 taxis are wheelchair accessible. The relevant figures are tabulated below:

Number of wheelchair accessible taxis (percentage among the total number of the respective type of taxis)			
Urban taxis	NT taxis	Lantau taxis	Total
4 196 (27.5 per cent)	495 (17.4 per cent)	6 (8 per cent)	4 697 (25.9 per cent)

The design of the wheelchair accessible taxi models available in the market vary, including the height restriction inside the compartment and the maximum loading capacity of the wheelchair ramp. Since different electric wheelchair models vary in dimensions and weights, and the weight and height of wheelchair users may also vary to a certain extent, it is difficult to generalise which taxi model is suitable for access by electric wheelchairs. Passengers may choose the suitable taxi model based on their individual circumstances.

(3) Under the concept of "Transport for All", the Government has been actively encouraging the taxi trade to introduce more wheelchair accessible taxis and different models of such taxis, so as to provide more options for wheelchair users and facilitate their transportation needs. The Government also announced in the Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address that \$50 million has been earmarked to subsidise the trade to purchase wheelchair accessible electric taxis.

To further improve the taxi service quality, the Government will soon introduce a taxi fleet regime, under which existing taxis may form a fleet and apply to the Transport Department (TD) for a Taxi Fleet Licence. The TD will regulate the operation and management of the taxi fleets through license conditions, and specify that the fleet must include a certain number of wheelchair accessible taxis so as to facilitate travelling by wheelchair users. The TD is actively carrying out the preparatory work and plans to invite the trade to apply for Taxi Fleet Licences in April this year, so that fleet taxis may commence operation as soon as possible. We expect that more wheelchair accessible taxis will come into service in phases.

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(4) and (5) To ensure passenger safety and road safety, any vehicle

modifications must comply with relevant safety standards relating to vehicle construction (e.g. wheelchair tie-down systems and user restraining systems) as stipulated in the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374) and its subsidiary legislation. Provided that the above statutory requirements are fulfilled, taxis which are currently not wheelchair accessible can be retrofitted with wheelchair accessible devices through modifications.

The TD has all along been open to the introduction of wheelchair accessible taxi models by the taxi trade or vehicle suppliers. The TD will also continue to maintain communication with the taxi trade and various vehicle suppliers to assist them in understanding the relevant standards and vetting procedures, and will help co-ordinate the trade's efforts in identifying models suitable for use on the roads in Hong Kong as and when necessary.

(6) The Government has been designating taxi pick-up and drop-off points across the territory and, where traffic situations allow, relaxing some no-stopping restrictions for taxis to pick-up or drop-off passengers, so as to facilitate riding of taxis by passengers.

Bus-Bus Interchanges (BBIs) are interchange stops for passengers to switch between different bus routes. The BBIs have relatively high utilisation (especially during peak hours), and most of them face certain geographical and spatial constraints. In considering whether it is appropriate to set up taxi pick-up and drop-off points at an individual BBI, the TD has to carefully assess all relevant factors (including the utilisation of the BBIs concerned, the provision of passenger facilities, the circulation space for buses and passengers) so as to avoid affecting the daily operation of the BBIs.