

Paper for LegCo Panel on Transport

Measures to enhance the efficiency of franchised bus service

This paper informs Members of the various measures which the Administration has been taking to enhance the efficiency of franchised bus service.

BACKGROUND

2. Franchised buses perform an important role in the public transport system. With a fleet of over 6,000 buses, 4.1 million passengers use bus services every day.

3. The franchised bus network has expanded to match new population developments and has made use of the provision of new transport infrastructure such as Western Harbour Crossing and Tai Lam Tunnel to improve services. With more bus routes and trips provided in recent years to meet passenger demand, this has led to increasing public concern about congestion problems along the major corridors, particularly in the Central Business District.

4. Our transport strategy is to develop the railways to make them the backbone of our public transport system since railways are environmentally friendly and efficient mass carriers. The planned expansion of the rail network will have a major impact on the scope for future expansion of bus service.

5. Taking into account these developments and to ensure the efficient use of bus resources and limited road space, we have been taking measures to enhance the efficiency of franchised bus services. These are explained in the following paragraphs.

RATIONALISATION OF BUS SERVICE

1999 and 2000

6. In the past two years, we have implemented the following bus rationalisation measures –

- (a) 12 low demand bus routes have been cancelled;
- (b) 183 routes have been rationalised through frequency reduction, route diversion, truncation and amalgamation; and
- (c) bus stops in the Central Business District and along King's Road, in Yau Tsim Mong and Kwun Tong districts and in the town

centres of Tsuen Wan, Tai Po and Yuen Long have been re-organised; over 130 bus stops were involved and over 2,500 bus stoppings have been reduced in a peak hour in these areas.

7. As far as the Central Business District is concerned, the above measures have reduced over 1,100 (6%) daily bus trips through Central/Admiralty and some 2,100 (18%) bus stoppings in a peak hour along the busy corridors in Central and Wanchai.

8. In addition, we have implemented 6 bus-bus interchange (BBI) schemes in 2000. They are –

- (a) Kwun Tong Road (implemented in March 2000) – passengers from Tseung Kwan O route 296A (Sheung Tak – Ngau Tau Kok MTR Station) can interchange with another 5 routes for travel between Tseung Kwan O and other districts in the New Territories.
- (b) Western Harbour Crossing Toll Plaza (implemented in June 2000) – passengers from cross-harbour route 973 (Stanley – Tsim Sha Tsui) can interchange with another 3 cross-harbour routes for travel from Stanley to the New Territories.
- (c) Causeway Road (implemented in August 2000) – passengers from Southern District routes 38 (Chi Fu Fa Yuen – North Point Ferry Pier) and 42 (Wah Fu South – North Point Ferry Pier) can interchange with another 4 routes for travel between Southern District and Eastern District.
- (d) Wan Chai Ferry Pier Concourse (implemented in October 2000) – passengers from Southern District routes 4X (Wah Fu – Wan Chai Ferry) and 43 (Tin Wan Estate – Wan Chai Ferry) can interchange with another 6 routes for travel between Southern District and Eastern District.
- (e) Tin Shui Wai town centre (implemented in December 2000) – passengers from Light Rail Transit feeder bus route 659 (Tin Shui Wai/North – Tin Shui Wai town centre) can interchange with another 3 bus routes for travel between Tin Shui Wai/North and east Kowloon/Causeway Bay/Airport.
- (f) Tate's Cairn Tunnel Toll Plaza (implemented in December 2000) – passengers from Tai Po routes 74X (Tai Po Central –

Kwun Tong Ferry) and 75X (Fu Shin – Kowloon City Ferry) can interchange with another route to Hung Hom; and passengers from Sha Tin route 82X (Ravana Garden – Wong Tai Sin) can interchange with another 2 routes to east Kowloon and Hung Hom.

9. In conjunction with these rationalization measures, actions have been taken since 1999 to contain the growth of the bus fleet particularly those used on Hong Kong Island to improve efficiency and reduce congestion. For example, some 40 buses have been redeployed from Hong Kong Island/urban Kowloon and cross-harbour routes to meet passenger demand in the new development areas in Tseung Kwan O/South and Tin Shui Wai/North.

2001/02

10. For 2001/02, Transport Department has worked out 30 bus route rationalisation packages in conjunction with the franchised bus companies, which include –

- (a) 7 packages for route cancellation;
- (b) 8 packages for route truncation and amalgamation; and
- (c) 15 packages for frequency adjustments.

These items as well as 9 proposals for new BBI schemes were included in the annual bus route development programmes on which the Traffic and Transport Committees of the relevant District Councils were consulted earlier this year.

11. Of the schemes mentioned above, 10 rationalization and 4 BBI schemes have been implemented in the first five months of 2001 –

(a) Route Rationalization Measures

- These measures involved 3 airport routes, 2 Lantau routes and 5 Kowloon/New Territories routes.

(b) BBI Schemes

- Admiralty (implemented in January 2001) – passengers from cross-harbour route 930 (Tsuen Wan Ferry – Admiralty) can interchange with another 5 routes to the Mid-Levels and Siu Sai Wan.
- Kwun Tong Road (implemented in March 2001) – the scheme

mentioned in paragraph 8(a) above was expanded to include another Tseung Kwan O route 98A (Hang Hau (North) – Ngau Tau Kok MTR Station) to enable more Tseung Kwan O passengers to interchange with the 5 routes to/from the New Territories.

- Airport Cargo Area (implemented in April 2001) – passengers from airport route E21 (Tai Kok Tsui – Chek Lap Kok Ferry Pier) can interchange with another airport route S52 (Aircraft Maintenance Area – Tung Chung MTR Station) for travel between the Aircraft Maintenance Area and Chek Lap Kok Ferry Pier following the cancellation of route S55 (Chek Lap Kok – Airport Cargo Area) which had low passenger demand.
- Tai Po (implemented in May 2001) – passengers from Tai Po route 71K (Tai Po – Tai Po Market) can interchange with another 2 routes to west Kowloon and Hung Hom.

Annex 12. Between now and mid 2002, 15 more rationalization measures will be implemented. Details are given in the Annex. Upon full implementation of the rationalization measures, a total of 27 buses serving the routes concerned can be released for redeployment to other routes to better meet passenger demand.

13. On the other hand, in the light of comments received during District Council consultation, Transport Department will review the proposals for 5 rationalization items and 5 BBI schemes which would involve route cancellation and truncation. Where practicable, Transport Department will put forward fresh proposals to help reduce objections from the relevant District Councils.

14. In addition to implementing pre-planned items mentioned in paragraphs 10 to 12 above, in the course of our ongoing monitoring of bus services, we have introduced other rationalization measures to better match with changes in passenger demand and traffic conditions. 5 additional rationalization and 2 BBI schemes have been implemented and 2 further BBI schemes will be implemented in the coming months.

PLANNING AND AWARDING OF FRANCHISED BUS ROUTES

15. Under the Public Bus Services Ordinance, franchised bus operators have to prepare and submit to Commissioner for Transport on an annual basis a rolling annual bus route development programme for the coming five years. In considering a bus route development programme, Transport Department

would take into account relevant factors including the following –

- (a) The need to make efficient use of resources and to reduce road traffic congestion. Bus service level will be adjusted to match changes in passenger demand. Rationalization measures will be introduced on bus services with relatively low utilization.
- (b) Long haul bus routes will not be encouraged, and the routing of new bus routes will avoid the heavily trafficked areas as far as is practicable.
- (c) The current transport strategy under which railways will form the backbone of Hong Kong's transport system. Within this framework, franchised buses will continue to be an important public transport mode particularly in areas not conveniently served by the railways and to feed passengers to the railways. Bus-rail interchanges or bus-bus interchanges at convenient locations are encouraged to reduce unnecessary duplication caused by point-to-point bus services.
- (d) The commissioning of new railways in the next few years will provide more capacity and choice to passengers. There will be an increase in the demand for feeder services to railway stations while the need for bus services which duplicate the new railways will decrease.

16. In considering individual route development proposals, the following factors would be taken into account –

- (a) changes in population and development in the area concerned;
- (b) existing public transport services in the area;
- (c) suggestions of the public;
- (d) traffic implications; and
- (e) completion of new transport infrastructure.

17. Individual new non-cross harbour routes in an existing service area are normally introduced by the relevant bus operator operating in that area, provided that his performance has been satisfactory, whereas the right to operate a network of new routes in new development areas with substantial population size will be awarded to an existing bus operator through a selection process. All applications for operating new bus network will be assessed with due consideration on service quality, passenger facilities, operators' management capability, etc.

18. The above arrangement facilitates route development and long term investment planning by the bus operators, and helps ensure that socially desirable routes which are unprofitable would be adequately serviced. As for new cross-harbour routes, all existing bus operators will be invited to apply for the operating right. Applications will be assessed on the basis of the same considerations as in paragraph 17 above.

19. In 1999, we completed two bus operator selection exercises for the new development areas in Tseung Kwan O/South and Tin Shui Wai/North, and the packages of routes were awarded to New World First Bus Services Limited (NWFB) and Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited (KMB) respectively. We will continue to adopt this approach in selecting bus operators for operating new packages of bus routes in new development areas whenever the opportunity arises.

ENCOURAGING THE PROVISION OF QUALITY SERVICE

20. We also encourage bus companies to enhance the quality and convenience of service provided to passengers. All new buses purchased by the operators are air-conditioned, low-floor and fitted with 2 x 2 seating, and all serving buses now accept the Octopus auto-payment system.

21. To improve passenger convenience, all bus companies provide enquiry hotlines and Internet access to their Homepages to facilitate enquiry and retrieval of information. Customer service centres (CSCs) are provided by all operators at selected public transport interchanges (PTIs) to facilitate communication and to provide customer services to the public. More CSCs will be provided in the coming years. KMB have installed LED display panels to provide passenger information at 4 bus termini and similar systems have been planned for installation in another 5 bus termini.

22. To improve comfort of passengers at bus termini, we are working closely with the bus companies and the relevant Government departments to improve the management and the overall quality of bus termini. In June 2001, Transport Department awarded a contract to a professional transport management company to maintain and manage two PTIs at Kowloon and Olympic Stations along the Tung Chung MTR Line. We plan to tender out more PTIs for management and maintenance in future. We are also developing plans to upgrade the appearance of a number of covered PTIs and a programme to upgrade the ventilation plants in covered PTIs where conditions are unsatisfactory.

23. At en-route bus stops, both KMB and NWFB are putting on trial schemes to provide audio and visual information to waiting passengers. KMB, Citybus Limited (Citybus) and Long Win Bus Company Limited have installed TV panels on 2000 buses to provide infotainment programmes to passengers, while NWFB is exploring similar systems to be provided on its buses.

24. On the environmental front, the bus companies have been taking initiatives to improve the environmental performance of their bus fleet. Since 1 February 2001, all franchised bus companies have converted to using ultra low sulphur diesel on all their fleet. Starting from late 2001, the bus companies will introduce new buses which meet the latest Euro III emission standards. For existing pre-Euro buses, the bus companies have been either upgrading them to meet Euro standards, retrofitting them with diesel catalysts, or scrapping and replacing them by new buses of the latest Euro emission standards. In addition, the three major bus companies (viz. KMB, Citybus and NWFB) are also conducting trials and tests on the use of other after-treatment devices, such as continuous regenerative traps to further reduce emissions from buses already with Euro I and II engines.

CONCLUSION

25. Franchised bus service has expanded and made substantial improvements in recent years. It will continue to be an important public transport mode providing choice to passengers. Particularly in areas not conveniently served by railways, franchised buses will be the main carrier.

26. We will continue with our efforts to enhance the efficiency of bus service and will develop further plans for bus rationalisation and new BBI schemes for inclusion in future route development programmes.

Planned Rationalisation Measures

(1 June 2001 – 30 June 2002)

Route Cancellation

Route	Terminal Points	Main features	Target implementation date
M21	Tai Koo Shing - Central (HK Station)	Cancellation (-5 buses)	<u>Q2/Q3, 2001</u>
82K	Mei Lam - Fo Tan KCR Station	Cancellation (-5 buses)	<u>Q3, 2001</u>
285	Bayshore Tower - Heng On (Circular)	Cancellation (-2 buses)	<u>Q3, 2001</u>
49X	Kwong Yuen - Tsing Yi Ferry	Cancellation of one special departure (-1 bus)	<u>Q4, 2001</u>

Route Truncation and Amalgamation

A35	Mui Wo - Airport	Truncation (-1 bus)	<u>Q2/Q3, 2001</u>
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Route and Frequency Adjustment

264M	Tin Shui Wai T/C - Tsing Yi AR Station	Frequency adjustment (-1 bus)	<u>Q2/Q3, 2001</u>
720	Shau Kei Wan - Central (Gilman Street)	Frequency adjustment (-2 buses)	<u>Q2/Q3, 2001</u>
722	Shau Kei Wan - Central (Man Kat Street)	Frequency adjustment (-2 buses)	<u>Q2/Q3, 2001</u>
102	Shau Kei Wan - Mei Foo	3 buses to be redeployed to operate special departures on Route 102 via Island Eastern Corridor (IEC)	<u>Q3, 2001</u>

Route	Terminal Points	Main features	Target implementation date
619	Central (Macau Ferry) - Shun Lee	1 bus to be redeployed to operate special departure on Route 619 via IEC	<u>Q3, 2001</u>
264M	Tin Shui Wai T/C - Tsing Yi AR Station	Frequency adjustment (-1 bus)	<u>Q3, 2001</u>
63M	Yuen Long (E) - Tsing Yi AR Station	Frequency adjustment (-3 buses)	<u>Q4, 2001</u>
69X	Tin Shui Estate - Jordan Road Ferry	Frequency adjustment (-2 buses)	<u>Q4, 2001</u>
1	Chuk Yuen - Star Ferry	Frequency adjustment (-1 bus)	<u>Q1, 2002</u>
92	Ap Lei Chau Estate - Causeway Bay (Moreton Terrace)	Frequency adjustment (-1 bus)	<u>Q2, 2002</u>

June 2001