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# \$230m student travel grant gets the green light

The revised student travel scheme will cost the Government about \$230 million in its first year — compared to \$60 million previously spent each year.

Subsidy grants of about \$30.5 million will go to the China Motor Bus Co Ltd; \$130.5 million to the Kowloon Motor Bus Co (1933) Ltd; \$41.1 million to the Mass Transit Railway Corpn, and \$2 million to the New Lantao Bus Co (1973) Ltd.

Another \$2.5 million is expected to go to the Hongkong Tramways Ltd; \$8 million to the Hongkong and Yaumati Ferry Co Ltd; \$200,000 to the Star Ferry Co Ltd, and \$3 million to the Kowloon-Canton Railway.

A new section called the Student Travel Office (STO) has been set up in the Transport Department to operate the scheme, which includes all franchised transport, the KCR and the MTR.

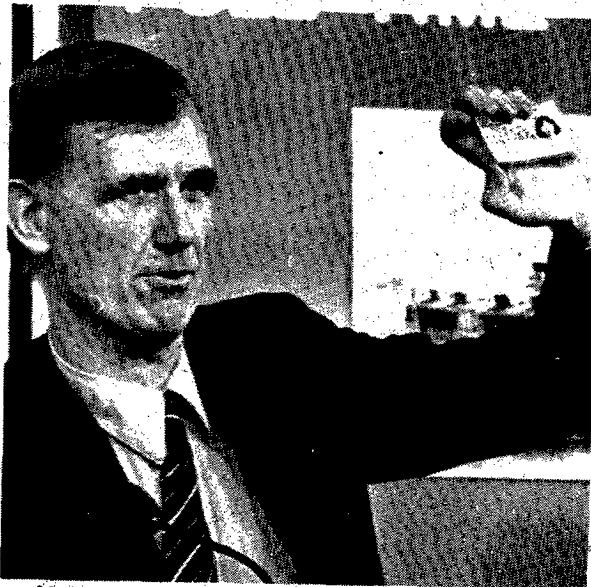
A further \$6 million will be spent on administration and issuing student travel cards.

More than 500,000 students are expected to benefit from the new scheme, which is open to all full-time students aged 12 to 25 from next month.

The Government first hinted at the extended scheme to help students in the face of higher transport costs in April, when it announced bus fare increases averaging 40 per cent for KMB and 30 per cent for CMB. Tram and ferry fares have also gone up since then.

Concessionary fares offered under the scheme will generally be set at half the full adult fare, rounded up to the nearest 10 cents, and apply throughout the year.

Except for KCR services and some CMB routes, the cheaper fares will also apply



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on Sundays and public holidays.

But the scheme will not cover taxis, maxicabs, minibuses, express coach services, special bus services on race days and festivals, some designated "recreational" bus routes and some CMB express routes.

HYF deluxe class and hoverferry services where cheaper alternative services are provided, Star Ferry second class services and KCR through-passenger and special services to the Shatin racecourse are also not covered.

Neither are cross-harbour bus routes because "there are not enough seats as it is on the overcrowded tunnel buses," the Deputy Commissioner for Transport, Mr Peter Leeds, said yesterday.

The existing scheme applies to about 390,000 students who are allowed to pay half fare to and from school

on the KMB, CMB and the trams.

Mr Leeds told a press conference it is still unknown how much more travel may be generated by the new student travel cards, which have fewer restrictions.

"The grants in recompense" to the transport companies are based on rough estimates, and it is also unknown how much of the actual transport costs they will cover, he said.

"The whole matter is quite complex and we've been working on various alternatives.

"There were a number of things wrong with the old scheme, which was not comprehensive enough," Mr Leeds said.

For a start, under the old scheme, CMB, KMB and Hongkong Tramways each issued their own cards. The scheme did not apply to university students either.

Although student travel passes were first issued by the MTR Corpn in April, the company will only receive a Government grant to help with the difference from next month, Mr Leeds said.

The new student travel cards will be security printed and laminated, bearing the identity card number, signature and photograph of the holder. They will be issued annually by the STO.

But the Government is not at present considering adding them to the list of identification documents Hongkong residents must carry at all times, Mr Leeds said.

The STO has a staff of about 15 now, but 70 more people will be temporarily deployed to it next month when the applications are processed, its administrator, Mr David Chow, said.

"All students aged from 12 to 25 inclusive who are in full-time education, including first-degree university students, and who have a valid Hongkong identity card will be eligible for a student travel card," according to a Government statement.

Children under 12 already pay half fare only on many routes.

Students must produce their cards when paying the fares, Mr Leeds said.

He also warned that the cards were non-transferable and would be cancelled if they were misused or if fraud was involved.

Students must apply for their student travel cards, which are valid for 13 months, through their schools next month. An administration fee of \$10 will be collected.

Parents and students who have queries about the scheme can ring the STO at 5-617687 or 5-7954631 after the middle of this month.