

TD's response to media enquiries on taxi trade's views about Government's proposal to strengthen penalty level for taxi driver-related offences

In response to media enquiries on the taxi trade's views about the Government's proposal to strengthen the penalty level for malpractices by taxi drivers, a spokesman for the Transport Department (TD) today (May 23) gave the following reply:

To enhance the service quality of the approximately 18 000 existing taxis, the Government in the Report of Public Transport Strategy Study released in June 2017 proposed various measures to enhance the operating environment by, inter alia, relaxing permanently the no-stopping restrictions for taxis from peak hours and "7am to 7 or 8pm" on roads with a speed limit of less than 70 kilometres per hour, extending the validity period of driver identity plates to 10 years, and amending the requirement for applicants for a driving licence for taxis to hold a valid driving licence for private cars or light goods vehicles for at least three years to at least one year.

In response to the request from the community and the taxi trade's views, the Government has reviewed the current penalty for various taxi driver malpractices with a view to enhancing the quality of taxi service. The approach of the preliminary proposals is as follows:

(a) For offences of a more serious nature (including overcharging, refusal to hire, not using the most direct practicable route, soliciting, and defacing, damaging or altering of taximeters), a two-tier penalty system is recommended. The maximum fine and imprisonment level for offenders in the case of first conviction would be maintained at the present level, while repeat offenders would be subject to a higher maximum fine and imprisonment to deter repeat offenders;

(b) To enhance the overall deterrent effect (especially on taxi drivers who have repeatedly committed various malpractices), the Government recommends introducing a Taxi Driver-Offence Point System by making reference to the existing Driving-offence Points System. If a taxi driver is convicted of taxi-related offences by the Court, offence points would be recorded alongside the penalties imposed in accordance with the existing legislation. Upon accumulation of a certain number of points, the driver's taxi driving licence would be disqualified for a certain period of time.

In formulating the detailed proposals, the Government will carefully review the regulations of the current penalty of various taxi driver malpractices, and strike a balance to ensure that there will be sufficient deterrent effect while keeping the penalty level at a reasonable level proportionate to the seriousness of the related offence.

The Government is now consulting the Taxi Trade Conference under the Transport Department on the aforementioned preliminary proposals, and notes that some trade representatives have different opinions. The Government will continue to maintain communication with the taxi trade and other stakeholders, and adopt an open attitude in listening to their views, in order to formulate appropriate and feasible measures to improve taxi service quality.