

### Motion 3

**The government should collaborate with transport operators to offer child concession fares for specific transportation means**

**Child Councillors:**

Andrina Au Ching Lam  
Chan Miu Yan  
GHHONDEY, Ashmi  
Jiao Bi Kun  
Kwan Eugene Yu Hin  
Lam Chung Yat  
Lam Wing Yen Joyce  
Lee Ho Ting Aida Belle  
Lo Ming Sum  
Sum Hiu Yi Natalie  
Tang Tsz Him  
Tang Wing Lam Natalie  
Tsang Tsz Man Essence  
Tse Parry  
Wong Hin Chi Anson  
Wong Ho Yee Fara  
Yeung Chin Mong

26 September 2015

*(English translation provided by the Centre for Translation  
in association with the Translation Programme, Hong Kong Baptist University)*

### **Motion 3:**

#### **Urge the government to collaborate with transport operators to offer child concession fares for specific transportation means**

### **Foreword**

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the term “children” refers to all persons aged below 18. However, as of today Hong Kong only offers half-price fare concessions to children aged 3 to 11, a practice that is arguably unfair to children aged between 12 and 17. Also, as children’s travel expenses are borne by the family, such expenses may directly affect the chance of children joining activities beyond the home, hence affecting their development. Therefore, our group hopes that by moving this motion, we will contribute towards making fare concessions available to all children of Hong Kong, and so help children fully realise their rights to development through addressing deficiencies in the present system.

### **Definition**

#### **1. Criteria for Inclusion as a Designated Transport Means**

With a view to benefiting the greatest number of children, our group suggests that four criteria should be taken into consideration when choosing the means of transportation: 1. The transportation should be a mainstream means of public transport in Hong Kong; 2. It should satisfy the basic transportation needs of children, thus all premium services (taxi, 1st class seats on the ferry) should not be included; 3. The transportation means is essential to children; 4. If more than one means of transportation is available for the same route, we suggest that fare concessions should be implemented by the transportation means with the highest capacity so as to benefit a greater number of children. The transportation means that fulfils the greatest number of these criteria should be given priority consideration, followed by other transportation means.

#### **2. The Definition of Concessionary Fare**

The concessionary fare is calculated by dividing the amount specified for the adult fare by half, then rounding up to the closest dollar.

### **Present Situations**

#### **1. The Present Situation of Fare Concessions**

Presently, the MTR offers half-price fare concessions to children aged 3 to 11, and children aged 0 to 2 may travel for free. Through the MTR Student Travel Scheme, all eligible full-time day course students aged 12-25 studying in a recognised institution in Hong Kong, and who possess a Personalised Octopus with “Student Status” can enjoy half-price concessionary fare. While the concession can undoubtedly lighten students’ financial pressures, the scheme does not cover children who have dropped out of school.

Currently, buses and ferries offer similar concession models with children aged 3 to 11 entitled to a half-price fare concession and children aged 12 to 17 required to pay the full fare. For minibuses, all children are required to pay the full fare (with the exception of children aged 0-2 who do not take up a seat).

Generally speaking, mainstream public transport means currently offer fare concessions to children aged 0 to 11. The concession does not cover children aged 12 to 17.

## **2. Student Travel Subsidy**

The Student Travel Subsidy Scheme was implemented in 1988 to replace the Student Travel Card Scheme that came before it. The scheme provides travel subsidies to needy full-time students receiving formal primary or secondary education, or attending a full-time day course up to first degree level in a recognised institution, residing beyond 10 minutes walking distance from school and traveling to school by public transport to cover part of the traveling expenses from their residence to the place of study.

According to statistics on the Hong Kong Government website, in the year 2014-2015, with the exception of non-child post-secondary students, a total of 152,452 applicants have successfully applied for the Student Travel Subsidy, while over 10 thousand applications have been rejected. In the population census conducted in 2011, by mid-2015 the projected child population in Hong Kong would be around 1.17 million, thus we estimate that only 13% of all children would benefit from the scheme.

Also, according to the questionnaire survey conducted by our group, even after parents have applied for a travel subsidy for their children, travel expenses remain a heavy burden for a family's finances. It is evident that the present system is less than effective in lightening the burdens of travel expenses for a family. Our group will present the details of our questionnaire study in the following section.

## **3. Questionnaire Study**

From 25 August to 3 September 2015, we successfully interviewed 400 children and 170 adults via online questionnaire. According to the results, 86% of interviewed children needed to take public transport to school or to participate in extra-curricular activities; with the exception of one respondent, all children living in outlying islands took public transport regularly. Also, nearly half of the interviewed children said they spent on average HK\$80 or above on travel each week and many of them were required to travel to another district for study reasons. It is obvious that most children spend a significant sum on travel.

Also, a respective 88.6%, 70% and 47.6% of interviewed children said they often take the MTR, the bus and the minibus. This indicates that these transportation means are essential for children and are in high demand.

Asked whether they agreed that transportation fare concessions should be adopted, 91% of interviewed children took an affirmative attitude indicative of a general consensus; while 80% of children believed the proposal could help lighten the financial burden of their families.

Regarding this financial burden, 36% of interviewed parents rated the financial burdens imposed by their children's travel expenses at 3 (on a scale of 1-4, with 4 being the highest). Over 80% of parents expressed a willingness to allow their children to join more extra-

curricular activities or go out to play after the implementation of travel fare concessions, which would surely promote children's rights to development. Just as we saw with the children's questionnaire, 99% of parents agreed with the implementation of fare concessions.

The group also interviewed adults who had no children and as many as 85% of them expressed the view that transport fares should be lowered for children aged 12 to 17. This is a clear indication that most in the society agree to the implementation of such concessions.

#### **4. Rights to Development**

Our group found that transport fares were factored into the parents' considerations when they allowed or arranged for children to join extra-curricular activities. If for the reason of travel expenses parents limit their children's opportunities of joining extra-curricular activities, children may miss out on many valuable experiences and their physical and mental development may be hampered as a result. This constitutes a detriment to the children's rights to development.

#### **5. Examples of Local Transportation Concessions**

In Hong Kong, similar travel concessionary schemes are provided for specific persons in need. The government subsidises the Government Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities, which allows elderly people aged 65 or above and eligible persons with disabilities to travel on designated means of public transport at \$2 per trip any time, including the MTR, buses, green minibuses and ferries. The scheme aims to help build a caring and inclusive society by encouraging these groups to participate more in community activities.

#### **6. Examples of Child Transport Fare Concessions Worldwide**

Examples of transport fare concessions for children are common around the world. In Sweden, school students aged 12 to 25 may enjoy half-price concessions when buying the Eurail Sweden Pass and 20% discount on bus fare. In London, children aged 11 to 16 may take the bus or the tube for free, and young people aged 16 to 18 may enjoy a half-price fare concession when using the Oyster Card; students aged 18 or below may travel free of charge. In Seoul, students aged 13 to 19 using the Transportation Card may enjoy 40% to 50% discount on the full adult fare. Transport fare concessions for children are also implemented in a number of other places including Japan, Taiwan and Denmark. These examples from around the world are illustrative of the emphasis that different countries place on children's rights, as children are an important asset to society.

### **Suggestions**

#### **1. Reform Present Social Values**

To allow all children of Hong Kong to be treated equally, the Government and the public should place children's welfare as the top priority, so that children can fully realise their rights. Therefore, the Government and the public should not only emphasise economic interests but also take children's needs into full consideration. Only by changing the present unitary values can a balance be achieved. If the Government can shoulder the responsibility

and ensure children's rights are given full expression, a fair and child-friendly society will not be just a dream but a realizable future.

## **2. Transportation means included in the scheme**

We suggest that four main criteria (see definition) be adopted in choosing the means of transportation. According to the criteria, the following transportation means should be included: MTR, franchise buses, ferries (designated ferry services) and green minibuses.

## **3. Leveraging the Octopus Payment System**

Octopus is a mainstream payment system in Hong Kong. Our group suggests that at the initial phase of the scheme, the government should leverage the strengths of the Octopus system to offer fare concessions to all children aged below 18 who possess a personalised Octopus card. Also, our group suggests that at the initial phase of the scheme the government and transport operators should collaborate with the Octopus Hong Kong to implement the concessionary scheme systematically, so that the correct amount of fare can be automatically deducted according to the Octopus card type. To prevent non-eligible persons from abusing the concession and to facilitate the government and operators to calculate the subsidy amount, cash payment for fares is not suggested at the initial stages of the scheme. The concessions for each trip will be automatically deducted by the Octopus Hong Kong for greatest ease of implementation.

## **4. Caring for the Minority**

During the implementation, there may be occasions where the scheme is abused or its original intent is distorted. First, regarding the matter of abuse, currently no usage limits have been imposed on the fare concessions offered to children aged 3 to 11. Similarly, the new scheme will not impose any usage limits and children will have the right to enjoy fare concessions for any purpose or reason of travel; such usage should not be considered as an abuse of their rights at all. If children should use such fare concessions for illegal purposes we trust the law enforcement bodies will deal with the matter appropriately and act in the best interests of all children. Regarding concerns that actual practice may result in distortion of the scheme's original intent, our group suggests that certain flexibility be adopted in the implementation of the concessionary scheme. If any issues should arise, amendments should be made in lieu of the actual circumstances and limitations, with an aim toward striving for fair concessions for all children. We also believe that should such issues of abuse or illegal use arise, they will be of an extreme and isolated nature only, and should not constitute a major obstacle for the scheme.

## **Conclusion**

Transportation expenses take up a significant part of a child's daily expenditures, and may hinder their social engagement, affect their quality of family life, and slow down their personal development. We believe that through implementing half-price transport fare concessions for children, we can lighten the burden of travel expenses for all children. Only then can all children be treated equally and so be encouraged to engage with the community and realise their rights to development. Therefore, the 17 child councillors of our group urge the government to collaborate with transport operators to offer concessionary fares for specific transportation means for children.

## **References**

Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency  
“Student Travel Subsidy Scheme Summary of Statistics”  
<http://www.wfsfaa.gov.hk/sfo/tc/statistics/travels1.htm>

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government Census and Statistic Department  
“Population Estimates”  
[http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp150\\_tc.jsp?tableID=002&ID=0&productType=8](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp150_tc.jsp?tableID=002&ID=0&productType=8)

MTR Corporation  
“MTR Student Travel Scheme (Academic year 2015 / 2016)”  
[http://www.mtr.com.hk/ch/customer/tickets/student\\_travel\\_scheme.html](http://www.mtr.com.hk/ch/customer/tickets/student_travel_scheme.html)

Labour and Welfare Bureau  
“Government Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities”  
[http://www.lwb.gov.hk/fare\\_concession/index\\_c.html](http://www.lwb.gov.hk/fare_concession/index_c.html)

Kowloon Motor Bus Co. (1933) Ltd.  
“Ways and Advantages of Using Octopus”  
<http://www.kmb.hk/tc/services/octopus.html>

## **Acknowledgements**

Hon. James To Kun Sun, Legislative Council Member

Professor Ngai Ngan Pun, Department of Social Work, Chinese University of Hong Kong

Ms Lai Wan Yiu, Social Worker, Alliance for Children Development Rights

Kowloon Motor Bus Co. (1933) Ltd

New World First Ferry Services Limited

All children and members of the public who answered the questionnaire