

立法會

Legislative Council

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LegCo Panel on Transport and LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs

Minutes of Joint Meeting held on Tuesday, 7 November 2000, at 3:30 pm in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : LegCo Panel on Transport

- * Hon Mrs Miriam LAU Kin-ye, JP (Chairman)
- * Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP (Deputy Chairman)
- Hon David CHU Yu-lin
- * Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP
- Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, JP
- Hon CHAN Kwok-keung
- Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP
- Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
- Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
- * Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
- * Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
- Hon WONG Sing-chi

LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs

Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP
Hon Bernard CHAN
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon CHOY So-yuk
Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP
Hon Henry WU King-cheong, BBS
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok

(* Also members of the LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs)

Members absent : LegCo Panel on Transport

Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah
Dr Hon TANG Siu-tong, JP

* Hon LAU Ping-cheung

LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs

Prof Hon NG Ching-fai (Chairman)
Hon Martin LEE Chu-ming, SC, JP
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon WONG Yung-kan

(* Also members of the LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs)

Public officers attending : Environment and Food Bureau

Mr Thomas CHOW
Deputy Secretary for the Environment and Food

Mr Howard CHAN
Principal Assistant Secretary for the Environment
and Food

Transport Bureau

Mr Brian LO
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport

Environmental Protection Department

Mr TSE Chin-wan
Assistant Director of Environmental Protection (Air)

Transport Department

Mr Thomas THUMB
Assistant Commissioner for Transport (Transport
Planning)

Electrical & Mechanical Services Department

Mr FU Tai-pun
Chief Engineer (Gas Production & Supply)

Customs and Excise Department

Mr Simon WONG
Assistant Commissioner of Customs and Excise
(Administration and Excise)

Clerk in attendance : Mr Andy LAU
Chief Assistant Secretary (1)2

Staff in attendance : Ms Alice AU
Senior Assistant Secretary (1)5

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I Election of Chairman

Mrs Miriam LAU Kin-yea was elected Chairman of the joint meeting.

II Control of vehicle emissions

(LC Paper No. CB(1)128/00-01(01) - Information paper provided by
the Administration)

2. At the invitation of the Chairman, the Deputy Secretary for the Environment and Food (DS(EF)) briefed members on the Administration's progress report on the implementation of its comprehensive programme to reduce motor vehicle emissions (LC Paper No. CB(1)128/00-01(01)).

(Post-meeting note: The revised English version and the Chinese version of the progress report which were tabled at the meeting were subsequently issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(1)142/00-01.)

Progress on the installation of particulate reduction devices

3. The Chairman expressed concern about the slow progress of the installation programme as only about 1 000 vehicles had so far been installed with the particulate traps since the commencement of the installation programme on 25 September 2000.

4. Referring to the one-off grant to assist owners of pre-Euro diesel light vehicles to retrofit their vehicles with particulate trap or diesel oxidation catalyst, Mrs Selina CHOW opined that the financial assistance of \$1,300 per device was inadequate to induce vehicle owners to retrofit the device for the purpose of reducing vehicle emissions. Given the inconvenience caused by regular cleaning, vehicle owners might be unwilling to choose particulate traps. However, if the owners opted for the more expensive oxidation catalysts, they

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would have to pay the balance which amounted to several thousand dollars. Under the circumstances, the Administration should consider increasing the amount of one-off grant for diesel oxidation catalysts to hasten the progress of the installation programme. She requested the Administration to consider her suggestion carefully and inform members of its decision in due course. The Chairman and Ms Emily LAU concurred with Mrs CHOW's view.

5. DS(EF) explained that both devices were effective in terms of reducing particulate emissions. The only difference was that the particulate traps would have to be cleaned regularly and the catalysts were maintenance-free. As vehicle owners could choose between the two, there did not appear to be justification to increase the one-off grant for the installation of diesel oxidation catalysts. He also remarked that only \$1.4 billion had been earmarked for the entire programme for improving air quality announced in the 1999 Policy Address, any increase in the resource allocation for one particular area would invariably be made at the expense of other initiatives.

6. Regarding the number of pre-Euro light diesel vehicles in Hong Kong, DS(EF) advised that the total number was about 42 000. Given the on-going LPG taxi scheme, the number of vehicles to be installed with particulate traps or diesel oxidation catalysts would be fewer.

Cleaner fuel

7. Apart from the use of cleaner automobile diesel in the transport sector, the Chairman asked whether any plan was in place to lower the sulphur content of industrial diesel to 0.05% or even 0.035%, thus achieving a greater improvement in general air quality. In reply, DS(EF) pointed out that diesel with a lower sulphur content might not necessarily bring about considerably higher efficiency in terms of ensuring a cleaner environment. Sometimes, only a marginal effect might be produced. Thus, careful studies would have to be made to determine the optimum level of fuel standards for different industrial undertakings. The Administration's stance was that cleaner diesel should be used wherever possible to improve air quality. However, given the large consumption of industrial fuel, the Administration would need some time to carefully consider the issues involved before concrete proposal could be made. Sharing the Chairman's concern, Ms Emily LAU said that air pollution involved a wider policy issue which was not simply confined to vehicle emissions. She requested the Administration to brief the Panel on Environmental Affairs on the progress of the implementation of measures to reduce non-vehicle emissions in Hong Kong.

Admin.

8. On the forthcoming trial for the use of biodiesel in local vehicles, Ms CHOY So-yuk sought elaboration on the types of biodiesel to be tested and how the trial results would be taken forward. In reply, the Assistant Director of Environmental Protection (Air) (AD of EP(Air)) informed members that suppliers of various types of biodiesel derived from vegetable oils, animal fats or

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used oils from domestic households would be invited to participate in the trial. Pending the completion of the trial, a standard specification for the use of biodiesel in local vehicles would be formulated so that no further tests would be required whenever new types of biodiesel were available in the market. DS(EF) added that although the trial was initially planned for six months, the trial period might have to be extended if further tests were required. The Chariman requested the Administration to give priority to the testing of cannola oil. AD of EP(Air) confirmed that cannola oil would also be tested. However, it would not be possible to advance the trial to give priority to a particular type of biodiesel as both the emissions and roadworthiness of using the fuel would have to be tested and a trial of at least six months was considered appropriate.

Phasing out diesel light buses

9. The Chairman pointed out that in order to make the switch to LPG light buses successful, the operating cost of LPG light buses should be comparable to that of diesel light buses. She however expressed concern about the differential between LPG light buses and diesel light buses in terms of mileage per litre of fuel, and hence, a higher consumption of fuel was required for the operation of LPG light buses than diesel light buses. She asked if consideration had been given to reducing the engine capacity of LPG light buses which could help cut down on fuel consumption. The Principal Assistant Secretary for the Environment and Food thanked the Chairman for the suggestion. He advised that the trial of electric and LPG light buses were only half way through and relevant data was still being collected. The Government would take up the issue on energy efficiency with manufacturers of light buses so that a model best suited for local use could be designed.

Emissions from franchised buses

10. Mr Andrew CHENG noted that the Administration had not proposed any test programme for electric buses and asked whether the way forward for the development of this totally non-polluting form of transport would be examined by the bus companies. In reply, the Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport (PAS(T)) informed members that the Transport Bureau and the Transport Department had in fact embarked on a consultancy study on the feasibility of introducing trolley bus system in the Hong Kong environment in the second half of the year. Responding to the Chairman's follow-up questions, PAS(T) said that the consultancy study was not conducted in collaboration with any bus companies. He was aware that a bus company would run a trial at its depot to ascertain the technical viability of trolley bus systems. Pending the completion of the Administration's study early next year, the findings would be presented to Members in due course.

11. Responding to Ms CHOY So-yuk's enquiry about measures to control the emissions of franchised buses, PAS(T) reported that at present, more than 60% of

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the franchised buses were running on Euro-engine buses. New buses would be required to comply with the prevailing Euro emission standard. As for buses running on pre-Euro engines, about 50% of them had been equipped with diesel catalysts and it was anticipated that all retrofitting work would be completed by mid-2001, six months earlier than originally scheduled. He understood that franchised bus companies would switch to ultra low sulphur diesel (ULSD) in 2001. Moreover, the following measures were being taken which might further help reduce pollution levels:

- (a) To avoid introducing new long haul bus routes to the central business district;
- (b) To implement bus-bus interchange (BBI) schemes; and
- (c) To rationalize bus stops in busy areas (such as Central, Wanchai, Mongkok and Tsim Sha Tusi) in order to reduce bus stopping activities.

12. Ms Emily LAU requested for further information on BBI schemes. PAS(T) advised that the locations of the eight BBI schemes, both on-going and planned, were as follows:

- (a) Kwun Tong Road;
- (b) Western Harbour Tunnel Toll Plaza;
- (c) Shing Mun Tunnel Toll Plaza;
- (d) Wan Chai Ferry Pier;
- (e) Admiralty;
- (f) Tin Shui Wai;
- (g) Tai Lam Tunnel Toll Plaza; and
- (h) Eastern Harbour Tunnel Toll Plaza.

Vehicle maintenance and testing

13. Citing criticisms against the Euro II standard, Ms CHOY So-yuk asked whether this emission requirement was too stringent and should be reviewed. In this connection, DS(EF) said that no matter what emission standard was adopted, it would be most important for drivers to ensure that their vehicles were properly maintained.

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14. As for the review on the appropriateness of maintaining the current testing fee level as mentioned in paragraph 18 of the paper, DS(EF) assured members that all relevant factors would be carefully considered and any proposal to revise the fee would be subject to negative vetting by the Legislative Council (LegCo).

15. Responding to concerns raised by Ms CHOY and the Chairman, DS(EF) advised that much effort had been spent in the past year to upgrade the vehicle maintenance trade on emission control, such as by organizing dedicated workshops for vehicle mechanics. Good progress had been made as the passing rate of smoke test had improved significantly. In order to raise the standard of service of the trade further, the Working Group on Vehicle Maintenance Services, comprising representatives from the trade, government departments and professional bodies had been set up to examine various related issues and put forward recommendations to the Government for consideration.

16. Referring to paragraph 19 of the paper, the Chairman queried why only 180 in-service mechanics had attended the training courses run by the Vocational Training Council since they were offered from March 2000. In reply, DS(EF) said that much publicity efforts had been made to encourage in-service mechanics to take part in the training courses. Although the attendance rate was not high, it should not be taken to mean that the trade was not well-versed with the required skills and expertise.

Strengthened enforcement on illicit fuel

17. Referring to paragraph 28 of the paper, Ms Emily LAU opined that the problem with illicit fuel should be tackled through more stringent enforcement actions, instead of relying upon the presumption proposed to be added to the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance (Cap. 109). In this regard, she sought elaboration from the Administration on how the presumption would work and whether it would in fact change the common law position by shifting the burden in adducing evidence to the drivers concerned.

18. In response, the Assistant Commissioner of Customs and Excise (Administration and Excise) (AC of CE) explained that by adding the presumption that any light diesel oil found in the fuel tank of a motor vehicle with a sulphur content in excess of the maximum sulphur content prescribed under the law was dutiable, the problem experienced by Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) in establishing the dutiability of the oil in question could be overcome and the enforcement capability of C&ED would thus be enhanced. AC of CE further said that extensive consultation had been conducted with the transport trade and both sides had agreed on a set of guidelines on keeping proper refuelling records which would enable the professional drivers to demonstrate the extent of their knowledge about the source of fuel in the vehicles they were using. He assured members that it would not be an offence if a driver failed to produce such records as each case would be investigated thoroughly before

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prosecution. Ms Emily LAU nevertheless was firmly of the view that the burden in adducing evidence should rest with C&ED. As much concern had been raised by the public, she said that all related issues would be thoroughly examined by the Bills Committee to be formed when the amendment bill was introduced to LegCo.

Contingency measures

19. Referring to paragraph 30 of the information paper, Mr Andrew CHENG sought elaboration on the rationale for the Administration's view that restricting entry of certain vehicles to traffic and pedestrian-busy districts on high Air Pollution Index (API) days would be a non-starter. He expressed disappointment with the Administration's decision which was taken without any detailed study or trial.

20. In reply, DS(EF) explained that such a measure would be difficult to apply in practice for API would vary from district to district and was not stable. As such, it would be very difficult to communicate effectively to the public as to when the restrictions would apply and when they would be lifted. As a result, much confusion and inconvenience would be caused to drivers and members of the public. The Administration therefore took the view that it would be more appropriate to concentrate on those measures that could improve general air quality, rather than implementing such contingency measures. He nevertheless assured members that should there be any major deterioration in air quality such that API might reach 300, the Administration would be prepared to re-consider this suggestion. In this connection, Mr Andrew CHENG urged the Administration to adopt an open attitude on this matter and suggested that initially, the daily API forecast could be taken as a guideline in the application of such restrictions.

Improvements in air quality

21. On Ms Emily LAU's request for relevant data showing the actual improvement in air quality achieved since the implementation of the comprehensive programme to reduce motor vehicle emission, DS(EF) explained that apart from the switch to ULSD which brought about quantifiable improvements within a relatively short period, other initiatives such as the LPG taxi scheme would take some time before results could be seen. In supplement, AD of EP(Air) said that the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) had been closely monitoring the situation. API data would be collected up to the end of the year to calculate the 12-month moving average of API which could reflect the overall trend in fluctuations of API. A report would be provided to Members early next year after data collection and analysis were completed.

22. While agreeing that results of some measures might take time to take root, Ms Emily LAU opined that it was the Government's responsibility to release

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relevant data to the public regularly so that they could decide for themselves how such data should be interpreted. She was not convinced that only yearly reports in this respect would be provided. The Chairman also remarked that the public would have to be satisfied that all the resources spent on improving air quality were value for money. In reply, DS(EF) clarified that there was no question of withholding information from the public because hourly and monthly APIs were calculated and released by EPD through the Internet. However, in order that a fair and objective comparison be made, a simple year-on-year comparison might not be appropriate for the purpose as many factors could affect APIs such as changes in climatic conditions. AD of EP(Air) added that a more complete picture will be obtained by calculating the 12-month moving average of air pollution concentrations.

Way forward

23. Referring to the target of reducing the particulate and nitrogen oxides emissions from motor vehicles by 80% and 30% respectively, Ms Emily LAU asked whether even higher standards would be set by the Government in future. DS(EF) replied that these were initial targets as set out in the Chief Executive's Policy Address 1999 and the Administration was hopeful that they would be achieved with the implementation of measures proposed under the comprehensive programme. In time, the Government would aim at an even greater reduction in motor vehicle emissions as better technology, cleaner fuel and more environmentally-friendly vehicles became available.

24. Responding to Ms LAU's further enquiry on the improvement in general air quality, DS(EF) said that the adoption of cleaner fuels for industrial use was being examined by the Administration and Members would be briefed in due course when detailed proposals were available. Apart from road-side air quality, the Administration also recognized the importance of keeping a vigilant watch on general air quality. To this end, an air quality assessment was being conducted jointly with the relevant Guangdong authorities to identify the sources of air pollution in the Pearl River Delta area. After the completion of the assessment early next year, both sides would jointly explore ways in which harmful emissions in the region could be reduced. Members and the public would be consulted on any measures proposed.

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III Any other business

25. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:45 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat

12 December 2000