

LCQ12: Hire car permits

Following is a question by the Hon Yiu Pak-leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (May 18):

Question:

Some members of the tourism industry have pointed out that as tourists place more emphasis on hygiene when travelling amid the epidemic, demands for services provided in the mode of family and smaller-size tours are expected to increase significantly. However, under the Road Traffic (Public Services Vehicles) Regulations (Cap. 374D), the numbers of hire car permits (permits) issued by the Government in respect of three types of hire car services, namely, (i) private, (ii) hotel and (iii) tour, are currently subject to the limits of just 1 500, 400 and 400 respectively, which can hardly meet market needs. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of applications for each type of the aforesaid permits received and approved by the Government in each of the past three years (set out in a table);

(2) of the justifications for the limit imposed on each type of the aforesaid permits, and whether a mechanism is in place whereby reviews will be conducted in the light of industry and market demands; and

(3) as some members of the industry have relayed that the numbers of the three types of the aforesaid permits are insufficient to meet industry demands whilst the application thresholds are too high, whether the Government will consider raising the limits imposed on the numbers of such permits and lowering the application thresholds to facilitate the business operation of the tourism industry?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Yiu Pak-leung is as follows:

(1) In the past three years, the respective numbers of new applications for hire car permits (HCPs) for private, hotel and tour services and the numbers of HCPs issued are set out in the table below:

Type of HCP	Relevant numbers (Note)	2019	2020	2021
Private hire car service	New applications	146	41	24
	HCPs issued to new applications	142	76	54

Hotel hire car service	New applications	5	3	0
	HCPs issued to new applications	2	10	1
Tour hire car service	New applications	18	8	4
	HCPs issued to new applications	6	7	2

Note: An applicant must provide sufficient information to support an application. Depending on the date of submission and timely submission of the required information by applicants, approval may not be granted in the same year as the application was submitted, while some applications were rejected or withdrawn by the applicants. Also, more than one permit may be involved in one application.

(2) The Road Traffic (Public Service Vehicles) Regulations (the Regulations) (Cap. 374D) stipulates the provisions on HCP and the assessment criteria for its issuance. The type of hire car service specified in the application must be reasonably required, and the vehicle licence and third party risks insurance policy of the vehicle concerned must be in force.

To avoid affecting the operation of public transport services and aggravating road congestion, the Hire Car Permits (Limitation on Numbers) Notice (Cap. 374L) stipulates the limits imposed on the number of HCPs (including private, hotel and tour services, etc.). The respective limits and the numbers of HCPs in force as at December 31, 2021 are tabulated as follows:

Type of HCP	Limit imposed on the number of HCPs issued	Number of HCPs in force as at December 31, 2021
Private hire car service	1 500	1 115
Hotel hire car service	400	100
Tour hire car service	400	120

The Government reviews the limits imposed on the number of HCPs issued in the light of the actual circumstances from time to time. For example, the limit on HCPs of tour hire car service was increased from 300 to 400 in 1998 to cater for the anticipated increase in tour service demand arising from the commissioning of Hong Kong International Airport.

(3) As the numbers of HCPs in force for private, hotel and tour hire car services are lower than the respective limits imposed on such permits at present, parties who are interested in operating the services may submit their applications. The Transport Department (TD) will vet applications for HCPs in accordance with the requirements of the Regulations. The hire car services concerned must be reasonably required. Other factors, such as hiring records and service contracts submitted by the applicants, will also be taken

into consideration.

Since February 2017, the TD has rolled out a series of measures on HCPs to enhance the vetting and regulatory regime for hire car services. These measures include the introduction of an optional "pre-application assessment". Parties who are interested in applying for HCPs may make a request for "pre-application assessment" without the need to submit vehicle registration documents. They may purchase vehicles after knowing that their HCP applications are likely to be approved. Besides, while the trade has been providing new and diverse hire car services to meet the changing needs of the market in recent years, past hiring records or service contracts may not be available before commencement of the business. As such, the TD will give flexible consideration to applicants for private service (limousine) HCPs who are unable to produce hiring records or service contracts. Such applicants may provide adequate justifications and document proof of the proposed business model to support their applications for TD's consideration. The above-mentioned measures will provide more flexibility and greater certainty to potential HCP applicants, as well as facilitate new market entrants. They will also enable the TD to conduct advance examination of potential formal applications, thereby shortening the time needed for formal vetting and approval.

The Government will continue to closely monitor the demand for hire car services in the community, and review the assessment criteria for and the limits imposed on HCPs in a timely manner to meet the market needs for such services.

LCQ11: Universal Accessibility Programme

Following is a question by the Hon Stanley Li and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (May 18):

Question:

It has been reported that the projects implemented under the Universal Accessibility Programme (the Programme) have been progressing at a slow pace, rendering such an initiative, which is well received by the public, unable to maximise its effectiveness. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as it is learnt that quite a number of projects under the Programme involve only the addition of lifts at suitable locations of existing footbridges or subways, but it takes an average of five years to complete

such a project from investigation, design to works completion, of the Government's ways to effectively shorten the time required to two to three years; and

(2) given that as at February this year, the Highways Department (HyD) has only engaged three consultants to undertake the advance works of investigation and design for 129 projects, and 10 contractors to undertake the construction of 93 projects under the Programme, whether the Government has assessed if the HyD has overly relied on these consultants and contractors to carry out the works, resulting in the slow progress of the projects; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the affirmative, whether it will instruct the HyD to engage more consultants and contractors to carry out the works, so as to maximise the effectiveness of the Programme?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been striving to create a barrier-free and accessible environment. In 2012, the Government launched the Universal Accessibility Programme (UA Programme) to proactively retrofit more barrier-free access facilities (i.e. lifts and ramps) at public walkways to facilitate the public to commute, especially for elders and persons in need. As at April 30, 2022, the number of items of barrier-free access facilities completed under the UA Programme across the 18 districts was 179, while 93 items were under construction.

The reply to the question raised by the Hon Stanley Li is as follows:

(1) Lift retrofitting items under the UA Programme have to go through stages of investigation, detailed design, tendering and construction.

Firstly, in terms of investigation and detailed design, as piling is required for installation of lift shaft to support the weight of the lift, the Highways Department (HyD) has to carry out ground investigation or boring works to ascertain the ground condition, and check the layout of underground utilities, so as to identify a suitable location for retrofitting the lift. The HyD will also consult the public on the proposed lift design with a view to meeting the needs of relevant stakeholders. The time required for investigation and design varies depending on the complexity of individual project items. Some projects need to be gazetted under the Roads (Works, Use and Compensation) Ordinance (Cap. 370) and to have objections resolved.

Upon completion of the above-mentioned investigation and design procedures, the HyD will invite tenders for the works and proceed to construction stage, which generally includes foundation works, construction of lift towers, installation of lift components, connection of the lift towers to existing walkways, and installation of associated facilities. Lastly, the HyD has to complete the commissioning tests for the lifts as required by the relevant legislation before they can be opened for public use. Out of the 179 completed project items, 77 were completed in less than five years.

To expedite the progress of items under the UA Programme, the following measures have been adopted:

- To implement items under the UA Programme more flexibly with the "dedicated-funds-for-dedicated-use" practice through the block allocation Subhead 6101TX "Universal Accessibility Programme" under Capital Works Reserve Fund Head 706 "Highways";
- To award works contracts for items in batches in accordance with their respective progress in investigation and design so that more works can be implemented as soon as possible;
- To ascertain the actual location and condition of the underground utilities as early as possible during the design stage so that works can be delivered smoothly at later stages;
- To adopt new works contracts model with Early Contractor Involvement so that contractors would be engaged in the design work at an earlier stage of the project, with the aim to enhance the buildability of the design and shorten the construction time; and
- To adopt the Modular Integrated Construction method under which the lift tower/lift components are installed in the factories before delivery to the sites for final assembly, so as to expedite the construction speed and enhance the cost-effectiveness of the building cost.

By adopting the above measures, the HyD expects that the construction time could be reduced by six to nine months so as to expedite the implementation of these projects.

(2) In view of the large number of projects under the UA Programme, which share similar works procedures and nature, the HyD will thus bundle an appropriate number of project items under the same contract, and invite tenders for the works contract in accordance with the established procurement procedures for government public works projects. Such arrangement can enhance the cost-effectiveness of the design and construction works and attract more competitive tenders.

Pursuant to the procurement procedures for government public works projects, the tendering process for each consultancy and works contract is open to the fair bidding by different consultancies and contractors, with the contract to be awarded to the most competitive bidder. While it is possible for a consultant to be awarded with more than one consultancy contracts, the firm is obliged to provide resources as committed, and complete its work under the specified timeframe to ensure there is no delay in the project. According to the HyD's records, all consultancy contracts were completed within the specified timeframe over the past five years. On the other hand, the works programme is stipulated in works contracts. In case a contractor fails to complete the works as scheduled, it is required to pay compensation to the Government in accordance with contractual provisions. Among the 179 completed items, only one item could not be completed within its contractual period due to insufficient resources provided by the contractor.

The HyD will also make every effort to expedite the implementation of the projects under the UA Programme so that more projects can be completed as

soon as possible to benefit the public. As more items under the UA Programme enter the design or construction stage in future, the HyD expects to attract more consultants/contractors to take part in the implementation of the projects.

Government receives tentative results of 2022 Pay Trend Survey

A spokesman for the Civil Service Bureau said that the bureau received the tentative results of the 2022 Pay Trend Survey from the secretariat of the Pay Trend Survey Committee (PTSC) today (May 18).

The tentative results, presented in the form of "gross pay trend indicators" (PTIs), show the rates of pay adjustment in the private sector in three salary bands for the period from April 2, 2021, to April 1, 2022. The PTSC will meet next week to decide whether to validate the "gross PTIs".

"The Chief Executive-in-Council will fully consider all relevant factors under the established annual civil service pay adjustment mechanism in determining the annual civil service pay adjustment. These factors include the 'net PTIs' (see attachment) calculated from the 'gross PTIs', the state of Hong Kong's economy, the Government's fiscal position, changes in the cost of living, the pay claims of the staff side and civil service morale," the spokesman said.

Pay Trend Survey Committee Meeting on May 18, 2022

The following is issued on behalf of the Pay Trend Survey Committee:

The 2022 Pay Trend Survey Report (2022 PTS Report), compiled by the Pay Survey and Research Unit of the Joint Secretariat for the Advisory Bodies on Civil Service and Judicial Salaries and Conditions of Service, has been distributed to Members of the Pay Trend Survey Committee (PTSC) earlier today (May 18).

The survey has indicated the following average pay adjustments in the surveyed companies over the 12-month period from April 2, 2021, to April 1, 2022:

Tentative Findings of the 2022 Pay Trend Survey (PTS) (subject to verification)

	Basic Pay Indicator	+	Additional Pay Indicator	=	Gross Pay Trend Indicator
Lower Salary Band (below \$24,070 per month)	: 2.78%	+	0.42%	=	3.20%
Middle Salary Band (\$24,070 – \$73,775 per month)	: 4.06%	+	1.52%	=	5.58%
Upper Salary Band (\$73,776 – \$150,915 per month)	: 4.53%	+	3.77%	=	8.30%

Members of the PTSC are at present studying the PTS Report in detail. Subject to their analysis and deliberation, the PTSC will verify and consider whether to validate the findings of the survey at its meeting scheduled for May 25. After that, the PTSC will submit the survey findings to the Government.

In accordance with the established practice, the Chief Executive-in-Council (CE-in-Council) will take into account the pay trend indicators derived from the PTS and other pertinent considerations (such as the state of Hong Kong's economy, the Government's fiscal position, changes in the cost of living, the pay claims of the staff side and civil service morale) before making a decision on the 2022-23 civil service pay adjustment.

The survey results reflect the pay trend in 111 companies covering 128 929 employees over the 12-month period from April 2, 2021, to April 1, 2022. Among these companies, there are 83 larger companies (employing 100 or more staff) and 28 smaller companies (employing 50 to 99 staff). These companies are regarded as typical employers in their respective fields, generally known as steady and good employers with rational and systematic salary administration.

The survey is conducted in accordance with the improved methodology as approved by the CE-in-Council in March 2007. The survey takes into account adjustments to basic salary and additional payments awarded to employees of the surveyed companies attributable to factors in relation to the cost of living, general prosperity and company performance, general changes in market rates, merit and inscale increment.

The PTSC is chaired by Mr Lee Luen-fai, who is a member of the Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service. Mr Lee wishes to express the PTSC's sincere appreciation for the co-operation and assistance rendered by the companies who participated in the 2022 PTS.

LCQ19: Work on preventing and fighting epidemic for elderly persons

Following is a question by the Hon Nelson Lam and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (May 18):

Question:

Amid the fifth wave of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic, over 95 per cent of the fatal cases have been elderly persons aged 60 or above, while residents in residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) and residential care homes for persons with disabilities have accounted for more than 50 per cent of such fatal cases. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will regularly publish statistics related to (a) elderly persons aged 60 or above and (b) elderly persons living in RCHEs, including the respective numbers and percentages of (i) confirmed patients, (ii) fatal cases, (iii) those who have completed three doses of vaccination and (iv) those who are unvaccinated, so as to facilitate members of the public to grasp the relevant situations; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as there are views that the Government failed in the past two years to boost the vaccination rate of elderly persons by taking measures appropriate to the situations, and it even suspended early this year the service of sending outreach vaccination teams to residential care homes (RCHs) to administer vaccines, resulting in a loophole for epidemic prevention and deaths of the residents, whether the Government will formulate a long-term vaccination strategy and roadmap for elderly persons (especially those in RCHEs); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether the inter-departmental task force, set up earlier on by the Government to examine the capabilities of RCHs in fighting the epidemic, will put in place a contingency response mechanism to protect the life of elderly persons in RCHEs in case the sixth wave of the epidemic breaks out, including providing manpower support for those RCHEs which face manpower shortage due to their staff being infected, and providing safe isolation and holding facilities for elderly persons; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Regarding the question raised by the Hon Nelson Lam, my reply is as

follows:

(1) In view of the fifth wave of epidemic, the Government has regularly published relevant statistical data on number of confirmed cases, deaths and vaccination status of different age groups (including elderly persons aged 60 or above) through its thematic website. The concerned link is as follows: www.covidvaccine.gov.hk/pdf/death_analysis.pdf.

(2) Since the launch of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme in February 2021, the Government has continuously appealed to and encouraged elderly persons to receive vaccination as soon as possible. The first batch of target group for vaccination was high-risk population, which included elderly persons. Apart from joining hands with the medical profession to step up the work on explaining effects of vaccination to elderly persons and their family members to ease their concerns with better understanding, the Government has introduced various facilitation measures, including same-day tickets for elderly persons aged 60 or above in Community Vaccination Centres, the Home Vaccination Service, approaching and assisting service users of the Department of Health (DH), the Hospital Authority (HA) and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) to register for vaccination, and providing vaccination service through designated Elderly Health Centres under the DH, designated General Out-patient Clinics under the HA and District Health Centres (DHCs) and DHC Expresses in various districts.

Since the outbreak of the fifth wave of the epidemic in February this year, confirmed cases were found in various residential care homes (RCHs). To enable suitable RCH residents to receive COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible, the Government had appealed to visiting registered medical practitioners and medical institutions to redeploy resources and accord priority to serving residential care homes for the elderly (RCHes) and residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs). At the same time, we mobilised and assisted personnel from the medical sector to form outreach teams to provide health assessment and vaccination service for RCH residents as soon as possible. As at May 10, a total of 14 medical institutions/organisations (including 13 teams comprising private medical practitioners and a team comprising public servants from the DH) and more than 200 visiting registered medical practitioners took up the task of providing outreach vaccination service to about 1 100 RCHs, involving more than 700 medical personnel in total.

The Government has completed three phases of RCH outreach vaccination service between March 18 and May 10, during which medical teams and visiting registered medical practitioners had visited RCHs 4 347 times. With the joint efforts of all parties, the overall first dose vaccination rate of RCH residents has risen from 55 per cent in mid-March to 84 per cent as at May 10, with the rate at RCHes standing at 82 per cent and the rate at RCHDs at 89 per cent. The overall second dose and third dose vaccination rate at the RCHs at the same time is 56 per cent and 14 per cent respectively.

Currently, all RCHs have been paired with medical institutions/organisations or visiting registered medical practitioners for

vaccination services. Relevant medical teams will continue to provide vaccination for RCH residents according to the latter's vaccination schedule. The Government will continue to take forward related work.

(3) Elderly persons belong to a group of people with the greatest risk in the epidemic, especially those elderly persons living in RCHs. The Government attaches utmost importance to the protection of elderly persons, who are our priority target group in anti-epidemic works. In order to enhance the overall capability of RCHs and RCHDs in fighting against the epidemic and in coping a possible sixth wave of epidemic, the Government has set up an inter-departmental task force led by the Labour and Welfare Bureau to examine the RCHs' capabilities and discuss effective and feasible improvement measures. Members of the task force comprises representatives of the Food and Health Bureau, the Development Bureau, the SWD, the DH, the Fire Services Department, the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department and the HA.

The task force is discussing various measures to prepare for a possible next wave of epidemic, for example, improvements to the ventilation of RCHs to minimise the risk of virus transmission within the premises concerned, enhancement of infection control in RCHs as well as improvements to the co-ordination between RCHs and government departments. When appropriate, the task force will announce its work progress.