

TAC discusses proposal to increase penalties for illegal carriage of passengers for hire or reward and is briefed on traffic situation of Central – Wan Chai Bypass

The following is issued on behalf of the Transport Advisory Committee:

The Transport Advisory Committee (TAC) discussed the proposal to increase penalties for illegal carriage of passengers for hire or reward and was briefed by the Government on the latest traffic situation of the Central-Wan Chai Bypass and Island Eastern Corridor Link (CWB) today (February 19).

Currently, it is illegal for a person to drive or use a motor vehicle for carriage of passengers for hire or reward without meeting prescribed conditions, and third-party risks insurance for the vehicle concerned may be invalidated. The Government has been taking a multi-pronged approach comprising enforcement, education and publicity in combating such illicit acts.

With the increasingly widespread use of online-hailing platforms, illegal hire services making use of such platforms have become more prevalent in recent years. To strengthen the deterrent effect for better protection of the safety of passengers and other road users, the Government proposes to increase the penalties for illegal carriage of passengers for hire or reward.

The TAC Chairman, Professor Stephen Cheung, said, "Members supported the proposal, and noted that in proposing the penalties the Government sought to increase the deterrent effect of the offence while upholding the proportionality of the proposed penalty level, having regard to the severity of the contravention and the penalties for offences of similar nature."

In addition, Members were briefed by the Government on the traffic situation of CWB since its stage 1 commissioning, as well as the traffic arrangements upon its full commissioning. The road link joining the CWB to the Rumsey Street Flyover westbound will be commissioned on February 24, signifying the full commissioning of the CWB.

"Members noted that since the stage 1 commissioning of the CWB, the Transport Department (TD) has implemented various temporary traffic measures to facilitate motorists' choice of appropriate routes and to divert the additional traffic induced due to the outstanding road link. The TD will continue to monitor the situation closely and implement measures such as enhancing road signages, with a view to ensuring the smooth operation of the CWB upon its full commissioning, thereby bringing convenience to motorists,"

Professor Cheung said.

Composite Interest Rate: End of January 2019

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) announced today (February 19) the composite interest rate at the end of January 2019.*

The composite interest rate, which is a measure of the average cost of funds of banks, decreased by 6 basis points to 0.83 per cent at the end of January 2019, from 0.89 per cent at the end of December 2018 (see Chart 1 in the Annex). The decrease in composite interest rate reflected declines in the weighted funding cost for both deposits and interbank funds during the month (see Chart 2 in the Annex).

The historical data of the composite interest rate from the end of the fourth quarter of 2003 to the end of January 2019 are available in the Monthly Statistical Bulletin on the HKMA website (www.hkma.gov.hk). The next data release is scheduled for March 19, 2019 and will provide the composite interest rate at the end of February 2019.

* The composite interest rate is a weighted average interest rate of all Hong Kong dollar interest bearing liabilities, which include deposits from customers, amounts due to banks, negotiable certificates of deposit and other debt instruments, and Hong Kong dollar non-interest bearing demand deposits on the books of banks. Data from retail banks, which account for about 90 per cent of the total customers' deposits in the banking sector, are used in the calculation. It should be noted that the composite interest rate represents only average interest expenses. There are various other costs involved in the making of a loan, such as operating costs (e.g. staff and rental expenses), credit cost and hedging cost, which are not covered by the composite interest rate.

Terms of reference of CoI into Diaphragm Wall and Platform Slab

Construction Works at Hung Hom Station Extension under Shatin to Central Link Project expanded

The following is issued on behalf of the Commission of Inquiry (CoI) into the Diaphragm Wall and Platform Slab Construction Works at the Hung Hom Station Extension under the Shatin to Central Link Project:

The terms of reference of the CoI have been expanded to also ascertain the relevant facts and recommend appropriate improvement measures relating to the irregularities that have recently surfaced in the construction of the North Approach Tunnels, the South Approach Tunnels and the Hung Hom Stabling Sidings under the MTR Corporation Limited's Contract No. 1112, following the Chief Executive in Council's decision today (February 19).

The CoI has been retitled "Commission of Inquiry into the Construction Works at and near the Hung Hom Station Extension under the Shatin to Central Link Project" with immediate effect to reflect the expanded ambit.

The CoI will endeavour to accomplish its tasks within the time frame given by the Chief Executive in Council.

Volume and price statistics of external merchandise trade in December 2018

Further to the external merchandise trade statistics in value terms for December 2018 released earlier on, the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (February 19) the volume and price statistics of external merchandise trade for that month.

In December 2018, the volume of Hong Kong's total exports of goods decreased by 7.4% over December 2017. Concurrently, the volume of imports of goods decreased by 8.7%.

Comparing 2018 with 2017, the volume of Hong Kong's total exports of goods increased by 4.9%. Concurrently, the volume of imports of goods increased by 5.9%.

Comparing the fourth quarter of 2018 with the preceding quarter on a seasonally adjusted basis, the volume of total exports of goods decreased by

3.9%. Concurrently, the volume of imports of goods decreased by 5.4%.

Changes in volume of external merchandise trade are derived from changes in external merchandise trade value with the effect of price changes discounted.

Comparing December 2018 with December 2017, the prices of total exports of goods increased by 2.0%. Concurrently, the prices of imports of goods increased by 2.0%.

As regards price changes in 2018 over 2017, the prices of total exports of goods increased by 2.4%. Concurrently, the prices of imports of goods increased by 2.6%.

Price changes in external merchandise trade are reflected by changes in unit value indices of external merchandise trade, which are compiled based on average unit values or, for certain commodities, specific price data.

The terms of trade index is derived from the ratio of price index of total exports of goods to that of imports of goods. Compared with the same periods in 2017, the index remained virtually unchanged in December 2018, whereas it decreased by 0.1% in 2018 as a whole.

Changes in the unit value and volume of total exports of goods by main destination are shown in Table 1.

Comparing December 2018 with December 2017, double-digit decreases were recorded for the total export volume to India (-33.1%) and the mainland of China (the Mainland) (-11.0%). Concurrently, the total export volume to Japan and the USA decreased by 4.9% and 2.9% respectively. On the other hand, the total export volume to the Netherlands increased by 26.5%.

Over the same period of comparison, the total export prices to the Netherlands, the Mainland, Japan and the USA increased by 3.9%, 2.7%, 2.5% and 2.0% respectively. On the other hand, the total export prices to India decreased by 4.4%.

Changes in the unit value and volume of imports of goods by main supplier are shown in Table 2.

Comparing December 2018 with December 2017, double-digit decreases were recorded for the import volume from Taiwan (-29.1%) and Japan (-15.1%). Concurrently, the import volume from the Mainland and Singapore decreased by 6.4% and 1.5% respectively. On the other hand, the import volume from the USA increased by 0.5%.

Over the same period of comparison, the import prices from Japan, the Mainland, Singapore and the USA increased by 3.0%, 2.5%, 2.1% and 1.0% respectively. On the other hand, the import prices from Taiwan decreased by 0.9%.

Further information

Details of the above statistics are published in the December 2018 issue of "Hong Kong Merchandise Trade Index Numbers". Users can download the publication free of charge at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp230.jsp?productCode=B1020006).

Enquiries on merchandise trade indices may be directed to the Trade Analysis Section (1) of the C&SD (Tel: 2582 4918).

Year-end population for 2018

According to the statistics released by the Census and Statistics Department today (February 19), the provisional estimate of the Hong Kong population was 7 482 500 at end-2018, representing an increase of 69 400 or 0.9% from 7 413 100 at end-2017 (Table 1).

Population increase comprises natural increase (i.e. births less deaths) and net movement of Hong Kong residents (i.e. inflow less outflow). The natural increase of the population from end-2017 to end-2018 amounted to 6 700, with 53 700 births and 47 000 deaths. Over the same period, there was a net movement of 62 700 persons, of which 42 300 were inflow of One-way Permit holders and 20 400 were net inflow of other Hong Kong residents.

The Hong Kong population is measured on the definition of Resident Population, which comprises Usual Residents and Mobile Residents. Among the total population at end-2018, 7 249 400 (provisional) were Usual Residents and 233 100 (provisional) were Mobile Residents.

"Usual Residents" refer to two categories of people: (1) Hong Kong Permanent Residents who have stayed in Hong Kong for at least three months during the six months before or for at least three months during the six months after the reference time-point, regardless of whether they are in Hong Kong or not at the reference time-point; and (2) Hong Kong Non-permanent Residents who are in Hong Kong at the reference time-point.

For those Hong Kong Permanent Residents who are not "Usual Residents", they are classified as "Mobile Residents" if they have stayed in Hong Kong for at least one month but less than three months during the six months before or for at least one month but less than three months during the six months after the reference time-point, regardless of whether they are in Hong Kong or not at the reference time-point.

The revised figure for the mid-year population for 2018 was 7 451 000. The number of Usual Residents was revised to 7 227 800 and the number of Mobile Residents to 223 200. The population growth rate from mid-2017 to mid-2018 remained at 0.8%.

The population figures for recent years are shown in Table 2.

Under the current practice, the latest population figure is released on a provisional basis in each round. The revised figure will be released six months later. In other words, while the provisional population figure for end-2018 is released today, the corresponding revised figure will be released in August 2019.