

Subcommittee to Study the Transport Needs of and Provision of Concessionary Public Transport Fares for Persons with Disabilities

Meeting on 22 May 2007

Equal Opportunities Commission's (EOC) Submission on Rehabus Service

Transport Policy for People with Disabilities ¹

1. Hong Kong's transport policy for people with disabilities (PWDs) is to enhance their mobility, thereby facilitating participation and integration in the community. The Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation (HKSAR) has operated, using government subvention, the Rehabus service since 1980. The principles adopted by the Government to fulfill this policy are –

- (i) PWDs who can make use of public transport should be encouraged and assisted to do so;
- (ii) public transport operators should be encouraged to provide transport services accessible to PWDs where necessary and possible;
- (iii) the Rehabus service should continue to be provided for PWDs who cannot utilise public transport services and have no alternative means of transport; and
- (iv) the average cost incurred by PWDs on transport should generally be comparable to that of able-bodied person.

Rehabus Service

2. Services offered by the Rehabus cover four categories, namely Scheduled Route Service (SR), Dial-a-Ride Service (DAR), Pooled Dial-a-Ride Service and Feeder Service, which allow users to choose the appropriate services needed. Currently, the Rehabus fleet consists of 95 buses serving a network of 61 fixed routes and 3 feeder routes as well as DAR every day. 62 buses are allocated for SR service while 24 buses are for DAR service at present.

¹ HKSAR Government's press release on "Transport services and subsidies provided for disabled person" dated November 21, 2001.

Waiting Time for SR

3. According to information provided by the Government, as at end February 2007, no PWDs having no alternative means of transport to travel to their work place were put on the waiting list for SR service. For those PWDs who can use public transport or have access to other means of transport but do apply for SR service, their average waiting time is about two months.² PWDs awaiting SR service was 47 as at end February 2007.³

4. It is a known fact that not all franchised buses have ramps or low-floor facilities. On the other hand, not all routes are designated with accessible buses. PWDs who use clutches or other walking aids may find it difficult, for example, to walk a long distance from their home to the nearby bus stop and to board a franchised bus without such facilities. However, they are not regarded as PWDs having no alternative means of transport. The Commission is concern that the 47 PWDs awaiting SR service may have a genuine need for SR service and it is not met due to insufficient provisions.

DAR Orders Declined

5. In 2006, the rehabus DAR service served 320,285 passenger trips and received 88,213 orders for service. There were 8,173 orders declined (representing about 9% of the total orders received) and about half of them were concentrated in the peak periods.⁴ The Commission considers that the situation needs to be improved. Just like any other members of the community, PWDs need to travel to their work place, school, leisure venue, etc. on time during the peak periods. The stated policy objective of facilitating PWDs participation and integration in the community is considered not fulfilled if most or a substantial number of orders continued to be declined during the peak periods.

Societal Changes

6. Currently, SR service provides scheduled round-trip transport service to PWDs going to work or to school on a regular interval basis. Each route covers two sections, i.e. the morning and the afternoon sections, and operates from 06:30am to 10:00am and from

² Legislative Council's *Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2007-08 – Controlling Officer's Reply to Initial Written Question* reply serial number HWFB(WW)002.

³ Legislative Council's *Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2007-08 – Controlling Officer's Reply to Initial Written Question* reply serial number HWFB(WW)148.

⁴ Legislative Council's *Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2007-08 – Controlling Officer's Reply to Supplementary Question* reply serial number S-HWFB(WW)10.

03:00pm to 07:00pm respectively (Mondays to Saturdays). However, recent trends have seen a move towards a 24-hour society. Shops are opening for longer hours. Leisure facilities and restaurants are also opening later. More and more core employment opportunities rely on shift work arrangements. The inflexible service hours of SR services may mean that some PWDs who rely on it may be excluded from employment opportunities. Thus, the Commission considers that the service hours of rebus services need to be reviewed from time to time taking into account the various societal changes and the consequential changes in needs for rebus services.

Equal Opportunities Commission

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