

LCQ13: Electric wheelchairs

Following is a question by the Hon Rock Chen and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Ms Mable Chan, in the Legislative Council today (February 19):

Question:

It is learnt that in recent years, more and more people with disabilities and elderly people with impaired mobility have chosen to use electric wheelchairs as a substitute for traditional manual wheelchairs. However, it has been reported that an electric wheelchair user collided with a motorcycle in July last year, arousing public concern about the safety of electric wheelchairs. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of cases in which the Police (i) issued advice to electric wheelchair users and (ii) instituted prosecutions against electric wheelchair users for contravening traffic regulations in each of the past three years, as well as the respective reasons for issuing such advice and instituting such prosecutions;
- (2) as the Consumer Council has earlier on recommended that the Government tighten regulation of the use of electric wheelchairs, including limiting their maximum travelling speed, requiring users to take out insurance, etc, whether the Government will, in accordance with the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374), formulate regulations on the use of electric wheelchairs for outdoor travel (e.g. restrictions on the modification of electric wheelchairs, loading requirements, insurance requirements, fire safety standards, prohibition on the carriage of passengers, and maximum speed limits), so as to protect the safety of electric wheelchair users and other road users; if so, of the specific details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (3) as there are views that pavements in many districts in Hong Kong are so narrow that electric wheelchair users may easily come into conflict with pedestrians due to competition for road space, whether relevant government departments will provide additional barrier-free facilities for electric wheelchair users when planning and constructing roads for new towns and new development areas in the future; if so, of the specific details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Health Bureau, the Hong Kong Police Force (Police) and the Transport Department (TD) in respect of electric wheelchair, my reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Rock Chen is as follows:

(1) The Police does not maintain statistics on enforcement against electric wheelchair users.

(2) Proper use of electric wheelchairs can help ensure the safety of both the wheelchair users and others. The allied health professionals of Hospital Authority (HA) hospitals, when prescribing electric wheelchairs, will teach patients how to use the wheelchairs safely and correctly according to the needs of individual patients. In addition, the Community Rehabilitation Service Support Centre under the HA provides systematic group training for electric wheelchair users so that they could familiarise the skills and attitudes of using the wheelchairs safely in order to cope with different situations including using public transport and public facilities and handling outdoor obstacles.

Under section 4(8) of the Summary Offences Ordinance (Cap. 228), it is an offence if any person, in any public place, drives recklessly or negligently or at a speed or in a manner which is dangerous to the public. As regards the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374), as it seeks to regulate road traffic and the use of vehicles, it is not suitable for further regulation of electric wheelchairs. Nevertheless, the TD will continue to help promote the safe use of electric wheelchairs to enhance the safety of road users (including pedestrians).

(3) It is the Government's established policy objective to provide barrier-free environment for people in need (including manual or electric wheelchair users) with a view to enabling them to access premises and make use of the facilities and services therein on an equal basis with others, thereby facilitating them to live independently and integrate into the community.

In planning the pedestrian network in new towns and new development areas, the Government will fully consider the needs of pedestrians (including wheelchair users and other people in need), provide footpaths of sufficient width and set up appropriate pedestrian crossing facilities to enhance the travel experience of wheelchair users and other pedestrians.

The Government will keep in contact with organisations of persons with disabilities, and pay heed to their views on the circumstances which they encounter in the daily use of barrier-free access and facilities.