

TRANSPORT NEWS – December 2002

C for T speech at seminar on "Barrier-free" Environment

The following is a speech entitled "Transport for All" delivered on December 5 by the Commissioner for Transport, Mr Robert Footman, at the 10th Anniversary of the Rehabilitation Alliance Hong Kong Seminar on "Barrier-free" Environment at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University:

Sir Harry, Mr. Cheng Kin-fai, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Introduction

I am most privileged to be invited to join all of you today at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Rehabilitation Alliance and to deliver an opening address to kick off the Seminar on Barrier Free Environment organized by the Alliance. I would like firstly to congratulate Sir Harry, Mr. Cheng Kin-fai and his Committee in leading the Rehabilitation Alliance to pass through its first decade so successfully. The Alliance, as we all know, has represented with great success the interests of people with disabilities in Hong Kong. Under the guidance of Sir Harry and the chairmanship of Mr. Cheng, the Alliance has made significant contributions to career training and provision of voluntary services for people with disabilities, as well as public education on the need for a barrier-free environment. Today's seminar is just another example of the distinguished achievements of the Alliance.

In October this year, I attended the Osaka Forum with Sir Harry and Mr. Cheng Kin-fai in Japan. At the Forum, I shared with delegates from Hong Kong and from countries of the Asia Pacific Region our new vision for provision of transport services and facilities for people with disabilities, that is, the vision of "Transport for All". Today, I would like to take this opportunity to share with you again our new vision. My talk today will briefly cover government policy and legislation, our current approach and our new vision of "Transport for All", with some observations.

Government Policy and Institutional Arrangements

Access and transport are priority issues for people with a disability. The Hong Kong SAR Government's policy objectives are stipulated in our 1995 White Paper on Rehabilitation - Equal Opportunities and Full Integration: A Better Tomorrow for All. They are to ensure:

- * The development of a barrier-free physical environment, which permits access to all buildings and facilities for all people with disability; and
- * The development of a transport system which includes provisions to meet the needs of people with a disability so as to enhance their ability to move around at will in society and to facilitate their full participation and integration into the community.

The Transport Department is one of the agencies that oversees and implements the above two policy objectives, through provision of accessible public transport services and on-street facilities. We observe the Disabilities Discrimination Ordinance which lays down the legislative foundation that all transport services and facilities should be accessible to people with disabilities. We also published the Transport Planning and Design Manual in June 2001, after consultation with representatives of people with disabilities, to provide general guidelines on the design and provision of facilities for planners and designers to follow.

On partnership, the Transport Department set up a Working Group on Access to Public Transport by People with Disabilities to provide a forum for the exchange of views among representatives of people with disabilities, public transport operators and relevant government departments, and discussions of issues of common concern. The Working Group also identifies new initiatives and monitors implementation of agreed programmes. I am grateful to the support rendered by the Rehabilitation Alliance to the Working Group. Transport Department also participates in the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee Access Sub-committee to work with other government departments, and the disabled community to make our city barrier-free and accessible. We also cooperate closely with the Panel on Transport and the Panel on Welfare Services of the Legislative Council as well as the Equal Opportunities Commission to promote accessible transport.

Current Approach in Promoting Disability Rights for Accessibility to Transport

At present, the transport needs of people with disabilities are met in the following ways:

* public transport and railway operators are encouraged to make their vehicles and services accessible as far as is practicable. With our encouragement, our franchised bus operators have introduced about 2,000 wheelchair accessible franchised buses with fixed ramp, or about one-third of all franchised buses. We aim to increase the number of wheelchair accessible buses to about 3,200 by 2006. On taxis, we have also introduced tailor-made facilities for people with visual impairment. At present, over 16,000 or 90% of our taxis are installed with a Braille and tactile vehicle registration number plate inside the vehicle compartment. By 2004, virtually all our 18,000 taxis will be equipped with this plate. Since October 2001, about 6,700 newly registered taxis in Hong Kong have been installed with talking taxi meters. These meters can announce taxi service and taxi fare related messages in Cantonese, Putonghua or English. The number of taxis with talking taxi meters is now increasing progressively.

* special transport services are provided for those who are unable to use public transport. There are two main types: center-based transport and the Rehabus. The former caters for people attending rehabilitation institutions and special schools. The Rehabus service is a territory-wide transport network comprising a fleet of about 90 wheelchair accessible buses. The network offers scheduled and feeder services on fixed routes and dial-a-ride service to serve some 490,000 passenger trips a year. These two types of special transport services are funded by the Government;

* a range of concessions are also provided for drivers with physical disabilities who drive their own vehicles. These include exemption from payment of driving licence fee, annual vehicle licence fee, vehicle first registration tax, tolls for using government tunnels and bridges, duty on hydrocarbon oil and parking fee for on-street metered parking spaces; and

* Government provides accessible traffic facilities like over 10,000 electronic audible traffic signals and dropped kerbs at crossings.

Transport for All - A New Vision for Promoting Disability Rights for Accessibility to Public Transport Services and Traffic Facilities

We are determined to provide a barrier-free and accessible street environment and accessible transport services for people with disabilities. As indicated above, we have made good progress. But our present approach is rather demand responsive and does not provide a clear way to facilitate building a common consensus among stakeholders. Furthermore, we want to adopt a strategic approach to plan and provide accessible transport services and barrier-free environment to all in our society. Our new vision, "Transport for All", is designed to develop a clear concept of the way ahead and consensus among stakeholders, and to help us all understand and deliver our objectives to the best of our abilities.

Under this umbrella, we are formulating a "5-Betters Strategy" to provide clear directions for planning and implementation. The "5-Betters Strategy" includes :

* Better accessible transport services for all - the target results under this strategy include further expansion of accessible franchised bus, railway, ferry and rebus services as well as wheelchair accessible taxi services.

* Better public transport infrastructure and facilities for all - which covers provision of accessible public transport interchanges, bus termini, taxi stands, ferry piers and railway stations and other ancillary facilities which would facilitate easy interchange with public transport services, not only for people with disabilities but for all.

* Better streets and pedestrian areas for all - we aim to provide better pedestrian facilities like electronic audible traffic signals by 2004 at all signalized crossings, tactile guide paths to connect major public transport interchanges and community facilities for people with disabilities, more lifts at footbridges and more extensive pedestrian areas in the coming decade.

* Better planning standards, guidelines and procedures, including updating our Transport Planning and Design Manual. We will also revisit, review and revise our planning manual and guidelines regularly to meet changing needs and new circumstances.

* Better partnership for actions and results - this includes developing existing advisory channels on new initiatives and new areas of needs, promotion of the concept of "Transport for All" and partnering with Hong Kong organisations including of course the Rehabilitation

Alliance Hong Kong to promote disability rights for accessibility to transport.

I hope that the new approach will give us some real motivation and meaningful concrete achievements in the years ahead.

Comments

I have given a broad account of our approach, and would like to make a number of comments :

* The various formal elements I have described, policy, legislation, institutional arrangements and so on, are vital components in promoting real progress.

* Planning standards and guidelines give concrete expression to policy and legislative intent. If colleagues at the front line have clear standards and guidelines, then the facilities will be built properly, at little if any expense, from the start. Retrofitting changes is much more difficult.

* Where something is needed on a large scale, it helps to develop a programmed approach, with clear targets for completion. We have been able to do this for dropped kerbs, electronic audible traffic signals, and Braille plates in taxi cabs.

* Similarly, if a more open-ended approach is needed, we have found developing an ongoing programme helps us - for example we need to develop more tactile paths, and a programmed rather than piece meal approach will help us focus on this task, and deliver more.

* We hope that the new vision "Transport for All" will help motivate, energize, and enhance our actual achievements.

* Finally, partnership is vital. Partnership with friends and representatives from those with disabilities has helped us in Transport Department to be more responsive to needs. Two examples : first, "Transport for All" was in fact suggested to us in one of my meetings with representatives from those with disabilities, and I am delighted that Cheung Kin-fai who made the suggestion is here today. Second, representatives from other associations took me on a check walk in Hong Kong to see for myself the difficulties faced on our streets. Their positive approach, and their understanding of the problems we face, are very powerful motivations for me and my staff, and help us to make real and meaningful progress.

Conclusion

With the new vision of "Transport for All" outlined above, the Transport Department is determined to strive for better accessible transport system for people with disabilities and the entire community in the coming decade. However, it is not an easy task. Much work remains to be done to implement and materialize the new vision. Concerned parties also need to understand that there will be difficulties which have to be resolved jointly by all

stakeholders. Mutual communication, understanding and compromising are key words for the success of the new vision. Though there are difficulties, our commitment for upholding disability rights for accessibility to transport services and traffic facilities will not fade away. Thank you.

Pedestrian Flashing Green Countdown Display on trial begins

Do you know how much time is left for pedestrians crossing the road when the 'Green man' light is flashing? From December 5 onwards you may get the answer if you are crossing at one of the 10 locations where a Pedestrian Flashing Green Countdown Display (PFGCD) system is in place under a Transport Department trial scheme.

Introducing the details of the trial scheme at a press briefing, Senior Engineer of Transport Department, Mr Li Chi-chiu said: "66 sets of PFGCD in two models have been attached to the traffic lights at 10 signalized crossings in the territory to evaluate the behaviour of pedestrians crossing the road with traffic light facilities.

When the 'Green man' light starts to flash, the PFGCD will countdown to show the remaining green time concurrently

City University of Hong Kong has been commissioned to evaluate the benefit and effectiveness of the PFGCD in reducing the risk of road crossing. An opinion survey and observations on the behavioral change of pedestrians will be conducted and analyzed during and after the trial, which will end in July 2003.

Locations of the 10 signalized crossings are as follows:

District	Location
-----	-----
Mongkok	Nathan Road/Mongkok Road
Cheung Sha Wan	Cheung Sha Wan Road/Nam Cheong Street
Kwun Tong	Hong Ning Road/Kwun Tong Road
San Po Kong	Tai Shing Street/Tung Tau Tsuen Road
North Point	King's Road/Tin Chong Street
Central	Queen's Road Central/Pedder Street
Tsuen Wan	Sha Tsui Road/Chuen Lung Street
Kwai Chung	Kwai Yan Road o/s Kwai Fong MTR Station
Tseung Kwan O	Po Fung Road/Mau Yip Road
Tai Po	Kwong Fuk Road/Po Heung Street

TD to issue Group 1 Private Driving Instructor Licences

The Transport Department (TD) will from December 19 invites applications for the issue of 173 Group 1 Private Driving Instructor's (PDI) licences (for driving instruction of private cars and light goods vehicles).

A TD spokesman said: "It is the existing driver-training policy to maintain a stable and sufficient supply of PDIs. Following extensive consultations with the trade and LegCo Transport Panel in 1999 and 2000, it has been agreed that new licences will be issued to replenish the loss through natural wastage in the following ways:

- * the average number of valid Group 1 PDI licences in 1999 (i.e. 1,050 licences) will be used as a reference;
- * when the number of valid Group 1 PDI licences falls below about 90 per cent of the reference, new licences will be issued to replenish the supply; and
- * the latest review shows that the average number of Group 1 PDI licences was 877 during May to October 2002; therefore 173 licences are being issued now."

He said: "Any person who possesses a valid full driving licence for Class 1 and 2 (private car and light goods vehicle) continuously for at least three consecutive years preceding the application and has not been convicted of any offence under Section 36 (causing death by dangerous driving) or 39 (drink driving) of the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374) during the past five years preceding the application will be eligible."

The spokesman said to maintain fairness among all applicants, there was already a provision in the existing law that if the number of eligible applicants exceeded the total of 173 Group 1 PDI licences to be issued, a ballot would be held and each application would be allotted a priority number.

Subject to the availability of the Group 1 PDI licences to be issued, applicants who meet the qualification stipulated above will be invited to take the test according to their balloted priority number.

The test is divided into two parts: the written test and the road test. Only applicants who have passed the written test will be invited to take the road test. Applicants who pass both parts will be qualified for the Group 1 PDI licences.

Application Forms (TD560) and the Guidance Notes for Applicants (TD564) are available at the District Offices and also the TD offices. Blank application form can be downloaded through the TD website (<http://www.info.gov.hk/td>). Xeroxed copy of blank application form can also be used for filling the necessary data by the applicants for submission.

Applications may be submitted by post to:

Transport Department
Driving Services Section
19 Pui Ching Road
Homantin, Kowloon

Completed forms can also be sent by hand (not necessarily in person) to any of the collection boxes at one of the following locations:

(location A)
Transport Department
Hong Kong Region Driving Test Appointment Office
3/F, United Centre
95 Queensway
Admiralty, Hong Kong

(location B)
Transport Department
Kowloon Region Driving Test Appointment Office
2/F, Cheung Sha Wan Government Offices Building
303 Cheung Sha Wan Road, Kowloon

(location C)
Transport Department
Driving Services Section
19 Pui Ching Road
Homantin, Kowloon

Applications must be submitted before 5 pm on January 10, 2003. For applications submitted by post, the stamped date will be taken as the date of application.

The spokesman added that TD staff, including Driving Examiners, would be allowed to apply for the PDI licence but would be tested by external examiners and, if successful in obtaining PDI licences, would be debarred from practicing until they have retired.

The number of Group 1 PDI licences will be reviewed again in about two years' time.

TD awarded electronic audible traffic signal contract

On behalf of the Transport Department (TD), the Government Supplies Department awarded the contract for supply and installation of the electronic audible traffic signal (e-ATS) at a sum of \$32.8 million to Siemens Ltd on December 20, after the trial of products by different manufacturers from Germany, Canada, Austria and Sweden since

March 2000.

A TD spokesman said: "The e-ATS, equipped to adjust its output sound level automatically in response to the ambient noise level, will provide adequate sound to guide the visually impaired at the pedestrian crossings while minimizing the interference to the nearby residents."

He added that the installation would be divided into two phases: about 7000 units of existing electromechanical type audible traffic signal would be replaced by e-ATS by September 2003; another 3000 units of e-ATS would then be installed on existing pedestrian crossings without audible traffic signal (ATS) by April 2004.

Presently, 66 percent (or 954) of the 1445 signalised junctions with pedestrian crossings are installed with some 7000 units of ATS. They generate "tic-tac" sound at a fixed output level.

As the output level of ATS is fixed, the visually impaired may find the sound level inadequate when the ambient is noisy and the nearby residents may find the sound level too high when the environment is relatively quiet. The ambient noise responsive feature of the e-ATS, thus, addresses the concerns of both the visually impaired and local residents.

Trial scheme for drivers carrying people with mobility disabilities extended

Transport Department (TD) announced on December 31 that the trial scheme for drivers carrying people with mobility disabilities to park their vehicles at designated parking spaces in government multi-storey carparks will be extended for one year until December 31, 2003.

A TD spokesman said: "Under the trial scheme, a parking certificate which is valid until December 31, 2003 will be issued to the applicant or his/her family member with mobility disability who must own a vehicle. Holders of the valid certificate must carry their family members with mobility disabilities as stated in the application when making use of the certificate."

He said the family members with mobility disabilities might include the applicant's grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, spouse, son, daughter, adopted son or adopted daughter.

He also reminded that the parking certificate for drivers carrying people with mobility disabilities was not transferable.

Application form and "notes to help you" are available at TD's licensing offices and can

be downloaded from the website (www.info.gov.hk/td). Enquiries can be made at Government hotline 1823 or TD at 2829 5326 during office hours.

Source : Information & Public Relations Unit