

## LCQ14: Curbing youth gambling participation

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Starry Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs, Miss Alice Mak, in the Legislative Council today (June 4):

Question:

In April this year, the Government published a consultation paper on the regulatory regime on basketball betting. There are views pointing out that while the regime aims to combat illegal gambling activities, the community is generally concerned about possible intensification of the gambling craze upon regulation of basketball betting, particularly the negative impact on youths. In addition, it has been reported that the average age of participants in basketball betting is younger than the corresponding figures in horse racing and football betting, and statistical data from gambling counselling organizations also indicate a deteriorating trend in the gambling problem among young people. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as the aforesaid consultation paper has pointed out that the regulation of football betting since 2003 has generally been effective in channelising illegal betting demand to the legal channel, whether the Government has compiled statistics on the changes in betting turnovers of legal and illegal gambling, as well as the number of help-seeking cases from pathological gamblers and the age distribution trend of those help-seekers, since the regulation of football betting; whether it has assessed the effectiveness of the existing betting regulatory regime in reducing youth gambling participation;

(2) of the following information on the assistance provided by the Ping Wo Fund to help youths quit gambling in the past five years: the number of youths assisted, the expenditure on the relevant publicity and education activities and the number of people covered, and the percentage of help-seeking cases from youths involving basketball betting;

(3) whether it will, upon implementation of the regulatory regime on basketball betting, require basketball betting operators to submit data on young bettors on a regular basis; whether it has assessed the adequacy of the existing measures to curb underage betting, including whether it will further restrict advertising targeted at youths;

(4) as there are views in the community that the authorities should consider setting up a dedicated committee to monitor the impact of basketball betting on youths, and strengthening the use of the Ping Wo Fund to take forward anti-gambling education (especially publicity efforts targeting young groups), whether the authorities will study the relevant proposals; and

(5) whether it has studied if implementation of the regulatory regime on basketball betting will result in a lower age range of gamblers; whether it will make use of technology to enhance the monitoring of gambling activities (such as using artificial intelligence to identify abnormal betting patterns), so as to prevent youth gambling addiction?

Reply:

President,

As a matter of policy, the Government does not encourage gambling. To address the possible problems brought by gambling, the Government adopts a multi-pronged strategy including law enforcement against illegal gambling activities, public education on the harms of gambling addiction, provision of counselling and support services to people in need and regulation over gambling activities through legislation.

The Government's consolidated reply to Dr the Hon Starry Lee's question is as follows:

#### Combatting illegal gambling activities

On law enforcement against illegal gambling activities, the existing Gambling Ordinance explicitly stipulates that all unauthorised gambling activities, apart from those situations stated in the ordinance, constitute an offence. The Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) has put in place strategies to combat illegal gambling activities, especially those involving triad-related or organised crimes, in four aspects, namely prevention, education, intelligence gathering and law enforcement. The HKPF will continue to closely monitor the illegal gambling trend, take appropriate intelligence-led law enforcement actions and strengthen the promotion against these illegal gambling activities. It is worth noting that according to the Gambling Ordinance, participating in illegal gambling (such as betting with an illegal bookmaker) is also an offence. Upon conviction, an offender is liable to a maximum penalty of a \$50,000 fine and imprisonment for nine months.

#### Public education and provision of counselling and support services

The Government attaches great importance to preventing gambling-related problems, particularly among youth. The Government established the Ping Wo Fund (PWF) in 2003 to finance both preventive and remedial measures to address the gambling-related problems. The Ping Wo Fund Advisory Committee (PWFAC) was also established to provide advice to the Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs on the use and application of the PWF.

The PWF provides appropriate counselling, treatment and other support services to individuals affected by gambling as well as their family members. The PWF will also launch targeted public education and publicity campaigns to raise public awareness (particularly among young people) on the harms of gambling addiction, thereby mitigating its associated negative consequences.

The PWF has consistently prioritised public education and awareness campaigns to raise public awareness on the harms of gambling addiction, and to increase public knowledge of the services available, enabling those in need to seek help at an early stage. These public education measures include providing financial support for non-governmental organisations and schools to organise public education programmes aimed at preventing and alleviating gambling-related problems, a publicity truck programme and other promotional efforts on traditional media and online platforms.

The PWF's funding support on public education and other publicity campaigns aimed at preventing and alleviating gambling-related problems has more than doubled over the past five years. Detailed figures are set out in the Annex.

In the past five years, service-seekers aged 18 or below constituted 1-2 per cent of the total number of persons receiving counselling or treatment services from the four counselling and treatment centres funded by the PWF. These data indicate that there has been no substantial change in the prevalence of gambling among young people. Relevant data (including variation in other age groups) are set out in the Annex. Separately, according to the information from The Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC), the proportion of bettors in the 18-21 age group has consistently remained below 2 per cent in the past five years.

We do not maintain a separate breakdown on individuals receiving counselling and treatment services due to illegal basketball betting.

We will review the work of the PWF from time to time, with particular focus on young people, to enhance measures for preventing and alleviating gambling-related problems. The HKJC has also committed to donate to the PWF over a four-year period starting from 2023/24, with contributions set at \$45 million per annum for the first two years and \$50 million per annum for the subsequent two years.

## Regulations

The Government currently regulates the HKJC's betting activities through the Betting and Lotteries Commission (BLC). Restricting betting activities to a limited number of authorised and regulated outlets is to address the actual and persistent public demand for certain gambling activities which is being satisfied by illegal means and the issue cannot be tackled by law enforcement alone.

According to the HKJC, the amount of football betting turnover ranged from \$92.5 billion to \$160.3 billion in the past five years. In addition, since the legalisation of football betting in 2003, it has diverted back to the legal channel over \$1,581 billion of turnover, which would have continued to flow into the unregulated and illegal gambling market without the regulation.

Under the existing mechanism, the Government requires the HKJC to submit regular work reports for review by both the Government and BLC. The HKJC is also required to meet with the Government and BLC on a regularly basis to report on its progress and plans, ensuring compliance with all licensing conditions and facilitating the review of current betting-related measures. The Home and Youth Affairs Bureau will continue to work closely with BLC to ensure that authorised betting activities are properly regulated.

At present, a number of conditions have been imposed under the licences of horse race betting, football betting and Mark Six Lottery issued to the HKJC to require its adoption of measures to minimise the negative impact of gambling on the public, especially on young people. These conditions include that the HKJC:

1. shall not accept bets from juveniles;
2. shall not accept credit betting;
3. shall display notices reminding the public of the seriousness of excessive gambling and provide information on the services available for those with gambling disorder; and
4. shall not, in conducting any promotional activities, target juveniles, etc.

As stated in the consultation document on the regulatory regime on basketball betting, the above stringent legal and regulatory restraints will continue to be put in place in the proposed basketball betting regime.

We will continue to closely collaborate with the PWFAC and the BLC, observe the prevalence of gambling activities among Hong Kong people, maintain communication with relevant departments, and proactively enhance our efforts to prevent and alleviate problems relating to gambling. As mentioned above, the HKJC has committed to donate to the PWF over a four-year period from 2023/24. If it is decided to implement the proposed regulatory regime for basketball betting, the Government will request the HKJC to further increase the donation to the PWF for stepping up public education programmes, as well as enhancing counselling and support services.

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## **LCQ17: Incident of malfunction of air-conditioning system in private hospital**

Following is a question by the Hon Michael Tien and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council

today (June 4):

Question:

It has been reported that in the middle of last year, a malfunction of the air-conditioning system in the operating theatres of the main block of St. Teresa's Hospital (the Hospital) in Kowloon lasted approximately 45 minutes, affecting a total of 12 operations. Some doctors and patients subsequently complained with the Department of Health (DH), which concluded its investigation in March of this year. DH stated that the Hospital had not breached the requirements. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as it has been reported that a doctor indicated that at the time of the incident, he felt that airflow in the operating theatre had stopped, that condensation water had caused the operating lamp to drip, and that the endoscope lens and connecting components were suspected to be dampened. The Hospital once denied that the situation aforesaid had occurred in its operating theatres, but after the media reported the aforesaid incident, the Hospital changed its version of the incident several times. During the investigation conducted at the Hospital by DH, whether DH inspected the operating theatres in question (e.g. by conducting environmental simulations or taking samples in the operating theatres) and found out why the Hospital had changed its statement several times; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as DH has indicated that air-conditioning interruption is not a reportable event of private hospitals and there was no breach of the requirements of the Private Healthcare Facilities Ordinance (Cap. 633) (the Ordinance) and the Code of Practice for Private Hospitals (the CoP) was found by the investigation, whether DH will review the Ordinance and the CoP in due course, following the occurrence of the aforesaid incident, to safeguard the level of medical safety in private healthcare facilities and enhance transparency in incident handling; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as it has been reported that the patient concerned has indicated that the Hospital has not yet explained the aforesaid incident to her, whether the authorities have put in place a mechanism to require private hospitals to follow up with patients concerned and find out more about their situation; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Department of Health (DH), the reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Michael Tien is as follows:

(1) and (2) The DH currently regulates private hospitals in accordance with the Private Healthcare Facilities Ordinance (Cap. 633) (Ordinance). The primary objective is to ensure that premises providing medical services can

meet the stipulated facility and safety standards. In accordance with the Ordinance, the Government established the Advisory Committee for Regulatory Standards for Private Healthcare Facilities (Advisory Committee), which comprises representatives from the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine and its constituent colleges, the Hospital Authority, the academia, as well as associations of private hospitals, medical practitioners and dentists. The terms of reference of the Advisory Committee include devising, reviewing and updating the standards of regulation for private healthcare facilities (PHFs), as well as making recommendations on the codes of practice for PHFs issued by the Director of Health (DoH).

The Code of Practice for Private Hospitals (CoP), which is issued by the DoH in accordance with the Ordinance and updated from time to time, sets out the licensing and operating standards for private hospitals, including related requirements for hospital facilities and equipment. The current CoP stipulates that fittings and equipment of hospitals must be maintained in good operational order, and requires hospitals to have contingency plans for emergencies (e.g. fire outbreak, cessation of water and electricity supply). It also stipulates that healthcare engineering systems (i.e. electrical installations, specialised ventilation systems and medical gas supplies) must be properly maintained to meet service needs and ensure patient safety. Reportable events for private hospitals are also set out therein.

Regarding the incident in Member's question, the DH was notified by a doctor on September 2, 2024, about an air-conditioning interruption which happened in the operating theatres on the second floor of St. Teresa's Hospital in the evening of July 31, 2024.

Although air-conditioning interruption is not a reportable event for private hospitals under the current CoP, the DH considered that the incident might involve potential patient safety concerns and therefore promptly initiated an investigation on the same day the notification was received (September 2, 2024). This included sending staff to conduct an inspection at the hospital concerned, checking relevant documents of the hospital, evaluating the effectiveness of its contingency measures, assessing the environmental condition of the operating theatres during the air-conditioning interruption and following up on the remedial actions.

According to the investigation, the incident involved a malfunction of the air-conditioning system used to regulate room temperature which lasted about one hour. During the time, a total of 10 surgeries were being performed in various operating theatres. The hospital explained to the DH that dehumidifiers were immediately deployed in the operating theatres where higher risk surgeries were being performed, including the one where the doctor was performing an operation. Upon the DH's enquiry, hospital staff and the nurses on site stated that the severity of condensation in the operating theatres did not result in water dripping onto the surgical site of patients. The hospital did not change its statement to the DH during the course of investigation. As for media reports suggesting that "the hospital had changed its statement several times", the DH will not offer any comment.

The DH also examined the hospital's records and noted that the

ventilation system used for infection control in the operating theatres (including air filtration equipment, hourly air change rate and a positive pressure environment) was operating normally during the incident, and all surgeries had been completed according to the original schedule. After the incident, the hospital made a prompt follow-up by conducting air sampling of the operating theatres and surveillance on conditions of patients who underwent surgeries during the affected period for infection. No abnormality was detected.

Based on the available relevant evidence gathered on the incident, the DH considered that the hospital had taken appropriate contingency measures in response to the emergencies, and there was insufficient evidence to show that the hospital had contravened the requirements of the Ordinance or the CoP. Nevertheless, the DH will continue to closely monitor the licensed hospital. If there is new and concrete evidence, the DH will take appropriate follow-up actions as necessary. At the same time, the DH will continue to regularly evaluate and update the regulatory standards for PHFs with the experts of the Advisory Committee, and review the CoP in accordance with the established mechanism so as to better protect public interests.

(3) The Ordinance established a two-tier complaints management system for handling public complaints against PHFs. Regarding the first tier, the Ordinance states that the licensee of a PHF must put in place a complaints handling procedure for receiving, managing and responding to public complaints against the PHF in the capacity of a service provider.

Under the Ordinance, the licensee must ensure the complaints handling procedure is made known in an appropriate way to the patients or persons acting on their behalf. Upon receiving a complaint, the licensee must ensure that (a) an investigation of the complaint is conducted and findings are made; (b) if the case requires, an improvement measure is implemented; and (c) the complainant is informed of the findings of the investigation and any improvement measure and, if the case requires, of any follow-up action taken/to be taken.

As for the second tier of the system, the Government established the Committee on Complaints Against Private Healthcare Facilities (Complaints Committee) under the Ordinance in 2020, with the DH serving as the Secretariat. Apart from registered medical practitioners/dentists, its current members also include persons of varied backgrounds such as representatives from other healthcare professions, patients' groups, the legal sector, the engineering sector and the consumer-interest body. Complainants who are not satisfied with the handling or reply of the PHF concerned may lodge a further complaint with the Complaints Committee.

The Complaints Committee has put in place a statutory mechanism to receive and handle complaints against licensed PHFs from the public, and will consider whether the PHFs have complied with the Ordinance and the relevant codes of practice. Pursuant to the Ordinance, the Complaints Committee may make recommendations on the issue of complaint (e.g. whether any regulatory action against the PHF concerned should be taken) to the DoH or improvement measures to the PHF concerned. In addition, the Complaints Committee shall

inform the complainant in writing of its decision and any action taken/to be taken in relation to the PHF according to the recommendations approved by the Complaints Committee.

As for the complaint status of the patient concerned, it is observed that the allegation of the patient received no response despite having made four complaint calls to the DH as suggested by media reports does not actually align with the DH's records. Existing records reveal that the Complaints Committee received a call on September 12, 2024, from a member of the public, who enquired about the procedure for lodging a complaint against a PHF and mentioned having encountered a malfunction of the air-conditioning system of St. Teresa's Hospital in the course of surgery. The Secretariat of the Complaints Committee has already explained to the enquirer the function of the Complaints Committee immediately, as well as the statutory procedures for lodging a complaint to the Complaints Committee. In addition, at the request of the enquirer, the Secretariat sent information on the complaint procedures, the complaint form and the statutory declaration form to the email address provided by the enquirer on the following day (September 13, 2024), with the enquirer confirmed receipt of the materials by email on the same day. After that, the Complaints Committee did not receive any complaint from the enquirer in relation to the incident.

The Complaints Committee will continue to handle every complaint in a professional and impartial manner, endeavouring to bring forth service improvement of PHFs and safeguard patient safety.

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## **LCQ22: Applying innovative technologies in the management of public housing estates**

Following is a question by Professor the Hon Priscilla Leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Housing, Ms Winnie Ho, in the Legislative Council today (June 4):

Question:

It is learnt that the Housing Department is actively promoting smart estate management, including employing drones to inspect lift shafts, external walls of buildings and pipes located beneath higher ceilings, utilising LiDAR-based localisation to capture images and analysing the images with artificial intelligence and thermal imaging technology to identify problems with the buildings, thereby reducing the risks of working at height and enhancing work efficiency. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of public housing estates (PHEs) where drone technology is applied in day-to-day management at present, and its percentage in the total number of PHEs in Hong Kong; whether it has compiled statistics on the specific effectiveness of the authorities in enhancing maintenance efficiency and reducing incident risks (e.g. the time saved or the reduction rate of untoward incidents) since the implementation of smart estate management;

(2) as it is learnt that, prior to using drones for inspections, the management offices of the relevant PHEs will notify households in advance, and the system will automatically blur faces to protect household privacy, of the standard procedures for notifying households (e.g. the number of days of advance notification and the means by which the notification is made) and the operational details of the automatic face blurring technology; how the authorities will handle privacy-related complaints from households arising from drone inspections; and

(3) of the plans in place to further promote the application of drone technology and other innovative technologies in the management of PHEs (including the implementation timetable, the number of estates where such technologies will be applied, as well as an overview of the estimated expenditure and resource allocation)?

Reply:

President,

The Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) is actively promoting smart estate management through innovative technologies to enhance management efficiency and service quality; expedite the handling of maintenance of public facilities; strengthen hygiene and cleanliness; and enhance the sense of well-being and belonging among public rental housing (PRH) residents. In 2024, the HA selected ten public housing estates as pilot projects to proactively introduce suitable innovative technologies for smart estate management, such as the use of Internet of Things sensors, artificial intelligence (AI), mobile devices, and robots. In response to the questions raised by Professor the Hon Priscilla Leung, the reply is as follows:

(1) and (3) In the past, inspections of building facades or lift shafts required work staff to perform on-site work, with the former involving working at height and the latter involving enclosed spaces, which are relatively high-risk types of work. With the advancement of technology, the HA has introduced the use of drones to assist in estate maintenance works in PRH estates since 2023. Compared with the traditional long-distance visual inspections, the use of drones for inspections of building facade not only reduces the risks of working at height for works staff, but also provides clearer, quicker, and safer results. As for the use of drones for lift shaft inspections, compared with the traditional method of scaffolding or setting up work platforms inside the lift shafts for manual survey, use of drones not only reduces the risks of works staff entering and leaving the lift shafts,

but also gains a more precise understanding of the issues, and shortens lift suspension time significantly, thereby minimising the impacts and inconvenience to the residents. Drone inspections also make it feasible to survey in high-level and enclosed lift shafts.

For building facade inspections, the HA's drone inspection contract covers all PRH estates in Hong Kong. To date, the service providers have completed the required facade inspections for about 20 PRH estates, with inspections in others are ongoing.

For lift shaft inspections, the HA has earlier successfully completed a trial use of drone inspections of lift shafts. Utilising the Light Detection And Ranging (LiDAR) positioning technology, the drone can be used by the site staff to conduct clear preliminary inspections and identify the necessary repairs at an early stage, such as concrete spalling and defects in electrical devices, and all can be more accurately displayed. Starting from early 2025, the HA has incorporated drone-based lift shaft inspection requirements in the consultancy contracts for lift modernisation projects. The HA also monitors the effectiveness of these inspections in improving maintenance efficiency and reducing accident risks, as well as collect the relevant data as the basis for further advancement in the future. The cost of drone inspections constitutes only a small portion of the overall estate maintenance and improvement works expenditures. Using drones to collect images and three-dimensional data can create detailed models, together with the AI algorithms, it allows a more precise identification of hard-to-reach defects. This enables works staff to co-ordinate the project and procure necessary materials more effectively, thus enhancing project efficiency. Additionally, using drones for inspections eliminates the need for scaffolding; shortens the inspection time and reduces the inconvenience caused by the works to the residents. At the same time, site staff does not need to enter high-rise enclosed space to check various equipment conditions, which can improve workplace safety management and make the overall process more time-efficient and effective.

To further promote the application of innovative technologies in PRH estate management, the HA has established a dedicated co-ordination team to oversee the trial of various technologies across different management functions and review operational models, including updating workflows and manuals as well as providing appropriate training to staff. The HA will also launch a centralised property management platform within this year to optimise estate management operations through data analysis, so as to enhance management efficiency and improve service quality. The HA will closely monitor relevant technological developments and introduce more innovative technologies as appropriate to optimise estate management works.

(2) Drones used for facade inspections are normally equipped with cameras, infrared detection lenses, and range finders, performing tasks such as capturing images, recording videos, and/or measuring specific targets during flight of designated routes. Through the images collected by the drones, together with AI technology, it helps identify areas of concern for repairs. The estate offices usually issue notices to the residents concerned 14 days

before the filming takes place, advising them to close windows and draw curtains during the filming period, so that the residents can be informed of the arrangement and prepared in advance.

Regarding the arrangement for using drones to inspect building facades, the HA has consulted the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data (PCPD). The PCPD advised that drone operations in Hong Kong involving the collection, holding, processing, or use of personal data must comply with the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap. 486) and the relevant guidelines issued by the PCPD. In this connection, the HA has requested the service providers to formulate and strictly implement measures to protect residents' privacy in accordance with the PCPD's guidelines. Currently, service providers use AI to automatically detect and blur the portrait of a person, and ensure that no records containing identifiable images are retained, thereby safeguarding residents' privacy. Furthermore, these processes must be irreversible, and the system must not retain unprocessed original images.

The HA will endeavour to protect residents' privacy. If any related complaints are received, the Housing Department will handle them in accordance with established procedures.

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## **Online auction of vehicle registration marks to be held from June 19 to 23**

The Transport Department (TD) today (June 4) said that the next online auction of vehicle registration marks (VRMs) will be held from noon on June 19 (Thursday) to noon on June 23 (Monday) through the auction platform E-Auction ([e-auction.td.gov.hk](http://e-auction.td.gov.hk)). Interested bidders can participate in the online auction only after they have successfully registered as E-Auction users.

A spokesman for the TD said, "A total of 150 Ordinary VRMs will be available at this online public auction. The list of VRMs (see Annex) has been uploaded to the E-Auction website. Applicants who have paid a \$1,000 deposit to reserve the Ordinary VRM for auction should also register as an E-Auction user in advance in order to participate in the online bidding, including placing the first bid at the opening price of \$1,000. Otherwise, the VRMs reserved by them may be bid on by other interested bidders at or above the opening price. Auctions for VRMs with 'HK' or 'XX' as a prefix, special VRMs and personalised VRMs will continue to be carried out through physical auctions by bidding paddles, and their announcement arrangements remain unchanged."

Members of the public participating in the online bidding should take note of the following important points:

(1) Bidders should register in advance as an E-Auction user by "iAM Smart+" equipped with the digital signing function; or by using a valid digital certificate and an email address upon completion of identity verification. Registered "iAM Smart" users should provide their Hong Kong identity card number, while non-Hong Kong residents who are not "iAM Smart" users should provide the number of their passport or other identification documents when registering as E-Auction users.

(2) Bidders are required to provide a digital signature to confirm the submission and amount of the bid by using "iAM Smart+" or a valid digital certificate at the time of the first bid of each online bidding session (including setting automatic bids before the auction begins) to comply with the requirements of the Electronic Transactions Ordinance.

(3) If a bid is made in respect of a VRM within the last 10 minutes before the end of the auction, the auction end time for that particular VRM will be automatically extended by another 10 minutes, up to a maximum of 24 hours.

(4) Successful bidders must follow the instructions in the notification email issued by the TD to log in to the E-Auction within 48 hours from the issuance of email and complete the follow-up procedures, including:

- completing the Purchaser Information for the issuance of the Memorandum of Sale of Registration Mark (Memorandum of Sale); and
- making the auction payment online by credit card, Faster Payment System (FPS) or Payment by Phone Service (PPS). Cheque or cash payment is not accepted in the E-Auction.

(5) A VRM can only be assigned to a motor vehicle registered in the name of the purchaser. Relevant information on the Certificate of Incorporation must be provided by the successful bidder in the Purchaser Information of the Memorandum of Sale if the VRM purchased is to be registered under the name of a body corporate.

(6) Successful bidders will receive a notification email around seven working days after payment has been confirmed and can download the Memorandum of Sale from the E-Auction. The purchaser must apply for the VRM to be assigned to a motor vehicle registered in the name of the purchaser within 12 months from the date of issue of the Memorandum of Sale. If the purchaser fails to do so within the 12-month period, in accordance with the statutory provision, the allocation of the VRM will be cancelled and a new allocation will be arranged by the TD without prior notice to the purchaser.

The TD has informed all applicants who have reserved the Ordinary VRMs for this round of auction of the E-Auction arrangements in detail by post. Members of the public may refer to the E-Auction website or watch the tutorial videos for more information. Please call the E-Auction hotline (3583 3980) or email ([e-auction-enquiry@td.gov.hk](mailto:e-auction-enquiry@td.gov.hk)) for enquiries.

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## LCQ4: Opening bus-only lanes to other public transport modes

Following is a question by the Hon Adrian Ho and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Liu Chun-san, in the Legislative Council today (June 4):

Question:

In the reply to a question from a Member of this Council in 2018, the Government undertook to conduct a study and consult stakeholders on the proposal to convert bus-only lanes into "public transport-only lanes" with a view to allowing the shared use by other public transport modes. Meanwhile, according to information from the Transport Department, the number of bus trips along busy corridors in certain districts decreased cumulatively by 6 762 trips between 2014 and 2023. As such, there are views that this is an appropriate time to review the bus-only lane policy. However, the Government has indicated earlier on that it currently has no plans to open bus-only lanes for use by other vehicles. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it has compiled statistics for each year of the past five years on the changes in the number of bus-only lanes in Hong Kong, the average traffic volume and vehicle speed in these lanes during peak hours, as well as how these figures compare with those for other lanes on the same road sections; if so, of the details; if not, how the Government determines the number of bus-only lanes to be added or reduced in the absence of such data;
- (2) of the findings of the Government's study and consultation on the aforesaid proposal to convert bus-only lanes into "public transport-only lanes", as well as whether there are specific reasons and actual data supporting the current decision of not to open up bus-only lanes; and
- (3) with regard to the reduction in the number of bus trips along certain busy corridors in recent years, whether the authorities have reassessed the need for bus-only lanes on such corridors and studied the opening up of such lanes; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong citizens mainly commute by public transportation, which accounts for nearly 90 per cent of the total passenger trips each day. Franchised bus is a road-based public transport mode with the highest carrying capacity. The average daily patronage in 2024 exceeded 3.7 million, making up over 30 per cent of the total daily public transport ridership.

Bus-only lanes (BOLs) (see note) are traffic lanes designated for use only by "franchised bus" or "franchised and non-franchised bus" during the prescribed time. Other vehicles have to make use of other traffic lanes next to the BOLs or alternative routes. Under the policy of giving priority to public transportation, the Transport Department (TD) has implemented BOLs to accord priority to buses with high carrying capacity to use the roads, thereby reducing delays caused by traffic congestion and encouraging the public to use convenient public transportation for travel.

Our reply in response to the questions raised by the Hon Adrian Ho is set out below:

(1) In implementing bus priority measures, the TD will consider the actual road situation and traffic conditions, including the design of roads and junctions, the number of traffic lanes, the number of bus routes and bus service frequencies, the traffic volume of other types of vehicles, availability of alternative routes, the impact on the flow of other vehicles, etc and carefully assess the feasibility of such measures, in order to strike a proper balance and ensure smooth operation of the transport network. In addition, the TD will work out the appropriate effective period of bus priority measures based on the actual road conditions and consult relevant stakeholders and districts to ensure the measures are in the interest of the public.

As of May 2025, there were 115 BOLs in total across Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories. Over the past five years, the TD added 16 BOLs. According to the TD's on-site observations as well as feedback from bus companies, BOLs can effectively minimise the impact of traffic congestion on bus services, enhance the stability and efficiency of bus frequencies and facilitate the travel of the public. The TD did not compile statistics on the daily average volume of bus traffic and vehicle speed in respect of each BOL compared with those for other lanes on the same road sections.

(2) The TD has examined the proposal of converting some BOLs into "public transport-only lanes" for the shared use by other modes of public transport such as taxis and public light buses (PLBs). In doing so, we need to consider the pros and cons. While the proposal can benefit passengers of PLBs and taxis, it will at the same time increase the number of vehicles sharing the same road space with buses, making BOLs busier and affecting bus passengers. Taking the BOL of Tuen Mun Road eastbound near Harrow International School Hong Kong to Sham Tseng Interchange as an example, about 510 buses pass through the BOL per hour during peak hours on weekdays carrying about 21 000 passengers, compared with the services of taxis and PLBs carrying about 1 100 passengers per hour during peak hours on weekdays at the same road section. On the premise of maintaining smooth operation of the BOL and balancing the needs of various road users, this section of BOL was not opened up. In light of changes in traffic flow and bus operation of Tuen Mun Road after the implementation of new toll plans at the Tai Lam Tunnel, the TD will review the arrangement of BOL of Tuen Mun Road in a timely manner under the public transport-oriented policy.

If the opening up of certain BOLs can improve the operational efficiency

of other public transport modes, the TD will make better use of these B0Ls through various means by taking into account relevant factors. For example, some green minibus (GMB) routes require access to specific B0Ls to reach designated pick-up and drop-off points. After considering factors such as service frequencies, boarding/alighting points as well as bus traffic of the relevant B0Ls, the TD will issue permits to the routes concerned for using the relevant B0Ls. At present, a total of 56 GMB routes have been granted such permits.

(3) The TD is committed to reducing the number of buses plying on busy roads in Central, Causeway Bay and Yau Tsim Mong districts with a view to reducing roadside air pollution, traffic congestion, etc. As most of the B0Ls are not located at these busy roads, there is no direct impact on the overall bus traffic of B0Ls.

The TD has from time to time reviewed and improved B0Ls and traffic facilities of the road sections in the vicinity. For example, the TD has reviewed the arrangement of the B0L from 200 Hennessy Road westbound to the section of Hennessy Road near Luard Road. After reviewing the traffic data, actual road situation and other factors as well as consulting relevant stakeholders and the district, the TD adjusted the effective period of the B0L of Hennessy Road westbound between Fleming Road and Luard Road from 7am – 9am to 5pm – 7pm, and shortened the B0L by 65 metres to balance the needs of other vehicles for loading and unloading.

In summary, the TD will continue to monitor the implementation of B0Ls and road traffic, and review and enhance individual road sections in a timely manner.

Thank you, President.

Note: B0Ls refer to bus lanes and designated bus gates.