

LCQ5: Facilitating pet owners to go out for consumption with pets

Following is a question by the Hon Rock Chen and a reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (June 12):

Question:

The Chief Executive has reportedly pointed out the need to brainstorm how to attract local spending by members of the public. However, there are views pointing out that statutory and policy restrictions have rendered it difficult for pet owners to go out for consumption with pets. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has plans to study with public transport service operators the relaxation of regulation on boarding public transport with animals during holidays and non-peak hours, e.g. allowing passengers to board public transport at special fares with small pets put in bags or cases or large pets that are muzzled, in diapers and kept on a leash, or designating some routes or train compartments exclusively for use by people with pets, as well as imposing fines or other penalties on those in violation of the regulation; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) given that under the Food Business Regulation, no person shall bring any dog onto food premises, whether the authorities will amend the legislation to allow restaurant operators to decide on their own whether indoor pet areas should be set up, and formulate the relevant hygiene and management standards, such as requiring that pets should be kept on a leash and stay away from food preparation areas; and

(3) given that the Government is promoting a mega event economy, whether the authorities have plans to incorporate pet-related elements and pet-friendly measures into the festive events, celebrations, shows, carnivals, etc. under planning to enable pet owners to participate with pets, so as to promote local spending; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

As pet keeping has become increasingly common in Hong Kong, there has been more attention in society to carrying pets when using public transport services and participating in public activities. Regarding whether members of the public can go out for consumption with pets or participate in events, the Government or relevant organisations generally need to take into account various factors, including the nature of individual facilities, whether ancillary facilities are in place, the degree of social acceptance, etc.

For instance, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has actively responded to requests for opening up individual parks to members of the public for use with their pets in recent years, and has been liaising with District Councils from time to time, to identify suitable locations as pet gardens. Regarding cultural venues, members of the public are generally not allowed to bring dogs into the venues of civic centres, museums and libraries under the LCSD, except for the visually impaired bringing guide dogs along into the venue facilities. The LCSD will balance the views of different stakeholders and users of venues and facilities, and review relevant arrangements from time to time.

Having consulted the Transport and Logistics Bureau and the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau, my reply to the question of the Hon Rock Chen is as follows:

(1) Currently, operators of some of the public transport services, including ferries, public light buses, non-franchised buses and taxis, may decide at their discretion whether to allow passengers to board with pets. Take ferries as an example, individual operators have set relevant terms and conditions for passengers to board with pets. These terms and conditions are generally set in consideration of the actual operating conditions of the operators and to minimise disruption to other passengers, e.g. passengers must leash their pets or put them in a cage/bag, passengers with pets must stay in designated cabin zone, etc. At present, there are 19 outlying island and in-harbour ferry routes that allow passengers to board with pets, accounting for over 80 per cent of all regular ferry routes. As for public light buses and non-franchised buses, the operators may decide whether to allow passengers to board with pets having regard to the actual situation and individual hire service contract.

As regards the Mass Transit Railway (MTR) and franchised buses, the carriage of animals by passengers into railway premises and on board is currently regulated by the relevant laws. With high daily patronage and limited compartment spaces, passengers are currently prohibited from boarding MTR trains and franchised buses with pets, except for guide dogs accompanying the visually impaired. When considering whether to relax the restriction on passengers travelling with pets for these public transport services, the Government shall consider and balance different factors, including the space and carrying capacity of the compartments, reaction of the pets in the travelling environment, as well as the potential impact on other passengers.

The Government will continue to keep in view relevant suggestions for considering whether a change to the existing arrangement is necessary.

(2) Regarding bringing dogs into food premises, the Food Business Regulation (Cap. 132X) currently prohibits dogs (except guide dogs) from entering food premises. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) has from time to time received complaints about certain food premises allowing customers who bring pet dogs inside.

In recent years, there are also views in society hoping to bring along pet dogs to dine in food premises. The Government understands that there may be changes in the societal culture over time but would also have to strike a balance on the need to safeguard public health and hygiene, etc. In addition, as food premises in Hong Kong are generally cramped, aside from the abovementioned angles, the reaction of pet dogs in a crowded and cramped environment (possibly with different types of dogs/animals), as well as the potential impact and threat on other diners would also need to be taken into account. Hence, the Environment and Ecology Bureau, together with the FEHD, will first conduct research on practices and experiences in other places, and will take note of the views of the public regarding bringing dogs into food premises, so as to consider the need to review current practice and legislation.

(3) Hong Kong is the Events Capital of Asia. Mega events in Hong Kong mean a lot to the city in various aspects, including generating passenger flow and more business opportunities, creating a positive atmosphere in the community, bringing joy to the public and bolstering Hong Kong's international image. In addition, different types of mega events can drive the multi-faceted development of various industries in Hong Kong. Both the direct and indirect spending of the local public and tourists during their participation in the mega events will also bring economic gains to Hong Kong.

Different events have their own nature and characteristics, and cater for different target audiences. When organising mega events, the organisers will consider different factors, including the condition and restrictions of the venue, the nature of the activity, target participants, public safety and hygiene, etc, to decide whether to allow the entry of pets. If there are mega events suitable for incorporating pet elements, it is believed that the organisers will actively consider to allow the entry of pets.

Thank you, President.