

TAC Chairman welcomes Budget measures to control private car growth

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

The Chairman of the Transport Advisory Committee (TAC), Professor Stephen Cheung, today (February 24) welcomed the proposed increase of the first registration tax (FRT) rates and the vehicle licence fee (VLF) levels for private cars (PCs) by 15 per cent and 30 per cent respectively, as set out in the Financial Secretary's 2021-22 Budget, with a view to controlling PC growth, thereby addressing the traffic congestion issue in Hong Kong at its root.

Professor Cheung said, "Hong Kong is a small and densely populated city. The number of PCs has been on the rise, growing by about 38 per cent from 415 000 in 2010 to 573 000 in 2020. Traffic congestion has thus been increased, which affects all walks of life in Hong Kong.

"The TAC published the Report on Study of Road Traffic Congestion in Hong Kong in December 2014. It was proposed that the FRT rates and VLF levels be increased as one of the short- and medium-term measures to alleviate road traffic congestion. All along, the Government has been implementing the recommendations in the TAC's Report in a progressive manner, in addition to continued enhancement of the public transport network and services as well as various smart mobility initiatives, with a view to making it easier for the public to commute. The current proposals in the Budget of raising the FRT and VLF for PCs have demonstrated the Government's determination to address Hong Kong's road traffic congestion. Easing road traffic congestion will benefit the community at large."

Professor Cheung added, "I truly wish that various sectors in the community, including Legislative Council members, can render support for the proposals concerned."

CHP investigates 17 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced that as of 0.00am, February 24, the CHP was investigating 17 additional confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), taking the number of cases to 10 914 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 10 913 confirmed cases and one probable case).

Among the newly reported cases announced, one is an imported case.

A total of 203 cases have been recorded in the past 14 days (February 10 to 23), including 167 local cases of which 69 are from unknown sources.

The CHP's epidemiological investigations and relevant contact tracing on the confirmed cases are ongoing. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the list of buildings with confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the past 14 days and the latest local situation of COVID-19 available on the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

Meanwhile, the CHP reminded those who had visited specified venues under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to receive COVID-19 nucleic acid testing according to the compulsory testing notice. The public are also urged to seek medical attention early if symptoms develop.

The CHP called on members of the public to avoid going out, having social contact and dining out. They should put on a surgical mask and maintain stringent hand hygiene when they need to go out. The CHP strongly urged the elderly to stay home as far as possible and avoid going out. They should consider asking their family and friends to help with everyday tasks such as shopping for basic necessities.

The spokesman said, "Given that the situation of COVID-19 infection remains severe and that there is a continuous increase in the number of cases reported around the world, members of the public are strongly urged to avoid all non-essential travel outside Hong Kong.

"The CHP also strongly urges the public to maintain at all times strict personal and environmental hygiene, which is key to personal protection against infection and prevention of the spread of the disease in the community. On a personal level, members of the public should wear a surgical mask when having respiratory symptoms, taking public transport or staying in crowded places. They should also perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes.

"As for household environmental hygiene, members of the public are advised to maintain drainage pipes properly, regularly pour water into drain outlets (U-traps) and cover all floor drain outlets when they are not in use. After using the toilet, they should put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs."

Moreover, the Government has launched the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for announcing the latest updates on various news on COVID-19 infection and health advice to help the public understand the latest updates. Members of the public may also gain access to information via the COVID-19 WhatsApp Helpline launched by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer. Simply by saving 9617 1823 in their

phone contacts or clicking the link wa.me/85296171823?text=hi, they will be able to obtain information on COVID-19 as well as the "StayHomeSafe" mobile app and wristband via WhatsApp.

To prevent pneumonia and respiratory tract infections, members of the public should always maintain good personal and environmental hygiene. They are advised to:

- Wear a surgical mask when taking public transport or staying in crowded places. It is important to wear a mask properly, including performing hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
- Perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes, after touching public installations such as handrails or doorknobs, or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing;
- Maintain drainage pipes properly and regularly (about once a week) pour about half a litre of water into each drain outlet (U-trap) to ensure environmental hygiene;
- Cover all floor drain outlets when they are not in use;
- After using the toilet, put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse with water and dry with a disposable paper towel. If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, performing hand hygiene with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub is an effective alternative;
- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin, then wash hands thoroughly; and
- When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending class at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly.

[Tax measures proposed in 2021-22](#)

[Budget](#)

In his Budget delivered today (February 24), the Financial Secretary proposed the following tax measures.

The Financial Secretary proposed a one-off reduction of profits tax, salaries tax and tax under personal assessment for the year of assessment 2020/21 by 100 per cent, subject to a ceiling of \$10,000 per case. This measure will cost the Government \$12.45 billion, benefiting about 2 million taxpayers.

The tax reduction will reduce the amount of tax payable by taxpayers for the year of assessment 2020/21. Taxpayers should file their profits tax returns and tax returns for individuals for the year of assessment 2020/21 as usual. Upon enactment of the relevant legislation, the Inland Revenue Department will effect the reduction in the final assessment.

The proposed tax reduction will only be applicable to the final tax for the year of assessment 2020/21, but not to the provisional tax of the same year. Therefore, taxpayers are still required to pay the provisional tax on time as stipulated in the demand notes that have been issued to them. The provisional tax paid will, in accordance with the Inland Revenue Ordinance, be applied in payment of the final tax for the year of assessment 2020/21 and provisional tax for the year of assessment 2021/22. The excess balance, if any, will be refunded.

The proposed tax reduction is not applicable to property tax. Nevertheless, individuals with rental income, if eligible for personal assessment, may be able to enjoy such a reduction under personal assessment.

A taxpayer who is separately chargeable to salaries tax and profits tax can enjoy a tax reduction under each of the tax types. For a taxpayer having business profits or rental income and electing for personal assessment, the reduction will be based on the tax payable under personal assessment. It might be different from the amount of tax reduction he or she would get if he or she was not assessed under personal assessment. The exact amount will need to be evaluated case by case. Individuals having business profits or rental income may elect for personal assessment in their tax returns for the year of assessment 2020/21.

The Financial Secretary also proposed to waive business registration fees for 2021-22.

In addition, the Financial Secretary proposed to increase the rate of ad valorem stamp duty from 0.1 per cent to 0.13 per cent of the consideration or value of each transaction of Hong Kong stock payable by buyers and sellers respectively.

The above proposed tax measures will be implemented after amendments to the relevant ordinances. Details of the proposals and examples of tax calculations are available on the website of the Inland Revenue Department (www.ird.gov.hk) for the public's reference. They can also be obtained through the fax hotline 2598 6001.

[Latest arrangements for EPD public](#)

facilities

In view of the latest situation of COVID-19, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) announced today (February 24) that EPD facilities will reopen from March 1.

EPD facilities to reopen on March 1 include:

- * EcoPark visitor centre;
- * T•PARK visitor centre (except T•SPA);
- * WEEE•PARK visitor centre; and
- * Lung Fu Shan Environmental Education Centre and Mobile Environmental Resource Centre.

The guided tours of the above facilities will resume upon the reopening of the facilities, but the number of persons on the tours will be limited to achieve social distancing. Members of the public can make advance bookings online for the guided tours and the facilities starting from February 25.

The T•SPA inside T•PARK will remain temporarily closed until further notice.

The EPD reminds venue users that a series of disease prevention measures will be adopted at the facilities, including limiting the total number of visitors and tour guides in accordance with the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G). Body temperature screening will be conducted for all people entering the facilities, and visitors need to wear their own masks. The EPD also appeals to members of the public visiting its facilities to download the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app and use the "LeaveHomeSafe" QR code displayed at the venue entrances. This is in line with the arrangement that, starting from March 1, members of the public will be required to use the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app before entering government buildings or offices. The venues will also step up cleaning, closely monitor the latest developments of the pandemic, and take immediate action accordingly as and when necessary.

LCQ21: Rare diseases

Following is a question by the Hon Leung Che-cheung and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (February 24):

Question:

It is learnt that as the costs of developing drugs for rare diseases are high but the market is small, the drugs for such diseases are extremely expensive or even non-existent. Regarding rare diseases, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will consider afresh laying down a definition for "rare diseases"; if so, of the details;

(2) as the Government indicated in June last year that it was planning to progressively develop with the Hospital Authority databases for individual uncommon disorders, of the progress of the relevant work; the diseases for which databases have been/will be developed, and the respective drugs for treating such diseases (i) which are registered in Hong Kong and (ii) whose registration process is underway;

(3) whether it knows the respective numbers of applications for subsidies made to (i) the Samaritan Fund and (ii) the Community Care Fund Medical Assistance Programmes for treating rare diseases which were received and approved by the authorities in each of the past three years, with a breakdown by name of disease; the average amount of subsidies approved for each successful applicant in respect of each type of diseases;

(4) of the long-term strategies to support patients suffering from rare diseases in the following aspects: laying down a definition for such diseases, conducting clinical research, introducing or manufacturing drugs, developing databases, and stepping up public education and publicity; and

(5) as it has been reported that on the Mainland, there are currently over 20 million patients suffering from rare diseases and 61 drugs available for treating such diseases, whether the Government has plans to collaborate with the Mainland authorities in respect of the research on and treatment of such diseases; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Department of Health (DH) and the Hospital Authority (HA), my reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Leung Che-cheung is as follows:

(1) At present, there is no common definition of rare diseases/ uncommon disorders worldwide. Same with other regions, Hong Kong makes arrangements on how to treat various diseases depending on the characteristics of its healthcare system and local situation. The optimal treatment for a patient hinges on professional judgement, the seriousness (not just rarity) of the disease, and the availability of clinical facilities and resources, etc.

If we lay down a definition of rare diseases, it is difficult to determine the patients' appropriate treatment and support solely based on the prevalence rate. The other more important considerations (including the severity of the diseases) may also be neglected. This may deviate from

addressing the specific clinical needs of individual patients.

(2) to (4) The Government and the HA highly values provision of sustainable, affordable and optimal treatments and care for all patients (including those with uncommon disorders). Currently, mechanisms have been put in place to provide support for patients with uncommon disorders in various aspects, including clinical diagnosis, multi-disciplinary care and rehabilitation services, introduction of new drugs, as well as subsidising drug treatments.

To further support patients with uncommon disorders, the Government and the HA plan to implement progressively a series of targeted measures. These measures include developing databases for individual uncommon disorders (e.g. spinal muscular atrophy and inborn errors of metabolism covered under the existing newborn screening programme) starting from 2021-22 to facilitate clinical diagnosis and treatment; enhancing public awareness of such disorders through the HA's Smart Patient Website; strengthening support for patients with uncommon disorders through the safety net mechanism; reviewing manpower support and deploying resources to help meet the needs of patients and promote technological development and clinical research relating to uncommon disorders. We also plan to further refine the means test mechanism of the Samaritan Fund (SF) and the Community Care Fund (CCF) Medical Assistance Programmes in the first half of 2021.

The Government and the HA will continue to work closely to discuss, formulate and review the policy support for patients with uncommon disorders, while maintaining communication with stakeholders (including patient groups) to keep reviewing and enhancing relevant mechanisms and measures for supporting such patients.

On drug registration, according to the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance (Cap. 138), pharmaceutical products should meet the criteria of safety, efficacy and quality, and be registered with the Pharmacy and Poisons Board of Hong Kong (the Board) before they can be sold or distributed in Hong Kong. The Government has introduced various measures to expedite the registration of pharmaceutical products in recent years. Since 2015, legislative amendments relating to new chemicals or biological entities (NCEs) could be made via the negative vetting procedure. The Board also implemented the Enhanced Procedures for Registration of New Drugs in 2018, under which the time required for processing application for registration of pharmaceutical products is generally shortened by two to three months. As at February 2021, the DH had handled 68 pharmaceutical products containing NCEs since the implementation of the Enhanced Procedures.

On drug subsidy, the HA supports needy patients (including those with uncommon disorders) to receive drug treatment through the recurrent funding from the Government, the SF and the CCF Medical Assistance Programmes.

Currently, the HA makes use of the designated funding from the Government to provide enzyme replacement therapy under a special drug programme for treatment of eligible patients with specific lysosomal storage disorders.

Taking into account the increasing demand for ultra-expensive drug treatments for uncommon disorders, the Government and the HA introduced a CCF Medical Assistance Programme in August 2017 to provide subsidy for eligible patients to purchase ultra-expensive drugs (including those for treating uncommon disorders) (the CCF Ultra-expensive Drugs Programme). The HA's Expert Panels will assess the clinical benefits of drug treatments under the relevant arrangement on a case-by-case basis according to the clinical conditions of individual patients and the established clinical guidelines. The HA will also liaise with pharmaceutical companies on providing risk sharing or capping programmes to facilitate early access to drug treatment for specific patients.

The following table sets out the number of applications approved and the amount of subsidies granted for the drugs under the CCF Ultra-expensive Drugs Programme since its implementation in August 2017 (as at December 31, 2020):

Ultra-expensive drug and clinical indication	Number of applications approved	Amount of subsidies granted (\$million)
1. Eculizumab for Paroxysmal Nocturnal Haemoglobinuria (Note 1)	41	161.39
2. Eculizumab for Atypical Haemolytic Uraemic Syndrome (Note 2)	3	11.04
3. Nusinersen for Spinal Muscular Atrophy (Note 3)	31	85.35
4. Tafamidis for Familial Amyloid Polyneuropathy (Note 4)	2	1.72
5. Dinutuximab beta for Neuroblastoma (Note 5)	—	—
Total	77	259.50

Note 1: From August 1, 2017 to December 31, 2020. The drug and specified clinical indication have been repositioned to the SF safety net since July 11, 2020. The application statistics includes the applications approved under the SF since that date.

Note 2: From November 25, 2017 to December 31, 2020

Note 3: From September 25, 2018 to December 31, 2020

Note 4: From July 13, 2019 to December 31, 2020

Note 5: From December 29, 2020 to December 31, 2020

(5) The HA has all along been keeping abreast of clinical evidence and technological development on treatment options for uncommon disorders worldwide, and has exchanges with overseas and Mainland experts on issues of common concern from time to time, so as to learn from each other's experiences and promote service development.

The HA has an established mechanism for regular evaluation of new drugs and review of the coverage of the safety net. Based on scientific and

clinical evidence, the process evaluates the safety, efficacy and cost-effectiveness of drugs, taking into account relevant considerations, such as the views of professionals and patient groups, so as to procure drugs that meet the statutory requirements and relevant quality standards for patients' use, and to ensure equitable and effective use of limited public resources in the provision of appropriate treatment and support for patients.

The HA will continue to pay close attention to international medical researches on uncommon disorders and the development of healthcare policies on uncommon disorders in other regions. It will also review the Drug Formulary through the established mechanism and include suitable self-financed drugs in the scope of subsidy under the safety net so as to benefit more patients in need.