INTRODUCTION

13.1 One of the basic requirements in achieving the overall policy objective of integrating people with disabilities into the community is the introduction of measures to facilitate their mobility. This can be achieved by rendering public places accessible to people with disabilities and the provision of special services or adaptation of the existing services, so that they can receive education and training, enter into employment and take part in social and recreational activities. The policy objectives in respect of access and transport for people with disabilities are to ensure the development of -

(a) a barrier-free physical environment, which permits access to all buildings and facilities for all people with disabilities; and

(b) a transport system which includes provisions to meet the needs of people with disabilities so as to enhance their ability to move around at will in society and to facilitate their full participation and integration into the community.

ACCESS


13.2 Since 1 August 1985, certain types of new buildings have been required to comply with relevant regulations under the Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123) including the Building (Planning) Regulations which stipulate, among other things, the standards for access for people with disabilities. The Building (Planning) Regulations and several related legislation were amended in September 1997 to incorporate the new obligatory requirements set out in the Design Manual: Barrier Free Access 1997 (Design Manual 1997). The Design Manual 1997 was promulgated in late 1997 to update the Design Manual: Access for the Disabled 1984 (Design Manual 1984). It stipulates obligatory and recommended design requirements for providing proper access to and appropriate facilities in a building, including new obligatory requirements on provision of facilities for hearing impaired and visually impaired persons.

13.3 To ensure compliance with the statutory building requirements, the Access for the Disabled Committee was set up under the Buildings Department in 1986 to consider applications to vary provisions related to the access of people with disabilities as stipulated in the Building (Planning) Regulations. After consulting relevant professional bodies and disability groups, the Department has re-organised the Committee with a view to taking a more pragmatic approach in considering applications for exemption from the provision of access for the disabled and ensuring that the Committee is widely represented by relevant disabled groups and persons who have the professional knowledge. In 1998, the Committee was renamed Advisory Committee on Barrier Free Access. The main objective of the new Advisory Committee is to offer advice to the Building Authority as to whether reasonable access will be provided in the new/existing building that will undergo major alternations. Apart from representatives of relevant government departments, the Advisory Committee comprises representatives of the physically handicapped, visually impaired and hearing impaired.
Government Buildings

13.4 As a general policy, all new government buildings are designed in accordance with the Design Manual 1997. In addition, when fitting out government buildings such as District Offices and Immigration Offices that are frequented by the general public, special facilities for people with disabilities are provided subject to structural feasibility.

13.5 With regard to government buildings completed before the Design Manual 1997, a two-pronged approach is taken to improve accessibility. While certain number of government buildings such as post offices, health centres and magistracies will be selected for modifications, improvements are incorporated in the continuing refurbishment programmes of government buildings. By the end of 1998, over 65 premises had been modified since the publication of the Design Manual 1997. In addition, improvement works are being carried out for 49 premises found to be in need of modification in 1998-99.

Schools

13.6 The 1990 Rehabilitation Programme Plan recommended improving the access facilities of 44 existing ordinary schools provided with lifts. After the completion of a feasibility study on 20 short-listed schools by the Architectural Services Department, eight schools were considered to be suitable for conversion works under the School Improvement Programme. As at December 1998, two of these schools were included in Phase II of the School Improvement Programme, another one in Phase III and four would be scheduled for later phases. The remaining one would be demolished and was thus withdrawn from the programme.

13.7 In compliance with the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 487), all new standard design schools completed in May 1997 or later and existing schools under Phase II and later phases of the School Improvement Programme, if found to be structurally feasible, would be provided with access facilities for people with disabilities. As at December 1998, there were 22 new standard schools and 88 existing schools under the School Improvement Programme completed with such access facilities including lifts, ramps, disabled toilets, handrails and signages. The Education Department plans to provide access facilities in all structurally feasible schools through the School Improvement Programme by 2004 and in a total of 29 new standard schools by the end of the school year 1998/99.

13.8 Special schools with approved lifts are provided with the Lift Maintenance Grant under the Education Department to cover the expenses incurred from maintenance, electricity and minor repairs of the lifts. In the school year 1997/98, a total amount of $868,363 was granted to 18 special schools for maintenance of lifts and related expenses.

Public Housing Estates

13.9 The Housing Department is committed to providing access for people with disabilities in public housing estates. Provisions contained in the Design Manual 1997 have been incorporated in the design of new public housing estates since February 1998. All public amenities are designed to be as barrier-free as possible. Upon receipt of referrals from the Social Welfare Department, Department of Health and Hospital Authority, the Housing Department will carry out necessary modification works to housing units to meet the
special needs of disabled tenants. In case the proposed modification works could not be
carried out in a housing unit, the tenant can apply for transfer to another unit in which
modification works can be carried out. The general items of adaptation include the
 provision of easier access and toilet for wheelchair users, the installation of Braille lift panel
for visually impaired persons and the provision of flashing door bell for hearing impaired
persons. The Department would also consider proposals for modifying existing public
amenities upon request of disabled tenants.

**Hospital Facilities**

13.10 Most of the buildings/facilities under the management of the Hospital
Authority were designed before the publication of the Design Manual 1984. To facilitate
access for people with disabilities, modifications have been carried out as far as technically
and structurally feasible. All hospital buildings designed after the publication of the Design
Manual 1984 are in compliance with the stipulated requirements. For newly designed
hospitals, the Hospital Authority has adopted the design requirements promulgated in the
Design Manual 1997. For existing hospitals and those under construction, the Hospital
Authority would take note of disability groups’ specific recommendations and examine the
possibility of modifying the existing/planned provision of access facilities subject to the
availability of resources.

**Social and Recreational Facilities**

13.11 The Provisional Urban Council provides most recreational and cultural
facilities in the urban area. New facilities have purpose-built access for people with
disabilities. For example, in addition to providing physical access to people with
disabilities, certain seats in the Concert Hall and Grand Theatre of the Hong Kong Cultural
Centre are equipped with infra-red sound system to better serve hearing impaired audience
during performance. The Council has also been implementing an improvement programme
with a view to modifying existing access and facilities to cater for the special needs of people
with disabilities. As at December 1998, about 75% of the recreational and sports
facilities/venues of the Provisional Urban Council were provided with disabled toilets. In
addition, due consideration will be given to the incorporation of means of access for people
with disabilities in new projects under planning and construction.

13.12 Modification works for improving the accessibility of the Provisional
Regional Council’s sports facilities to people with disabilities have been carried out since
1987. Appropriate signs have also been put up at suitable locations. For projects under
planning or construction, architectural provision for people with disabilities will be
incorporated according to the Design Manual 1997. For improvement works to existing
recreational facilities, the Council will also explore the feasibility of introducing relevant
facilities for different disability groups. As at December 1998, about 89% of the
recreational and sports facilities/venues of the Provisional Regional Council were provided
with disabled toilets.

13.13 The Agriculture and Fisheries Department, which is responsible for Hong
Kong’s 41 474 hectares of country parks and special areas, also provides special facilities for
people with disabilities. Apart from 10 specially designed barbecue sites, many roadside
picnic sites are accessible to wheelchair users. There are a total of 25 accessible disabled
toilets in various country parks. In addition, all country park visitor centres, except for the Shing Mun Country Park Visitor Centre, are accessible to people with disabilities. In order to cater for the special needs of people with low vision, most of the maps and signages in country parks are in large-print characters. Designated picnic and barbecue sites are also provided with explicit signages in black and white and some of the sites have wooden “pai lau” erected at the entrance with large and bold characters of local names. Many of the roadside picnic and barbecue sites are also easily accessible and safe for visually impaired persons.

Highway and Pedestrian Facilities

13.14 Suitable highway and pedestrian facilities are provided to maximise the mobility of people with disabilities. These facilities include audible traffic signals (ATSs), dropped kerbs at at-grade crossings and taxi stands, ramps for footbridges and subways, and informative and warning signs. The provision of dropped kerbs at new at-grade crossings was standardised in 1981 and existing at-grade crossings will be modified to meet this standard during road maintenance and re-construction. Taking into account both construction and re-construction programmes, over 400 additional dropped kerbs at at-grade crossings was provided in 1998. Besides, access ramps for footbridges and subways have been made a standard provision since late 1985, subject to physical practicability. Traffic signs have been designed and installed to inform people with disabilities of facilities and access routes, and to warn vehicle drivers of their presence on roads. In addition, the Transport Department will consider launching a trial scheme on installing tactile guide path on streets.

13.15 The Transport Planning and Design Manual provides planning and design guidelines for traffic and transport systems. The Manual contains a chapter entitled “Facilities for the Disabled” which reminds designers to consider always the special needs of people with disabilities when designing highway or transport systems. Design details of the facilities are also provided in the chapter. The Manual and the guidelines are reviewed and updated as and when necessary by a working group.

13.16 The installation of ATSs at existing signal-controlled pedestrian crossings began in the early 1980s and the programme of installation has been carried out in consultation with representatives of visually impaired groups. With effect from 1 January 1994, ATSs are automatically included as part of the design of new signal-controlled pedestrian crossings in the urban areas and new towns. ATSs generally operate round-the-clock except in noise sensitive surroundings where ATSs operate from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. only. As at December 1998, 660 signalised junctions were installed with ATSs, with 187 on Hong Kong Island, 260 in Kowloon and 213 in the New Territories.

Hong Kong International Airport

13.17 The new Hong Kong International Airport at Chek Lap Kok commenced operation in July 1998. It is designed to be convenient and to provide barrier-free access for people with disabilities. Specially trained airport and airline staff are always ready to provide assistance. Special facilities are also available and clearly signposted. These facilities include telephones and induction loops for hearing impaired persons, unisex restrooms for wheelchair users and tactile guide paths for visually impaired persons. In
addition, car parks of the airport have reserved parking spaces for disabled drivers. These parking spaces are clearly marked and located conveniently next to the lifts. The Airport Authority has also published a leaflet on the existing special facilities and services for people with disabilities in the new airport. The Airport Authority will continue to review the needs for further improvements through regular channels.

Environmental Advisory Service

13.18 The Environmental Advisory Service was established in 1981 and incorporated as part of the Rehabaid Society in 1993. It is headed by a qualified architect with special knowledge on the access needs of people with disabilities and provides -

(a) an advisory service to government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on issues related to existing or future implications on the provision and design of buildings;

(b) a consultative service to clients with disabilities on modifications of existing living or working environments and appropriate building designs to suit specific needs; and

(c) an easily accessible data-bank on accessibility and other architectural issues concerning people with disabilities.

The amount of government subvention for the Environmental Advisory Service in 1998-99 was about $1.47 million.

TRANSPORT

13.19 To fulfil the policy objective in respect of transport for people with disabilities and to meet their special transport needs, the Review Committee recommended the following principles -

(a) people with disabilities who can make use of public transport should be encouraged and assisted to do so;

(b) public transport operators should provide transport services accessible to people with disabilities where necessary and possible;

(c) centre-based special transport services should be provided for people with disabilities attending centre-based rehabilitation services who cannot utilise public transport (excluding taxi) and have no alternative means of transport;

(d) Rehabus services should continue to be provided for people with disabilities who cannot utilise public transport services (excluding taxi) and have no alternative means of transport to attend activities such as open employment, training and education, social and recreational activities and medical appointments; and

(e) the average cost incurred by people with disabilities on transport should generally be comparable to that of able-bodied persons.
Public Transport Services

13.20 The Government and public transport operators are committed to improving public transport facilities so as to further promote the integration of people with disabilities into society. The Government organised four summit meetings on ways to improve the accessibility of the public transport system for people with disabilities between 1992 and 1996. These meetings provided useful forums for frank discussion among public transport operators, disability groups, rehabilitation organisations and government officials. In order to follow up issues arising from the meetings, a working group comprising representatives of the major public transport operators and various disability groups has been set up under the Transport Department since 1993. The working group provides another useful forum for members to exchange their views on public transport services. In addition, the working group will identify new initiatives and monitor the implementation of the proposed programmes to improve access of people with disabilities. It will also take the lead in tackling problems common to all public transport operators, such as establishing common standards and guidelines on the provision and modification of facilities for disabled passengers.

13.21 The Transport Department published a booklet in 1993 setting out the range of transport facilities available to people with disabilities. This booklet, which facilitates people with disabilities in planning their journeys, is updated as and when necessary. The second edition was published in 1996 and the third edition is under preparation.

13.22 Through the concerted efforts of the Government, public transport operators and the rehabilitation sector, public transport facilities have become more user-friendly and accessible to people with disabilities. In future design of transport facilities, the needs of people with disabilities will also be accommodated as far as practicable. Major improvements and initiatives undertaken by public transport operators as well as the progress on specific items as at December 1998 are summarised in Appendix 1.11. Details on the accessibility of various transport services are set out in the following paragraphs.

(a) Railway Services

13.23 The Kowloon Canton Railway (KCR) system is accessible to people with disabilities, including wheelchair users. A wide range of features have been provided in KCR stations and on trains. For people with mobility difficulties, lifts, ramps, disabled toilets and call bells are provided in stations and wheelchair parking spaces are provided on trains. For people with visual impairment, tactile yellow lines, guide paths, Braille buttons in lifts and handrails of staircases are provided in stations, and colour luminescence contrast grab-poles are provided on trains. For people with hearing impairment, electronic information displays and induction loops are provided in stations.

13.24 The Light Rail Transit is accessible to people with disabilities. Since 1998, all vehicles are installed with an on-board passenger information system which includes electronic information displays and a vehicle announcement system.

13.25 No special access provision for people with disabilities was made in planning the Urban Lines of the Mass Transit Railway (MTR) on the grounds of safety and effectiveness. However, a consultancy study carried out in 1993 concluded that the system could be improved to cater for the needs of people with disabilities without affecting its
safety and effectiveness. Through continuous collaboration with various disability groups, significant progress has been achieved in recent years to improve the accessibility of the system. For example, all MTR stations are now accessible to wheelchair users and tactile guide paths are installed for visually impaired persons except for stations undergoing major renovation works. As at December 1998, about 50% of the stations were installed with lifts and ramps and thus wheelchair users could reach the concourses from ground level without assistance from the station staff. Under the train modernisation programme, the existing trains will be provided with wheelchair parking spaces, colour-contrasted grab rails and door thresholds, and electronic visual displays. In addition, a Corporate Policy has been agreed and published to ensure continuous improvements of access facilities for people with disabilities.

13.26 The new Airport Railway, which comprises the Airport Express Line and the Tung Chung Line, provides necessary access facilities for people with disabilities.

(b) **Bus Services**

13.27 With the following features, buses become more accessible to people with disabilities -

(a) comparatively easy access with one or two small steps at the entrance and exit;
(b) low floors covered with non-slip material;
(c) step edges marked with contrasting colours;
(d) improved handrail arrangements;
(e) bright and clear destination display; and
(f) public announcement system.

To facilitate people with disabilities in using bus services, low floor buses with ramps and wheelchair space on board were introduced in 1996. As at December 1998, there were about 800 wheelchair accessible buses in service. Besides, franchised bus companies have started trial programmes of installing public announcement systems and electronic display systems on buses to meet the needs of the visually impaired and hearing impaired respectively. As at December 1998, about 150 buses were equipped with a public announcement system. The Transport Department will closely monitor the progress on the implementation of these initiatives and continue to work closely with franchised bus companies to further improve bus services for people with disabilities.

13.28 As at December 1998, there were about 5 900 buses in Hong Kong, of which about 5 000 buses were equipped with all or some of the features mentioned in paragraph 13.27 above. By the end of 2003, franchised bus companies will replace over 2 000 of the in-service buses for service improvements. Those features will be embodied on new buses as far as possible so as to cater for the needs of people with disabilities.

(c) **Ferry Services**

13.29 Ferry services provided by both the Star Ferry and the Hongkong and Yaumati Ferry are accessible to people with disabilities, including wheelchair users. Special entrances and call bells are provided at ferry piers. Gangplanks are made anti-skid and
grooves are made on the landing ramps to facilitate the movement of wheelchair users. The Star Ferry has also reserved spaces for people with disabilities, and the Hongkong and Yaumati Ferry is providing the same on conventional ferries. The Star Ferry provides people with mobility difficulties with a wheelchair parking space at the lower deck entrance of each ferry pier. The Hongkong and Yaumati Ferry offers half-fare discount to recipients of Disability Allowance travelling on inner harbour routes and this will be extended to outlying district routes with effect from September 1999.

13.30 Ferry services to the Mainland or Macau departing from the China Ferry Terminal and the Macau Ferry Terminal are accessible to people with disabilities, including wheelchair users. Special channels for immigration and custom clearance are provided for disabled passengers. Ferry staff are ready to offer assistance and where necessary, provide escort service between ticket check-in counters and ferries. Special seating arrangements on ferries will be offered to wheelchair-bound passengers upon request. Further assistance can be arranged by the Marine Department through the terminals’ hotlines. The Department will continue to work closely with ferry operators concerned with a view to improving services for disabled passengers.

(d) Tram Services

13.31 The tram service provided by the Hongkong Tramways is accessible to people with disabilities except for wheelchair users. Disabled passengers may board a tram via the front exit door with assistance provided by the tram driver. To cater for the needs of people with disabilities, the operator has provided additional vertical handrails in the lower deck of trams and an additional vertical handrail at the front exit gate, with specific handrails fitted with yellow tubing. In addition, larger rear stairs to the upper deck have been fitted to improve accessibility and upper deck seats with back handrails are being installed.

13.32 The peak tram service of the Peak Tramways is fully accessible to most people with disabilities. Special facilities such as ramps, special access gates and call bells are available on platforms. In addition, electronic information displays and audio announcement are provided for hearing impaired persons and visually impaired persons respectively. In case wheelchair users have difficulty in getting on or off the trams, the staff of the Peak Tramways are always ready to provide assistance to them.

(e) Taxi Service

13.33 Taxis provide the most convenient mode of transport for people with disabilities. Under the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374), wheelchairs, crutches or any other articles used by passengers as an aid to or means of mobility are carried free of charge on taxis. The Police also exercises discretion to allow taxi drivers to pick up and set down people with disabilities in restricted zones, provided that no hazard or major disruption is caused to other road users. To encourage taxi drivers to carry disabled passengers and to allay their fear of being prosecuted when picking up or setting down disabled passengers in restricted zones, a scheme whereby a certificate is issued by disabled passengers to taxi drivers was introduced in 1993. The scheme is well received and has combined with similar certificate issued to private car drivers.
(f) Public Light Bus Services

13.34 Most of the people with disabilities other than the wheelchair users can conveniently use the public light bus services. To assist people with speech impairment as well as other passengers such as non-Cantonese speaking persons to send requests for alighting from the vehicle, Green Mini Bus operators of new scheduled routes will be required to provide call bells on public light buses.

Centre-based Transport Services

13.35 Centre-based transport services are provided for those people with disabilities attending centre-based rehabilitation services or receiving education in special schools, who, as a result of their disabilities, cannot make use of public transport services, and have no alternative means of transport. In general, provision of centre-based transport services is on the basis of need and subject to individual assessment. For rehabilitation centres and special schools which can demonstrate such a need and that they have no alternative source of funding, the capital cost of centre-based vehicles can be met by the Lotteries Fund and other charitable funds whereas the recurrent cost will be subvented by the Government.

(a) Special Child Care Centres

13.36 Centre-based transport service is provided for disabled pre-schoolers attending special child care centres (SCCCs) as and when necessary. Hence, the two SCCC's for hearing impaired children are not provided with centre-based vehicles. As at December 1998, subvention for 20 centre-based vehicles and drivers was provided to SCCC's.

(b) Special Schools

13.37 The transport subsidy scheme under the Education Department provides full subvention for the salary of drivers employed by special schools. Other recurrent costs including fuel and maintenance costs are to be borne by parents of the pupils using the service. In the school year 1997/98, 41 special schools received subvention for drivers’ salary under the transport subsidy scheme. The Education Department will consider extending the present provision of transport subsidy to special schools for mildly mentally handicapped children and the existing hospital school, subject to the availability of resources.

(c) Skills Centres for People with Disabilities

13.38 The Vocational Training Council provides centre-based transport service to disabled trainees receiving vocational training at its skills centres for people with disabilities whenever necessary. The same is also provided by a subvented skills centre for people with disabilities operated by an NGO.

(d) Sheltered Workshops and Day Activity Centres

13.39 Centre-based transport service is provided for people with disabilities attending stand-alone day activity centres (DACs). For those people with disabilities
attending sheltered workshops and DACs that are paired up with other rehabilitation services, centre-based transport service is provided on a need basis. As at December 1998, the Social Welfare Department subvented a total of 72 centre-based vehicles and drivers for sheltered workshops and DACs. In addition, commercial-hired vehicles are also provided to supplement the need under special circumstances. As at December 1998, there were a total of 14 routes of commercial-hired transport at an average unit cost of $20,162 per month in 1997-98. Nine of these routes were operated by seven NGOs and five by the Social Welfare Department. They serve mentally handicapped clients who could not make use of public transport services and have no alternative means of transport for travelling to DACs or sheltered workshops. The average utilisation rate of commercial-hired transport in 1997-98 was 91.1%.

(e) **Residential Centres**

13.40 Generally, clients of residential services are covered by centre-based transport service of its associated day service, for examples, DACs and sheltered workshops. Current provision is made on the following basis -

(a) residential centres for severely physically handicapped persons may require special transport provision to enable residents to engage in employment, and to attend workshops, clinics as well as social activities. As at December 1998, subvention for 19 vehicles and drivers was provided to such centres;

(b) minimal transport services are provided to homes and hostels for other types of disabled adults. As at December 1998, subvention for nine vehicles and drivers was provided to such centres;

(c) no provision is made for halfway houses; and

(d) in respect of the social, leisure and sports activities for people with disabilities in residential centres, existing transport facilities in associated day service, commercial-hired vehicle, and the Reabus dial-a-ride service are utilised since such demand should be outside the hours of peak usage of the centres’ own transport facilities and that of the Reabus scheduled route.

(f) **Sports and Recreation**

13.41 The needs for transport services for sports and recreational activities are met through utilising vehicles of the government departments or sponsoring organisations concerned when normal demand for their services is low, for example, during weekends. In addition, Reabus services have been meeting part of the demand outside peak hours and this will continue. For those NGOs with established needs for special transport for sports and recreational activities, the capital cost of the vehicles will be met from the Lotteries Fund and the recurrent expenses from subventions, subject to the availability of resources. As at December 1998, subvention for five vehicles and drivers was provided to these centres.

**Rehabus Services**

13.42 Reabus services were introduced by an NGO in 1978 and turned in subvention in 1980. Since 1 April 1987, the responsibility for administering subvention of Reabus services has been transferred from the Social Welfare Department to the Transport
Department. Rehubus services use specially adapted vehicles and provide door-to-door services for passengers who have serious mobility difficulties including wheelchair users. The major services provided can be broadly classified into two types -

(a) **scheduled service** - This is a regular service taking passengers with disabilities to and from work, training centres and medical treatment. As at December 1998, there were 52 routes operating daily from Monday to Saturday from 6:30 a.m. to 10 a.m. and from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. In addition, there were two routes providing feeder service in Kowloon City and Shatin respectively with stops at hospitals and elderly centres.

(b) **dial-a-ride service** - This is a personalised pre-booked transport service taking people with disabilities to clinics, shops, sport and leisure activities, etc. from 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. As at December 1998, 14 vehicles were deployed to provide a full day dial-a-ride service. This was augmented by vehicles on scheduled service which were also deployed to operate dial-a-ride service outside their usual hours of operation.

13.43 The demand for Rehubus services has increased considerably in recent years. The number of passenger trips made on these services increased by 22.4% from 310 719 in 1995-96 to 380 282 in 1997-98. The amount of recurrent subvention for Rehubus services also increased by 39.3% from $16.12 million in 1995-96 to $22.45 million in 1997-98. The amounts of subvention for the scheduled and dial-a-ride services in 1997-98 were $58.5 and $66.2 per passenger trip respectively. To meet the increased demand and to extend the services to other districts, one additional scheduled route was introduced and four additional vehicles was added to the dial-a-ride service in early 1999.

**Non-emergency Ambulance Transfer Service**

13.44 Non-emergency Ambulance Transfer Service is available to patients who genuinely require such assistance because of physical/mental disabilities and are unable to use public transport or have no alternative means of transport to access to hospital service. The service was previously provided by the Fire Services Department. The Hospital Authority has taken over the provision of the service to its patients in the Hong Kong and Kowloon regions since April 1994 and in the New Territories region since September 1995. On the other hand, the Auxiliary Medical Service has taken over the provision of the service to patients of the Department of Health, Social Welfare Department and private hospitals/institutions since April 1997.

13.45 There is a growing demand for the Non-emergency Ambulance Transfer Service provided by the Hospital Authority. Compared with 1995-96 (October 1995 to March 1996), the average number of patient trips per month in 1997-98 increased by 15.6% to 34 555. With 110 vehicles and 312 staff deployed for the service, the average unit cost of the service in 1997-98 was $185 per patient trip. The Hospital Authority expanded the service in 1998-99 by providing an addition of seven vehicles and 12 staff. In addition, the Hospital Authority has introduced various improvement measures to improve the productivity and efficiency of the service including the establishment of service quality standards on waiting time and punctuality.
Other Special Arrangements

(a) **Concessions to Disabled Drivers**

13.46 Under the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374), a disabled person who is suffering from a permanent disease or physical disability that cause him difficulties in mobility may apply for exemption from payment of the following fees charged by the Government -

(a) Learner’s driving license fee in respect of a private car, motor cycle or motor tricycle;

(b) driving test fee;

(c) full driving licence fee;

(d) annual vehicle licence fee in respect of -

(i) a private car, the cylinder capacity of the engine of which does not exceed 1 500 cc and which is owned and driven by him. (Should the engine cylinder capacity exceed 1 500 cc, the licence fee payable will be the difference between the fee payable in respect of his vehicle and that payable on a car with an engine cylinder capacity of 1 500 cc);

(ii) a motor cycle or a motor tricycle of which he is the registered owner; and

(e) fee for the transfer of vehicle ownership in respect of a private car, motor cycle or motor tricycle if at the time of delivery of notice of transfer of ownership, he is not the owner of another private car, motor cycle or motor tricycle in respect of which the transfer of ownership fee has been waived.

In addition, as an administrative measure, holders of Disabled Person’s Parking Permit are exempted from the payment of on-street metered parking fee for their vehicle. They are also granted a 50% reduction in both monthly and hourly parking charges in 13 government multi-storey car parks with effect from July 1998.

13.47 Under the Motor Vehicles (First Registration Tax) Ordinance (Cap. 330), a disabled person within the meaning of Section 2 of the Ordinance is exempted from the payment of first registration tax on the first $300,000 of the taxable value of a motor vehicle for which he is applying for first registration. No exemption will be granted if he has, within the previous five years, registered a motor vehicle without payment of tax or subject to exemption.

13.48 Under the Cross-Harbour Tunnel (Passage Tax) Ordinance (Cap. 274), a disabled person holding a valid driving licence issued to him under the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374) is exempted from payment of the passage tax. Besides, administrative arrangements have been made to exempt them from payment of toll of Government tunnels and the Lantau Link.

13.49 Under the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance (Cap. 109), duty payable on hydrocarbon oil for use by a disabled person within the meaning of Section 2 of Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374) in a private car, invalid carriage, motor cycle or motor tricycle owned and driven by him shall be waived, such waiver to be subject -
(a) in the case of a private car or an invalid carriage, to a limit of 200 litres per month; and
(b) in the case of a motor cycle or motor tricycle, to a limit of 100 litres per month.

Administrative arrangements are also made for learner disabled drivers to be given early driving tests.

13.50 In addition, disabled car owners who live or work in public housing estates are eligible for a 50% reduction in monthly parking fee. With effect from 1999, disabled drivers using temporary parking facility in public housing estates are also granted a 50% reduction in hourly parking fee.

(b) **Parking Spaces for Disabled Drivers**

13.51 As at December 1998, parking spaces reserved for disabled drivers were available in 13 government multi-storey car parks. In addition, 107 on-street parking spaces at different locations were reserved for the exclusive use of disabled drivers with Disabled Person’s Parking Permit. The Administration will further expand this scheme as and when appropriate.

13.52 Apart from the above, parking spaces of people with disabilities were available at all of the 29 and 42 recreational and sports facilities/venues, where public parking spaces were available, of the Provisional Urban Council and the Provisional Regional Council respectively as at December 1998. Though there are no public parking spaces provided in the Chong Hing Water Sports Centre, Jockey Club Wong Shek Water Sports Centre and Tai Mei Tuk Waters Sports Centres, the Provisional Regional Council will consider making special parking arrangement for people with disabilities attending activities there. Similarly, the Provisional Urban Council will consider making special parking arrangement for people with disabilities attending activities in their facilities/venues, subject to the availability of parking spaces in the adjacent recreational and sports facilities/venues.

**REHABILITATION ENGINEERING SERVICES**

13.53 Technology is infiltrating into almost every aspect of our daily living such as education, training, employment, recreation, etc. and helps us improve quality of life. To allow people with disabilities to get access to fully utilising new products, the most effective way is the adoption of a universal design approach in developing the products such that the special needs of people with disabilities are met by the built-in features. Another way is the adoption of the adaptable design approach such that some modules of the products could be replaced by special modules designed for people with disabilities. Both of these design approaches would help people with disabilities keep in pace with technology development and fully participate in community life.

13.54 While some technical needs of people with disabilities may be met by off-the-shelf commercial products, some have to be met by rehabilitation engineering services. The services aim to help people with disabilities overcome their functional challenges due to mismatches between their ability and the environmental demand, and restore their functional
performance to facilitate their independent living and full participation in the community. The services comprise -

(a) information, assessment and consultative service;
(b) design, manufacture, modification and installation of assistive devices such as communication aids, prosthetics, orthotics, mobility devices, computer aids, etc.;
(c) repair and maintenance of rehabilitation devices; and
(d) research and development of assistive and rehabilitation devices.

Currently, rehabilitation engineering services are provided by the Hospital Authority, Vocational Training Council, Education Department and tertiary institutions, each with their specialised areas. Some NGOs are also providing rehabilitation engineering services for people with disabilities with non-governmental resources.

13.55 Since 1991, a working group has been set up under the auspices of the Joint Council for the Physically and Mentally Disabled (Rehabilitation Division, Hong Kong Council of Social Service). It aims at enhancing the co-ordination among agencies providing rehabilitation engineering services in respect of the division of work, service delivery and quality of services provided. It is also responsible for enhancing communication between users and service providers so as to improve service provision.

ISSUES OF CONCERN

13.56 The Social Welfare Department has recognised that most severely mentally handicapped persons and some moderately mentally handicapped persons have mobility problems. Centre-based transport is therefore provided by the Department for some mentally handicapped residents of hostels to attend DACs or sheltered workshops in other locations. Commercial-hired transport is also provided to meet individual needs in commuting between residence and day rehabilitation centres.

13.57 Some NGOs and parents of mentally handicapped persons are of the view that DAC attached to hostel in close vicinity should also be provided with centre-based vehicles for taking residents to attend medical appointments and outdoor activities. The Social Welfare Department considers that the issue has to be further examined in terms of cost-effectiveness and the availability of other means of transport such as Rehabus. A review on the transport needs of DACs, sheltered workshops and hostels is being conducted by the Department in conjunction with the Hong Kong Council of Social Service.

13.58 Some NGOs are of the view that it is important for public transport operators to take into account the special needs of people with disabilities when introducing new facilities. The Transport Department will continue to liaise with the public transport operators concerned with a view to developing a barrier-free public transport system for all people with disabilities. Their needs and interests will be incorporated into public transport services as necessary and possible. The Department, in considering the grant of franchise or licence to public transport companies, will require them to observe the requirements for provision of accessible facilities for people with disabilities as and when appropriate.
13.59 Some NGOs have expressed concern about the enforcement of the statutory requirements in relation to providing access and facilities for people with disabilities in buildings. The Building Authority is empowered by Section 24 of the Buildings Ordinance to take action against unauthorised removal of or alternation to approved building works. The public may report removal of or alternation to access and facilities for people with disabilities to the Buildings Department. The Building Authority, where appropriate, will order the owner of the building to revert the settings to the original, or take other enforcement action as appropriate. In addition, the public may lodge a complaint with the Equal Opportunities Commission against unreasonable suspension/termination of providing appropriate access or facilities to people with disabilities. The Commission will then investigate the case and assist the relevant parties to reach conciliation as appropriate.