

Over \$10 billion in environmental projects outlined in Budget (with photo/video)

The Environment Bureau today (February 27) presented the details of more than \$10 billion in environmental projects and over \$3 billion in relief measures outlined in the 2020-21 Budget, to mitigate climate change, improve air quality, support waste reduction and recycling as well as enhance environmental protection and provide financial relief to the relevant sector.

Environmental projects totalling more than \$10 billion

The Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, said, "The Government proposes an allocation of more than \$10 billion to implement various measures to further strengthen environmental protection. To promote popularisation of electric vehicles (EVs), \$2 billion of this amount will be earmarked for launching a pilot scheme to subsidise the installation of EV charging-enabling infrastructure in car parks of existing private residential buildings."

The subsidy scheme, expected to be launched in the second half of this year, would help tackle technical and financial challenges encountered by owners of car parks in private residential buildings in installing EV charging-enabling infrastructure. The initial assessment is that the scheme will help equip some 60 000 private parking spaces with EV charging-enabling infrastructure within three years.

"On mapping out diversified applications for EVs, we have also set aside \$80 million to launch a pilot scheme for electric public light buses (e-PLBs). We are examining suitable e-PLBs for local use, and will formulate relevant technical guidelines. Furthermore, the Government will update 'A Clean Air Plan for Hong Kong', in which policies on further promoting the use of EVs as well as Hong Kong's first roadmap on the popularisation of EVs will be explored and formulated," Mr Wong added.

Meanwhile, the ex-gratia payment scheme for phasing out pre-Euro IV diesel commercial vehicles (DCVs) will end by the middle of this year, thereby scrapping nearly 80 000 DCVs. Mr Wong said that the Government is preparing to allocate another \$7.1 billion for the ex-gratia payment scheme in the second half of this year, which aims to phase out about 40 000 Euro IV DCVs.

To reduce emissions from ferries, the Government has also earmarked \$350 million to launch a pilot scheme for electric ferries serving in-harbour routes and explore the feasibility of using new energy ferries to replace traditional ones in the long run. It is estimated that one electric ferry will be allocated for each of the four in-harbour route operators, with

trials expected to commence in 2022-23.

On improving the regional environment, the Government, in order to encourage Hong Kong-owned factories to adopt cleaner production technologies to sustain regional environmental benefits from emission reductions and energy saving, has earmarked around \$300 million to extend the Cleaner Production Partnership Programme, scheduled to finish by end of this March, for another five years until March 2025.

On mitigating climate change, the Government earlier invited the Council for Sustainable Development to conduct a public engagement exercise on Hong Kong's long-term decarbonisation strategy. The Council is analysing the views collected, which will be a reference for the Government in developing a long-term decarbonisation strategy for Hong Kong. During the public engagement process, it was observed that the community generally supported increasing public resources to develop decarbonisation technologies and the expedition of low-carbon transformation. The Government therefore proposes to set up a \$200 million Green Tech Fund (GTF) to further promote the research and development (R&D) and application of decarbonisation and green technologies, so as to facilitate the community in advancing decarbonisation and enhancing environmental protection.

Introducing the GTF, Mr Wong said, "Priority would be given to R&D themes including decarbonisation and energy saving, green transport, waste management as well as air and water quality improvement. The GTF may fund large projects of up to \$30 million each for up to five years. We aim to invite the first round of applications by the end of this year."

To enhance the recycling volume, quality and value of local waste paper and to promote the sustainable development of the industry, Mr Wong said that the Government has proposed an allocation of about \$300 million each year to implement waste paper collection and recycling services. These services will help stabilise the recycling volume and the price of local waste paper. This would in turn help safeguard around 5 000 jobs in the recycling industry. The Environmental Protection Department will appoint contractors through open tender to collect waste paper from all local districts for filtering, sorting, baling and exporting with a view to turning waste paper into resources. The scheme is expected to commence in the second half of this year.

More than \$3 billion further added to relief measures

In the face of the current economic difficulties and the impact of the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic, Mr Wong said that the Government has also proposed to extend a number of measures to support the trade. Those measures concerning the Environment Bureau involve a total of more than \$3 billion.

As for relief measures for electricity charges, the Government announced last December some \$2.3 billion in provisions to provide an electricity subsidy to each eligible non-residential electricity account holder so as to cover 75 per cent of their monthly billed electricity charges for four

months, subject to a monthly cap of \$5,000 per account. The Financial Secretary announced in his Budget Speech that the subsidy would be increased by about \$2.9 billion, with the validity period extended from four months to eight months. A total of some 430 000 non-residential electricity account holders will benefit.

On relief measures regarding sewage charges, the Government announced last December a provision of some \$120 million to waive 75 per cent of sewage charges for non-domestic accounts for four months. The Financial Secretary in his Budget Speech further proposed that an extra \$120 million sewage charge be waived by extending the waiver period from four months to eight months in total. Some 250 000 non-domestic accounts will benefit from this, subject to a monthly cap of \$12,500 per account.

Other measures include an extension of rental reduction arrangements of 50 per cent for eligible tenants of EcoPark, country park refreshment kiosks and Hong Kong Wetland Park for another six months until this September. It involves an additional \$7 million and will benefit more than 20 tenants.

The Advisory Committee on the Recycling Fund has decided to extend the six-month "One-off Rental Support Scheme", which was launched last year, for another six months to one year in total. It involves an additional funding of some \$100 million, and will benefit about 500 recycling street-corner stores and 400 recycling sites, with each receiving a monthly rental subsidy capped at \$25,000. In addition, the recycling fund will allocate an extra sum of \$100 million to support the recycling industry to fight against the epidemic. Details will be announced by the Advisory Committee at a later date.

