

立法會

Legislative Council

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LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs and LegCo Panel on Transport

**Minutes of joint meeting held on
Tuesday, 27 February 2001, at 9:00 am
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

Members present : LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs

- Prof Hon NG Ching-fai (Chairman)
* Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP
Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP
Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP
* Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP
Hon Henry WU King-cheong, BBS
* Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok
* Hon LAU Ping-cheung
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP

LegCo Panel on Transport

- Hon Mrs Miriam LAU Kin-yee, JP (Chairman)
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon David CHU Yu-lin
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-yee, JP
Hon CHAN Kwok-keung
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Dr Hon TANG Siu-tong, JP

Members attending : Hon James TIEN Pei-chun, JP
Hon IP Kwok-him, JP

Members absent : LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs

Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan (Deputy Chairman)

Hon Martin LEE Chu-ming, SC, JP

Hon Bernard CHAN

Hon WONG Yung-kan

Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP

Hon CHOY So-yuk

* Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip

LegCo Panel on Transport

Hon Albert HO Chun-yan

Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP

Hon LAU Kong-wah

Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP

Hon WONG Sing-chi

(* Also members of the LegCo Panel on Transport)

Public officers attending : Environment and Food Bureau

Mr Thomas CHOW

Deputy Secretary for the Environment and Food (C)

Mr Howard CHAN

Principal Assistant Secretary for the
Environment and Food (C)

Environmental Protection Department

Mr TSE Chin-wan

Assistant Director of Environmental Protection (Air)

Transport Bureau

Mr Benjamin MOK

Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport (Atg.)

Transport Department

Mr Alan LUI

Assistant Commissioner for Transport
(Ferry and Paratransit)

Hong Kong Police Force

Mr H K TANG, William
Chief Superintendent of Police (Traffic)

Clerk in attendance : Miss Becky YU
Chief Assistant Secretary (1)1

Staff in attendance : Mrs Mary TANG
Senior Assistant Secretary (1)2

I Election of Chairman

Prof Hon NG Ching-fai was elected Chairman of the joint meeting.

II Control of idling engines

(LC Paper No CB(1)652/00-01(01))

2. At the invitation of the Chairman, the Deputy Secretary for the Environment and Food (C) (DSEF(C)) highlighted the salient points in the information paper which included an analysis of the views collected by the Administration during the consultation with the District Councils and the transport trade on the proposal to control idling engines.

3. Mr James TIEN stated that Members of the Liberal Party supported the control of idling engines and agreed with the District Councils and the transport trade on the need for exemptions and further consultation. He however opined that the adoption of an advisory approach using published guidelines should only be intended as an interim measure, the use of enforcement legislation should be the way forward in the long term. DSEF(C) said that in the past, the Administration had appealed to drivers for turning off their idling engines. Consideration was being given to formalizing guidelines with the transport trade on the control of idling engines as a first step. The Administration would assess the effectiveness of these guidelines before deciding on the need for regulatory measures. If the guidelines could achieve the desired effect, regulatory measures would not be required. Otherwise, the Administration might need to examine other more effective measures including the case for introducing enforcement legislation.

Consultation and publicity programmes

4. Mrs Miriam LAU briefed members on the outcome of her consultation with the transport trade. She said that taxi drivers were concerned about the requirement for all taxis in a queue, except for the few taxis at the front of the taxi stand, to switch off their engines. She said that in actual practice, taxi drivers would prefer to switch off their engines when they expected a long wait or when there were no passengers waiting in the

queue as engines left idling would consume fuel. However, in the case of a moving queue, taxi drivers would need to keep their air conditioners on for the comfort of the awaiting passengers. She added that drivers of franchised buses and public light buses would have no problem adhering to the requirement that only the first few buses on the queue could keep their engines running. Operators of the cargo transport trade would be willing to comply with the scheme but those engaged in the transport of frozen items would need to turn their engines on continuously. She pointed out that in implementing the scheme, care should be taken to avoid pinpointing a certain categories of trade. DSEF(C) agreed that it was impractical to require drivers on a moving queue to stop their engines. The requirement for taxis/public light buses in the queue to switch off their engines should only apply to situation where there were no passengers waiting at the waiting stand. He added that the Administration would like to adopt a partnership with the transport trade in the control of idling engines and did not wish to create any undue disruptions to its operation. So far, the transport trade had adopted a co-operative attitude on the Government's clean air initiatives.

5. While acknowledging the practical difficulties in implementing control on taxis and public light buses as referred to in paragraph 4 of the information paper, Mr James TIEN held the view that drivers should be advised to turn off their engines if they anticipated a long wait for passengers. The Administration should also consult the commerce associations on measures to control idling engines, in particular on trucks and vans during loading and unloading of goods. He did not agree that vehicles with turbo engines should be exempted on account of their design as he was aware that turbo engines did not require much time for cooling and hence need not be left idling for a long time. He hoped that the Administration could draw up guidelines on the control of idling engines as soon as possible. DSEF(C) advised that the Administration would also approach commerce associations in drawing up guidelines on the control of idling engines for their fleet.

6. Mr Andrew CHENG stressed the need to strike a balance in formulating the control scheme to ensure that the transport trade would not be unduly affected. To this end, a phased implementation, starting first with private cars and extending to other vehicles at a later stage, would be more appropriate. DSEF(C) advised that there would be practical difficulties in enforcing control of idling engines for private cars because drivers who preferred to leave their engines on while waiting could immediately drive away once they spotted an enforcement officer approaching them.

7. In view of the lack of an objective and scientific analysis on whether private cars would prefer to circulate on the road if the control scheme was to be implemented, Mr CHENG suggested that the Administration should conduct a pilot scheme on a busy district and assess the preference of drivers. DSEF(C) advised that as there were few idling engines on the road, the exhaust emissions from these engines were relatively low. It was unlikely that the air quality would have a marked improvement after the implementation of the scheme. He added that instead of conducting a pilot scheme on a designated district as proposed, the Administration should apply a control scheme, if one were to be implemented, across the territory in order to ascertain whether drivers would prefer to circulate their vehicles or to turn off their engines while waiting.

8. To promote public awareness on the need for control of idling engines, Mr James TIEN suggested that in addition to providing published guidelines, publicity programmes should also be conducted through the media. DSEF affirmed that the Administration would invite the Environmental Campaign Committee to jointly work out the publicity programmes.

Control of idling engines in other countries

9. Mrs Miriam LAU shared the view that the control of idling engines should start with private cars as they outnumbered the vehicles of the transport trade. Since Singapore should have the same problem with idling engines on account of its warm weather, she enquired how the Singaporean Government was dealing with the problem. DSEF(C) said that although the Singaporean Government had laws to control idling engines, it seldom enforced the legislation but appealed to its citizens for stopping their idling engines. The situation in Toronto was much the same except that enforcement actions would not be taken when the air temperature was above 27 degrees or below 5 degrees Celsius as there was a need to keep the air conditioners or the heaters on.

Enforcement actions against idling engines

10. Mr David CHU asked if there were existing traffic regulations to control idling engines as he was aware that quite a number of drivers, in particular those of Government vehicles, had left their engines on while they were taking a rest. The Chief Superintendent of Police (Traffic) (CSP) confirmed that there were no existing legislation on the control of idling engines. As such, any enforcement action taken would give rise to disputes. He said that while the Police was supportive of measures to improve roadside air quality, it was of the view that any enforcement legislation on control idling engines, if introduced, should be clear and enforceable without too many exemptions. DSEF(C) added that there were working guidelines provided to Government drivers that they should not leave their vehicles idling and members of the public could report to the Administration if they spotted idling Government vehicles.

11. Ir Dr Raymond HO remained of the view that there was a need for control of idling engines to protect public health. He did not accept that enforcement difficulties should be the excuse for not introducing control on idling engines. Consideration should be given to allowing drivers to keep their engines running for a certain period of time before they were charged for idling of engines. The Administration's assertion that drivers would tend to circulate around instead of switching off their engines was also unfounded as most drivers would not prefer to circulate around, particularly on roads with one-way traffic. To resolve the problem, there was a need to provide more carparks in the urban area. He invited the Administration to explain its position on the provision of carparks as he was aware that the previous policy of discouraging the ownership of private cars by limiting the number of carparks had been abolished in 1981. In response, DSEF(C) reiterated that there were practical difficulties in enforcing control of idling engines for private cars. Taking the case of Toronto as an example, the existing legislation disallowed the continuous idling of engines for more than three minutes in an

hour. However, a driver could circumvent the law by switching off his idling engine when it was close to three minutes, after which he could restart the engine again. CSP added that unlike the use of hand held mobile phones while driving or illegal parking which could be spotted at a distance, idling engines might not be easily detected unless the enforcing officer was standing close to the vehicle. The proposed imposition of a time limit on idling engines would lead to inevitable disputes over whether the idling period was continuous.

12. While agreeing that the setting of a time limit on idling engines would impose practical difficulties, Mrs Selina CHOW did not accept that the Administration could be absolved from the responsibility for implementing control of idling engines. The use of guidelines as a first step was an acceptable arrangement. She pointed out while some members of the transport trade had expressed difficulty in compliance with the control scheme, owners of tourist bus companies had indicated support. However, this had not been met with the co-operation of the tourist bus drivers who claimed that there was a need to keep their air conditioners on for the comfort of passengers. She said that in order to obtain the co-operation of drivers, there might be a need to provide supporting facilities such as sheltered waiting areas for the tourist buses as well as other incentives to prevent the idling of vehicles. DSEF(C) agreed that the Administration should take the initiative to liaise with the business sector to solicit their support in the control of idling engines, so that the management could take steps to ensure that the published guidelines were adhered to by the drivers. The Administration would also look into the provision of supporting parking facilities for tourist coaches in consultation with the tourist companies. Mrs CHOW said that the provision of carparks, in particular for tourist buses, should be actively considered in the planning of new towns.

13. Mr Henry WU stressed the importance of self-discipline in the control of idling engines. He was more concerned about the poor air quality in areas where there was insufficient air circulation, such as underground carparks. He suggested that the Administration should seek the co-operation of management companies in the installation of signs in their carparks reminding drivers to switch off their engines while waiting, in line with the practice adopted by some carparks. He also enquired if the Administration had any internal guidelines on the control of idling engines that could be made available for reference. DSEF(C) welcomed Mr WU's suggestion and agreed to follow up the issue. He also undertook to inform members of the internal guidelines on the control of idling engines of Government vehicles for their reference.

Admin.

14. On the extent of control on idling engines, Mr Andrew WONG asked whether drivers caught in traffic congestion should switch off their engines. DSEF(C) said that the control scheme was meant to reduce roadside pollution arising from exhaust emissions. It would also address the problem of poor air quality in covered carparks. The control of idling engines in traffic congestion would be a more difficult matter given that the switching on and off of engines would pose a problem to some vehicles.

Conservation of fuel energy resulting from the control of idling engines

15. While supporting the advisory approach to be adopted at the present stage to control idling engines, Mr David CHU opined that as a means of encouragement, the Administration should conduct studies and provide findings on the conservation of fuel energy resulting from switching off engines while waiting. DSEF(C) affirmed that the Administration would stress on the conservation of fuel in its publicity programmes. The publicity programme would include a message that 3.5 litres of fuel per hour or \$3 per five minutes would be saved from switching off engines instead of idling them.

Exhaust emissions from running and idling engines

16. Mr James TIEN queried the results of comparison of the exhaust emissions between a running engine and an idling engine set out at the Annex to the paper. The Assistant Director of Environmental Protection (ADEP) advised that the results were based on studies conducted by environmental protection agencies in the United States. The comparison was made between the exhaust emissions of different types of vehicles running at a speed of 25 kilometres per hour with the air conditioning on and those of idling engines. As running engines would consume more fuel than idling engines, the amount of exhaust emissions from running engines would be higher than idling engines.

17. The Chairman expressed concern that the constant switching on and off of engines would create more pollution. DSEF(C) said that although there were no conclusive evidence to indicate that this was the case, there had been suggestions that the constant restarting of engines would give rise to more exhaust emissions. ADEP affirmed that the restarting of engines might result in more impulsive exhaust emission but since this varied amongst vehicle types, it was difficult to provide a comparison. In general, there should be emission benefits to switch off an engine if the vehicle was to idle for more than a couple of minutes.

The way forward

18. Mr James TIEN enquired about the time table for implementing the control scheme. DSEF(C) said that with members' support on the proposed approach of drawing up guidelines, the Administration would proceed with the drafting of guidelines on control of idling engines as soon as practicable and these would form the basis of consultation with the transport trade and car park management companies. The Administration would report the outcome of consultation to members as when the process was completed.

19. Mr Andrew WONG stated that he would accept the use of guidelines but not the use of enforcement legislation as the latter was impracticable and would cause unnecessary inconvenience to the public. DSEF(C) said that for the past months, the Administration had been in close liaison with the transport trade on the control of idling engines. The trade supported measures to protect the environment but hoped that any measures introduced would not adversely impact on their normal operation. The Administration preferred to establish a partnering relationship with the transport trade and did not wish to resort to punitive measures. For this reason, it would continue its dialogue with the trade and would introduce guidelines on the control as a first step.

These guidelines would be subject to review and further plans to control idling engines would depend on the effectiveness of these guidelines.

- Admin. 20. The Chairman requested and the Administration agreed to provide a supplementary information paper providing scientific analysis on the comparison of exhaust emissions between running and idling engines as well as the conservation of fuel resulting from control of idling engines.

II Any other business

21. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 11:00 am.

Legislative Council Secretariat

17 April 2001