

LCQ13: Countermeasures against traffic chaos

Following is a question by the Hon Vincent Cheng and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (January 8):

Question:

Some members of the public have relayed that since the eruption of the disturbances arising from the opposition to the proposed legislative amendments in June last year, demonstrators have extensively vandalised railway and road facilities (including traffic lights, roadside railings and slab-paved pavements), causing traffic chaos and endangering the safety of drivers and pedestrians. In addition, while railway and bus services have often been immediately suspended due to demonstrations, members of the public have difficulty in gaining access to the latest traffic conditions and arrangements, causing great inconvenience to their travelling. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) in respect of the road facilities (including traffic lights, railings and pavement surfaces) vandalised in June last year or later, of (i) their quantity (and among them, the quantity of those facilities that were vandalised for more than once), (ii) progress of the repair works and (iii) the costs incurred by the repair works (with a tabulated breakdown by type of facilities and District Council district);

(2) of the monthly numbers of traffic accidents in the past two years and the resultant casualties; the number of traffic accidents since June last year that occurred at signal-controlled junctions/pedestrian crossings where the damaged traffic lights had yet to be repaired at the time of the accidents, as well as the casualties caused by such accidents (with a tabulated breakdown by District Council district);

(3) whether it reviewed last year the mechanism and channels for disseminating the latest traffic news to members of the public; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) of the details of the temporary traffic safety measures (including the installation of temporary traffic lights and manual direction of traffic) taken by the authorities in the past six months at the locations where the traffic safety facilities had been damaged?

Reply:

President,

Since early June 2019, many protests, processions and public meetings across Hong Kong have ended up in violence. In different districts, violent protestors extensively vandalised road safety facilities (e.g. traffic

lights, railings and road signs), and maliciously blocked roads to paralyse the traffic. Such acts had not only caused serious impact on public transport services and created difficulties for the travelling public, but also posed a potential risk to road users.

Upon consultation with the Transport Department (TD), Highways Department (HyD) and Hong Kong Police Force (Police), my reply to the various parts of the Hon Vincent Cheng's question is as follows:

(1) From June to December 2019, a cumulative total of 740 sets of traffic lights across Hong Kong were vandalised to different extents. The vandalism mostly involved the cutting of traffic light cables or blackening of their surfaces. In some cases, the traffic lights had their components or traffic signal controllers damaged or even burnt. Among these 740 sets of traffic lights, 365 were vandalised more than once, with individual traffic light having been vandalised up to 17 times. The cumulative total number of traffic light damages across the territory amounted to about 1 590. Since many traffic lights were vandalised again after repairs, TD and relevant departments had to carry out repair works repeatedly. With the concerted efforts of relevant government departments, all the traffic lights vandalised during the above-mentioned period were repaired by January 2, 2020. The repair works incurred an additional expenditure of about \$40 million.

Apart from traffic lights, from June to December 2019, some 52 800 metres of railings and some 21 800 square metres of paving blocks of footpaths were removed.

Regarding the repairs for railings, having discussed the matter with other relevant departments, HyD has temporarily put up plastic chains or plastic tapes for the purpose of alerting road users at locations where the railings have been removed. The relevant road facilities will be reinforced or enhanced taking into consideration such factors as road safety.

As for paving blocks of footpaths, HyD has repaired most of the damaged road facilities concerned. To ensure the safety of road users and enable the traffic to return to normal as soon as possible, apart from temporary repair works such as using concrete or bituminous to fill up locations where paving blocks have been removed, HyD will carry out works to reinforce paving blocks or replace paving materials on public roads having regard to the actual circumstances.

As the repair works are still in progress, the cost of repair or replacement is being ascertained and is roughly estimated to be about \$25 million.

The distribution of damaged road facilities in various districts across the territory is at Annex 1.

(2) The monthly numbers of traffic accidents and the resultant casualties over the past two years (i.e. from January 2018 to November 2019), and the numbers of traffic accidents involving environment contributory factor of "defective traffic signal" and the resultant casualties from June to November

in 2019 are at Annex 2 and Annex 3 respectively.

(3) TD has all along been disseminating traffic information to road users through different channels in a timely, effective and extensive manner, so that they could plan their trips and select transport modes having regard to the actual traffic conditions.

Currently, apart from issuing electronic press releases to the media, TD disseminates the latest information of traffic and transport incidents to the public through its website (www.td.gov.hk), "HKeMobility" mobile application and variable message signs on highways. In addition, designated staff are deployed to conduct soundbites through radio stations as necessary after occurrence of incidents so as to convey messages relating to the incidents and call for public attention to the unexpected road situation of individual districts and the latest arrangements on public transport services.

TD reviews from time to time the content and arrangements of information dissemination to the public. In recent months, "HKeMobility" has been enhanced in terms of information content and dissemination arrangements to provide more specific traffic and transport information (including releasing information on the lanes, directions and areas involved in the roads being affected, providing links to websites of franchised bus companies, and adding maps about the railway service status and major road status). In addition, the voice-over function for traffic news on "HKeMobility" has been strengthened to cater for the travel needs of different road users.

(4) In view of the damage to traffic facilities, TD has posted notices on traffic light poles to be repaired so as to remind road users to take extra care and pay attention to safety. Temporary traffic control measures have also been implemented at some junctions (such as Nathan Road/Lai Chi Kok Road, Nathan Road/Public Square Street, Nathan Road/Jordan Road and Shanghai Street/Man Ming Lane, etc). Besides, TD has set up portable traffic lights at critical junctions (including Nathan Road/Argyle Street, Nathan Road/Waterloo Road, Nathan Road/Mong Kok Road and Yuen Wo Road/Shatin Rural Committee Road) to enhance road safety and relieve traffic.

Regarding manual direction of traffic, the Police has on different occasions since June 2019 deployed officers to direct traffic during peak hours at main junctions where traffic lights were damaged so as to ensure road safety. If members of the public are aware of any damaged traffic facilities at particular road sections which may pose a serious danger to road safety, they are welcome to report such to the Police. Police officers will be deployed to deal with the situation on site as soon as possible.

[2019 warmest year on record for Hong](#)

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With 11 months warmer than usual, 2019 was the warmest year for Hong Kong since records began in 1884. The annual mean temperature of 24.5 degrees was 1.2 degrees above the 1981-2010 normal (Note 1) (or 1.5 degrees above the 1961-90 normal). The annual mean maximum temperature of 27.1 degrees and the annual mean minimum temperature of 22.6 degrees were also the highest on record. In particular, the winter from December 2018 to February 2019 and the autumn from September to November 2019 were especially warm, with the mean temperatures reaching 19.1 degrees and 26.1 degrees respectively, both the highest on record. The highest temperature recorded at the Hong Kong Observatory in the year was 35.1 degrees on August 9, the 14th highest temperature recorded since 1884. There were 46 Hot Nights (Note 2) and 33 Very Hot Days (Note 3) in Hong Kong in 2019, the highest and joint fourth highest on record respectively.

On the other hand, the lowest temperature recorded at the Hong Kong Observatory in the year was 11.4 degrees on January 1, the highest annual absolute minimum temperature on record. There was only one Cold Day (Note 4) in the year, which is 16.1 days less than the 1981-2010 normal and the lowest annual number of Cold Days since 1884.

The annual total rainfall was 2,396.2 millimetres, near the 1981-2010 normal of 2,398.5 millimetres (or about 8 per cent above the 1961-90 normal). Three red rainstorm warnings were issued by the Hong Kong Observatory with no black rainstorm warning issued in the year. 2019 was a thundery year in Hong Kong with thunderstorms reported on 59 days, which was 20.4 days above the 1981-2010 normal of 38.6 days and the joint highest since records began in 1947.

A total of 28 tropical cyclones occurred over the western North Pacific and the South China Sea in 2019, less than the long-term (1961-2010) average of about 30. There were 16 tropical cyclones reaching typhoon intensity (Note 5) or above during the year, slightly more than the long-term average of about 15, and seven of them reached super typhoon intensity (maximum 10-minute wind speed of 185 kilometres per hour or above near the centre). In Hong Kong, five tropical cyclones necessitated the issuance of tropical cyclone warning signals, slightly less than the long-term average of about six in a year. The No. 8 Gale or Storm Signal was issued during the passage of Wipha in July, while the No. 3 Strong Wind Signal was issued during the passages of Kajiki in September.

Globally, 2019 was likely to be the second or third warmest year on record according to the World Meteorological Organization's preliminary assessment. Over the Arctic, the daily sea-ice extent minimum in September 2019 was the second lowest in the satellite record and October saw further record low extents. In 2019, various extreme weather events ravaged different parts of the world, including unrelenting heat waves in much of western and northern Europe, the Middle East, India, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and southern South America; a significant cold spell in central North America;

and severe drought in many parts of southeast Asia, the southwest Pacific, eastern Australia and the Greater Horn of Africa. Extreme rainfall triggered severe flooding in western and northern India, parts of southern China, Iran, northern Queensland in Australia, the west coast of New Zealand's South Island, Jayapura in Indonesia, a large part of the central United States and parts of Eastern Canada. High winds, storm surges and torrential rain induced by tropical cyclones brought severe damage and heavy casualties to parts of the United States East Coast, eastern Texas, Nova Scotia in Canada, Japan, India, the Philippines, Mozambique, parts of Zimbabwe and the Bahamas. Severe storms brought significant damage to parts of Spain, southern France, Corsica in France, Venice in Italy, Thessaloniki in Greece, eastern Africa, Pakistan and northern and western India. High temperature and drought also contributed to destructive wildfires in western North America, Alaska, Siberia in Russia, the Amazon basin, Bolivia, Venezuela, Indonesia and many parts of Australia.

In addition, a weak El Niño event was established in early 2019. Sea surface temperatures of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific then cooled and returned to normal in July. The sea surface temperatures of the region exhibited some warming towards the end of the year.

Detailed description of the weather for individual months is available on the Monthly Weather Summary webpage:

www.weather.gov.hk/en/wxinfo/pastwx/mws/mws.htm. A detailed version of the Year's Weather for 2019 with some significant weather events in Hong Kong is available at: www.weather.gov.hk/en/wxinfo/pastwx/ywx.htm.

Note 1: Climatological normals for the reference periods of 1961-90, 1971-2000 and 1981-2010 are available at www.weather.gov.hk/en/cis/normal.htm. Climatological normals of 1981-2010 are referenced in the text unless otherwise stated.

Note 2: "Hot Night" refers to the condition with the daily minimum temperature equal to or higher than 28.0 degrees.

Note 3: "Very Hot Day" refers to the condition with the daily maximum temperature equal to or higher than 33.0 degrees.

Note 4: "Cold Day" refers to the condition with the daily minimum temperature equal to or lower than 12.0 degrees.

Note 5: Information on the classification of Tropical Cyclones is available at: www.weather.gov.hk/en/informtc/class.htm.

LCQ12: Electric mobility devices and

electric wheelchairs

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (January 8):

Question:

At present, electric unicycles, electric scooters, electric hoverboards and electric bicycles (electric mobility devices) are all prohibited from being used on roads, but electric wheelchairs, which are regarded as medical devices, are not subject to that restriction. Earlier on, two persons died as a result of the traffic accidents that happened when they were using electric scooters on cycling tracks. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it knows the number of electric mobility devices imported in each of the past three years, together with a breakdown of such number by type;
- (2) of the respective numbers of cases, in each of the past three years, in which the Police (i) issued advices to and (ii) instituted prosecutions against persons who used electric mobility devices illegally;
- (3) whether, at present, there are any public places in Hong Kong where members of the public may use electric mobility devices legally; if so, of their locations; if not, the reasons why the Government still allows the importation of such devices and their sale in Hong Kong; and
- (4) as some members of the public have relayed that electric wheelchairs travelling at high speed on pavements and pedestrian crossings might pose safety hazards to the wheelchair users concerned, pedestrians and drivers, whether the Government will review the existing regulation of electric wheelchairs, including conducting studies on (i) the introduction of a licensing regime and a mandatory third-party insurance to be taken out by electric wheelchair users, and (ii) the provision of assistance to such users in need in paying for the licence fees and insurance premiums concerned; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Food and Health Bureau, the Department of Health, the Hospital Authority (HA), the Transport Department (TD), the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) and the Hong Kong Police Force (Police), our consolidated reply to the Hon Chan Han-pan's question is as follows.

- (1) According to C&SD, no separate commodity codes are designated to electric unicycles, electric scooters, electric hoverboards and electric bicycles

under the Hong Kong Harmonized System. The respective commodity codes are shared with other vehicles (such as mopeds, electric skateboards, electric golf carts/electric golf bag trolleys), hence the import quantity of these devices is not available.

(2) and (3) According to the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374), "motor vehicle" means any mechanically propelled vehicle. Electric mobility devices are mechanically propelled and thus belong to "motor vehicles". All "motor vehicles" must be licensed for use on roads or private roads. Considering from the perspectives of road safety and accessibility, it is the long-standing policy that the TD does not register or license electric mobility devices under the Ordinance.

The Police made 13 arrest cases in relation to the illegal use of electric mobility devices on roads between July and December 2019.

(4) 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.

To educate wheelchair users on the proper use of electric wheelchairs, the allied health professionals of 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 learn 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 the "Walk in HK" initiative, the TD is conducting the "Consultancy Study on Enhancing Walkability in Hong Kong", which is expected to be completed within this year. It looks into various issues on encouraging walking, the feasibility of the use of electric mobility devices in Hong Kong, and the prevailing regulatory policies on electric wheelchairs. The Government will make reference to the findings of the study and review the regulation on electric wheelchairs.

LCQ14: Guangdong Scheme and Fujian Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Wong Kwok-kin and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (January 8):

Question:

Under the Guangdong Scheme (GD Scheme) and the Fujian Scheme (FJ Scheme) implemented by the Social Welfare Department (SWD), eligible Hong Kong elderly persons who have moved to reside in the Guangdong (GD) and Fujian (FJ) Provinces may receive a monthly Old Age Allowance (OAA) without being required to return to Hong Kong each year. The Old Age Living Allowance (OALA) has been extended to the two schemes from January 1 this year, and applications have been accepted since November 1 last year. SWD has appointed an implementation agent to assist in processing the OALA applications from those elderly persons who are currently receiving OAA under the two schemes but are unable to return to Hong Kong to complete the application procedure. Some of such elderly persons have indicated that as they have not yet received the review forms issued by the implementation agent, they are worried that they may not be able to start receiving OALA as scheduled. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the numbers of elderly persons, as estimated by the Government, who were eligible to apply for (i) Normal OALA and (ii) Higher OALA respectively under the two schemes at the time when it announced the extension of OALA to GD Scheme and FJ Scheme in October 2018;
- (2) of the number of eligible elderly persons who have applied for OALA under the two schemes since November last year, and the percentage of such number in the total number of Hong Kong elderly persons who have moved to reside in GD and FJ Provinces;
- (3) whether it knows (i) the respective numbers of review forms issued and collected by the implementation agent, as well as (ii) the number of cases in which the review forms have been lost in the mailing process that the implementation agent is aware of, since November last year;
- (4) of the to-date numbers of elderly persons who have, through the implementation agent, (i) applied for OALA and (ii) been granted OALA respectively; and
- (5) of the support currently provided by the implementation agent for those elderly persons who (i) have not received the review forms and (ii) have encountered problems in completing the review forms, and whether the agent has taken the initiative to contact those elderly persons who have not returned their review forms to follow up such cases; in respect of those elderly persons who, due to failure to receive the review forms in time or documentation errors/omissions, have been unable to start receiving OALA from January 1 this year, whether SWD will undertake, when approving their OALA applications in future, to exercise discretion to set the commencement date for receiving OALA retrospectively at January 1 this year, so as to ease the mind of the elderly persons?

Reply:

President,

Starting from January 1, 2020, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) implements the Old Age Living Allowance (OALA) under the Guangdong (GD) Scheme and Fujian (FJ) Scheme, in addition to the Old Age Allowance (OAA). Normal OALA (currently at \$2,675 per month) or Higher OALA (currently at \$3,585 per month) will be provided to eligible Hong Kong elderly persons who have chosen to reside in GD or FJ, without requiring them to return to Hong Kong each year. SWD has appointed an implementation agent to assist with the operations of the GD Scheme and FJ Scheme, which include assisting new applicants who are unable to travel to Hong Kong for the application procedures owing to their health conditions, conducting interviews and case reviews, handling enquiries, etc.

In the past few months, SWD has been implementing various arrangements to facilitate eligible elderly persons to make timely applications, namely "Application through case review", "Application by postal submission" and "New application". "Application through case review" is for persons aged 65 to 69 who were receiving the then means-tested OAA under the GD Scheme and FJ Scheme, as well as some of the persons aged 70 or above who were receiving the non-means-tested OAA under the Schemes. Under this arrangement, the implementation agent verified whether these persons are eligible for OALA through the case reviews under the established mechanism. "Application by postal submission" is for those remaining persons aged 70 or above who were receiving the non-means-tested OAA under the GD Scheme and FJ Scheme (i.e. recipients who were not included in the "Application through case review" arrangement). In October 2019, SWD issued notification letters enclosing the application form to these elderly persons to invite them to apply for OALA. "New application" is for other elderly persons (i.e. elderly persons who were not already receiving OAA under the GD Scheme and FJ Scheme). These elderly persons may obtain the application form through different channels (e.g. the thematic websites of the two Schemes, Social Security Field Units (SSFUs), service centers of the implementation agent located in the two Provinces, etc.) and make applications starting from November 2019.

My reply to Hon Wong Kwok-kin's question is as follows:

(1) Whether eligible elderly persons would apply for OALA under the GD Scheme and FJ Scheme depends on their individual considerations and circumstances. It is difficult for the Government to provide an accurate assessment.

(2) As at December 31, 2019, SWD has received about 10 600 applications for OALA under the GD Scheme and FJ Scheme through the various application arrangements mentioned above. SWD will closely monitor the situation, including the number of applications for OALA and OAA under the two Schemes as well as the number of applications for the above allowances in Hong Kong.

According to the "Statistics on Hong Kong residents usually staying in Guangdong" published by the Census and Statistics Department in October 2019, it was estimated that there were about 84 400 Hong Kong elderly persons aged 65 or above usually residing in GD in end-2018. The Government does not maintain recent figures of Hong Kong elderly persons aged 65 or above residing in FJ.

(3) and (4) As mentioned above, SWD issued notification letters enclosing the application form to relevant elderly persons under the "Application by postal submission" arrangement. The Department issued about 9 900 notification letters. SWD does not maintain the number of notification letters that were lost during the mailing process.

As at December 31, 2019, among the about 10 600 applications mentioned in Part (2) above, about 4 500 applications were made under the "Application by postal submission" arrangement, of which 2 100 applications have been approved.

(5) Whether eligible elderly persons would apply for OALA is a matter of individual preference, and would also depend on economic and other circumstances. SWD would not take the initiative to follow up with cases in which the application forms were not returned under the "Application by postal submission" arrangement. Elderly persons who could not receive the notification letter or need help in completing the application form may contact the SSFUs or the implementation agent. The relevant staff would provide appropriate assistance.

Upon receiving the applications, SWD will suitably follow-up with those involving omissions in declarations or incomplete information. In case of special circumstances resulting in the late receipt of applications from elderly persons, SWD may consider exercising discretion and process the applications with the date on which they should have been received having regard to individual circumstances and reasonable cause.

LCQ7: Redevelopment of factory estates under Hong Kong Housing Authority

Following is a question by the Hon Ma Fung-kuok and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (January 8):

Question:

Last month, the Secretary for Transport and Housing indicated that in response to an initiative put forward by the Chief Executive in the 2019 Policy Address, the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) was exploring the feasibility of redeveloping HA's individual factory estates for public housing use, taking into account individual site conditions and arrangements, as appropriate. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of (i) the average occupancy rate, (ii) a breakdown of the number of

tenants by trade group, and (iii) the number of tenants that engaged in cultural, arts or sports related trades, in respect of the various factory units under HA in each of the past three years;

(2) whether the aforesaid exploratory work has included (i) consulting the existing tenants of the factory estates, (ii) assessing the impacts of related plans on the tenants and the trades concerned, and (iii) formulating measures to mitigate such impacts; if so, of the details (including the approaches for the consultation and assessment work); of the expected dates of completion of the exploratory work and announcement of the outcome; and

(3) whether the Government will consider including in the aforesaid exploratory work a study on the feasibility of the following arrangement: upon drawing reference from the practice in earlier years of converting the whole block of the Shek Kip Mei Factory Estate into an arts centre, converting individual factory estates for cultural, arts or recreational and sports related uses, or setting aside, in the projects for redeveloping the factory estates into public housing, certain floors for such uses?

Reply:

President,

Our consolidated reply to the Hon Ma Fung-kwok's question is as follows:

In response to the suggestion in the Chief Executive's 2019 Policy Address, the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) is exploring the feasibility of redeveloping its individual factory estates under suitable conditions and arrangements for public housing use, with a view to increasing public housing, particularly the supply of public rental housing.

At present, HA has six factory estates (Note) which provide small-sized units to manufacturers of light industries for industrial purposes. The occupancy rate has been maintaining at a high level. During the three-year period from early-December 2016 to end-November 2019, the average yearly occupancy rates of these factory estates were over 98 per cent. There are about 3 320 tenants at present.

The existing trades operated by tenants of HA's factory estates can be classified into 12 general categories, which are mainly light industries related to manufacturing, repair and production of equipment and products, etc. Non-industrial uses such as cultural, arts or sports activities are not included. The number of tenants in these 12 categories of trades as at end-November 2019 is listed at Annex.

In HA's previous clearance exercises of its factory estates, an advance notice of 18 months would normally be given to affected tenants to facilitate their early planning for vacating the premises. Rent increase would also be normally frozen until clearance, and an ex-gratia allowance would be paid to the concerned tenants to assist them to relocate or terminate their businesses.

In order to minimise the number of affected tenants and avoid loss to tenants of newly-let units arising from start-up investments, HA has already frozen the letting of vacant factory units temporarily. If HA finally decides to clear its existing factory estates, it will make reference to the previous practices mentioned above and the then circumstances in making appropriate arrangements. HA will maintain communication with existing tenants and listen to their opinions and concerns during the process.

As all six factory estates are situated in industrial or industrial-office areas, technical assessments are required to ascertain the feasibility of residential use, including public housing development, at these sites.

Rezoning will also be required to change the use of the sites for residential purpose in accordance with the Town Planning Ordinance. HA has already commenced the relevant assessments. In view of the tight supply in housing land, HA's ongoing study only focuses on the feasibility of redeveloping the factory estates for public housing use. To make the best use of scarce land resources and optimise site potential, HA will follow the established mechanism for including suitable community facilities in new public housing developments with reference to the requirements of the "Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines" and in consultation with relevant departments/organisations as well as other stakeholders including the District Councils.

Note: Including Chun Shing and Kwai On Factory Estates in Kwai Chung, Hoi Tai Factory Estate in Tuen Mun, Sui Fai Factory Estate in Fo Tan, Wang Cheong Factory Estate in Sham Shui Po and Yip On Factory Estate in Kowloon Bay.