

TAC briefed on initiatives for enhancing public transport services and implementation arrangements for Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme

The following is issued on behalf of the Transport Advisory Committee:

The Transport Advisory Committee (TAC) was briefed today (December 18) on the initiatives for enhancing public transport services and the implementation arrangements for the Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme.

To enhance public transport services, the Policy Address of this year proposed a number of new initiatives, which include waiving the toll of Government tunnels and roads charged on franchised buses to relieve the fare increase pressure; subsidising franchised bus operators for retrofitting three safety devices on appropriate existing buses with a view to further enhancing the operating safety of franchised buses; funding and developing a data collection system and a mobile application, as well as installing global positioning devices on green minibuses (GMBs), so as to enable passengers to get access to the real-time arrival information of GMB routes and release relevant data for public use; relaxing the vehicle length restriction of light buses to facilitate the introduction of light buses with more environmental benefits and barrier-free facilities by the trade; and re-commissioning the Central-Hung Hom ferry route and launching a pilot water taxi service.

The TAC Chairman, Professor Stephen Cheung, said, "Members welcomed the new initiatives, which could enhance the safety and service quality of public transport services, and provide more comprehensive ancillary facilities that keep up with the time so that the public can travel conveniently."

Members also noted that the Government would take forward the new initiatives mentioned above as early as possible and meanwhile continue to enhance public transport services through implementing other on-going initiatives.

Regarding the implementation arrangements of the Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme, members noted that the Scheme would be implemented on January 1, 2019. Under the Scheme, commuters with public transport expenses exceeding \$400 are eligible for the public transport fare subsidy. The Government will provide subsidy amounting to 25 per cent of the actual public transport expenses in excess of \$400, subject to a maximum of \$300 per month. Monthly subsidy is calculated on the basis of the actual monthly transport expenses recorded on each Octopus. The Government estimates that the annual subsidy amount will be around \$2.3 billion and over 2.2 million commuters will benefit from the Scheme.

Members understood that the fares of public transport services covered by the Scheme paid by Octopus, and the expenses on the designated transport tickets (e.g. concessionary tickets such as monthly passes, day passes and holiday tickets) of these public transport services purchased by any payment means would be taken into account in the calculation of the monthly public transport expenses. Commuters may collect the subsidy for the first month (i.e. January 2019) starting from February 16, 2019. Thereafter, on and after the 16th of each month, commuters can collect the subsidy of the previous month. The subsidy is valid for collection within three months.

Professor Cheung said, "Members welcome the implementation of the Scheme by the Government to relieve the fare burden of the commuters who travel on local public transport services for daily commuting and whose public transport expenses are relatively high. Members were pleased to note that the Scheme is simple and easy to understand, and that neither application nor pre-registration of Octopus is required. Collection of subsidy is also simple. Commuters just need to tap their Octopus at the designated subsidy collection channels and the subsidy will be credited to the Octopus automatically."

Members also noted that the Government would closely monitor the operation of the Scheme upon implementation and would commence the first review of the Scheme around a year after the Scheme's implementation (i.e. early 2020) to examine its effectiveness, impacts on the travelling patterns of commuters and the overall strategic arrangement of public transport services, as well as its financial implications having regard to actual data.