

LCQ15: Use of safety equipment among cyclists

Following is a question by the Hon Frederick Fung and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (June 4):

Question:

It is learnt that wearing protective helmets can effectively lessen the degree of head injury sustained by cyclists in the event of accidents, but there is no such requirement under existing legislation. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the details of its work in the past five years to promote the use of safety equipment (e.g. protective helmets, elbow pads and knee pads) among cyclists;

(b) whether it had conducted studies in the past five years on whether cyclists should be required to wear protective helmets, including the effectiveness of imposing such a requirement, as well as overseas experience and practice in this respect; if it had, of the results of the studies; if it had not, the reasons for that; and

(c) whether it will consider requiring cyclists, especially children, to wear protective helmets, in order to lessen their degree of head injury in the event of accidents?

Reply:

Madam President,

(a) We attach great importance to cycling safety. In the past five years, the Road Safety Council, the Police and the Transport Department (TD) have been promoting cycling safety, including the use of safety equipment, through different forms of publicity and educational activities. We have further

strengthened our efforts in this area since the latter half of 2007. Details of the major work are as follows:

(i) publishing and distributing "Cycling Safety" pamphlets, leaflets on "Safety Tips for Cyclists" and "Smart Cycling" cards;

(ii) launching territory-wide "Safe Cycling Week" during summer holidays and some long school holidays; and holding safety roadshows at cycling hotspots and promoting the use of safety equipment (including protective helmets, elbow pads and knee pads) among cyclists, as well as handing out "Smart Cycling" cards;

(iii) delivering talks in schools and communities on a regular basis to promote the use of safety equipment;

(iv) arranging the Road Safety Bus to visit kindergartens and primary, secondary, and special schools to promote knowledge on safety equipment to students;

(v) giving talks on cycling safety to students and organisations visiting the four Road Safety Towns and providing practice sessions;

(vi) two large-scale publicity campaigns and the "Safe Cycling Week" were organised in Sha Tin and Tai Po respectively in July 2007. A professional cyclist was invited as guest speaker to introduce and promote the use of safety equipment to participating teenagers;

(vii) the legislative requirements and safety advice on cycling safety were published in the 17th issue of the Road Safety Bulletin issued in July 2007. The public was encouraged to use appropriate safety equipment for cycling;

(viii) a special programme under the theme of "Cycling Safety Gear" was produced in December 2007 and was broadcast on the

television programme "Police Report". In the television programme, a professional cyclist was invited to introduce the proper use of safety equipment, and a doctor from the Hospital Authority to explain the protection provided by protective helmets; and

(ix) producing television and radio Announcements for the Public Interest (APIs) under the theme of "Cycling Safety Gear". The latest APIs are expected to be broadcast on television and radio in June 2008.

(b) TD has made reference to overseas experiences and practices in examining the proposal to make it a mandatory requirement for cyclists to wear protective helmets. The research reveals that such a measure is not commonly adopted internationally. Practices and considerations vary among different countries.

France, Switzerland, Germany, the United Kingdom and Singapore do not impose any legislative requirements to mandate cyclists to wear protective helmets. Authorities in these countries generally consider that enhancing education and publicity to encourage voluntary wearing of protective helmets by cyclists is a more appropriate approach. In the United Kingdom, there are views that a mandatory requirement may lead to a reduction in cycling activities. Such a measure may also not be generally accepted by the public, and there are practical difficulties in enforcement.

In Australia, New Zealand and some provinces in Canada, there are legislative requirements to mandate cyclists to wear protective helmets. Experiences in New Zealand and Canada also indicated that there was reduction in the number of cases of head injuries sustained by cyclists in accidents. However, some of these countries have also seen a reduction in cycling activities.

(c) On whether to make it a mandatory requirement for cyclists

to wear protective helmets, we have to consider the actual situation in Hong Kong, including the fact that cycling is mainly a recreational and leisure activity and quite a number of people rent a bicycle to engage in one-off outdoor activities. Also, many cyclists are children and they mostly cycle within housing developments or recreational grounds (such as parks, playgrounds and waterfront promenades), issues concerning enforcement and prosecution will need to be carefully examined. The impact of such legislative control on the public and public acceptance are also important factors for consideration. In fact, the above considerations are some of the main reasons for a number of countries deciding not to implement such a mandatory measure. As such, we do not have any plan at this stage to implement this mandatory measure. Nevertheless, we will continue to listen to the views of the community. We will also closely monitor the cycling activities by the public and the related accident statistics.

In parallel, we will continue with our publicity and educational efforts to further enhance the awareness of cycling safety among the general public, including the use of safety equipment such as wearing of protective helmet.

Ends/Wednesday, June 4, 2008