

LCQ5: Supporting public transport sector

Following is a question by the Hon Frankie Yick and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (December 11):

Question:

It has been reported that a number of public service vehicles (including buses, minibuses, taxis and school private light buses) have been vandalised or burnt out during the public meetings and processions held in recent months. Some of the owners and drivers concerned have relayed that the vandalism of their "vehicles as a means of subsistence" has gravely affected their livelihood. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of reports of vandalism of public service vehicles received by the Police since June this year, with a tabulated breakdown by the class of and extent of damage caused to the vehicles;

(2) whether it will consider setting up a fund to subsidise the owners concerned to pay for the expenses on vehicle repair or procurement of new vehicles; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) given that taxis and minibuses are vulnerable to vandalism as most of them are parked at public places such as roadside and public transport interchanges at night, whether the Government will consider providing additional temporary car parks for the parking of public service vehicles, so as to minimise the chance of such vehicles being vandalised?

Reply:

President,

Currently, 90 per cent of Hong Kong people rely on public transport services to travel and the number of daily passenger trips is as high as 12 million. Due to the continuous public events in the past six months, various road facilities and land transport services have been affected to varying degrees, which have greatly hampered the land public transport services and seriously obstructed the travel of the general public. All relevant government departments, including the Transport Department (TD) and Highways Department, and public transport service operators have been making their best endeavours to resume the provision of relevant services as soon as possible. I hereby once again urge all people that, regardless of your political stance or views towards the incidents, you should never damage the public transport vehicles and road traffic facilities. We should all treasure Hong Kong, and restore calm and stability in society.

My reply to the various parts of Hon Frankie Yick's question is as

follows:

(1) According to the Police, they classify the reported cases by the case nature so as to keep the relevant cases in their records. Simply speaking, vandalisms done to the road traffic facilities are classified as cases of criminal damage. The Police does not maintain any statistics breakdown based on the types of damaged object or facility. Therefore, we are not able to provide detailed figures as requested. Nonetheless, according to the information obtained by TD from the public transport service operators, it is understood that from June to the end of November 2019, around 420 franchised buses and seven tram cars were vandalised to different extent during the public order events in the past few months, including being burnt, smeared, glass windows being broken or vandalised, and tyres being deflated, etc. As for public light buses (PLBs), taxis and non-franchised buses, according to the rough estimates provided by the relevant major service operators to TD, more than 100 vehicles were vandalised.

(2) Public transport services in Hong Kong are generally provided by relevant service operators on commercial principles. Maintenance and procurement of vehicles, etc, are under the daily operation scope, for which the operators or vehicle owners should be responsible. At present, we have no plan to set up a special fund for vehicle owners affected to repair or procure vehicles. However, we understand that the operating environment of the public transport sector has been greatly affected by the social activities in recent months. In this regard, the Financial Secretary announced a series of measures on August 15 and October 22 this year respectively, aiming to help the transport trades to cope with the pressure brought by the social and economic environment. The measures include the following:

Firstly, from December 30, 2019 onwards, the vehicle licence fees and examination fees for registered commercial vehicles, fees payable for the new issue or renewal of Passenger Service Licence (PSL) and PSL Certificate for eligible types of vehicles will be waived for 12 months.

Secondly, the Government will introduce a six-month fuel subsidy or a one-off subsidy to assist the transport trades. In terms of land transport, the Government will offer a \$1 discount per litre of liquid petroleum gas (LPG), i.e. approximately a one-third discount, for six months for LPG taxis and PLBs, and reimburse one-third of the actual diesel cost for six months for each diesel PLB. The Government will also reimburse one-third of the actual fuel cost and one-third of the actual electricity cost to the five franchised bus companies and Tramways respectively for six months. In addition, every licensed non-franchised bus and goods vehicle will receive a one-off non-accountable subsidy of \$5,000. TD is drawing up the specific details of the arrangement. We plan to consult the Legislative Council Panel on Transport on the implementation details in early 2020, and will seek the funding approval in accordance with the established mechanism.

Thirdly, the rental for short-term tenancies for government land for fee-paying public car parks under the Lands Department, as well as the rental for fee-paying public car parks under the Government Property Agency and Leisure and Cultural Services Department will be reduced by 50 per cent for

six months, with retrospective effect from October 1, 2019. If the relevant operators would share such concessions with the car park users, this will benefit the transport trades and car owners in general.

The Government will continue to closely monitor the operating environment of the public transport service sector, and will consider introducing further measures to help the whole transport sector if necessary.

(3) As regards parking spaces, given the operational characteristics and needs of the major public transport modes, the arrangements for the provision of parking spaces for public transport service vehicles differ from those for general commercial vehicles and private cars. For franchised buses, at present, their parking spaces are mainly provided at bus depots and bus terminals in various districts. To cater for the operational needs of the relevant public transport services and optimise the use of limited land resources, the Government also permits franchised buses and PLBs to park at designated public transport interchanges and PLB stands at night.

As for taxis, given their mode of operation, they generally operate on the road round the clock and their parking demand is mainly for short duration stay. Hence, all along, TD has not made specific planning for parking provision for taxis. In fact, if taxi owners or drivers need to park for longer duration, they may choose to park at general parking spaces for private cars. The government multi-storey car parks under TD also provide parking spaces for taxis, and monthly parking tickets are sold to taxi owners or drivers at a concessionary rate.

Meanwhile, there are quite a number of short-term tenancy car parks in various districts of Hong Kong, providing parking spaces for different types of vehicles including public service vehicles like PLBs and taxis. Given the land resource situation in Hong Kong and the aforementioned policies, the Government has no plans at the current juncture to provide additional temporary car parks dedicated for public service vehicles. That said, we will closely monitor the parking demand of such vehicles.