

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)871/01-02
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB1/PL/TP/1

Legislative Council
Panel on Transport

Minutes of meeting held on
Friday, 14 December 2001, at 8:30 am
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon Miriam LAU Kin-ye, JP (Chairman)
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP
Hon CHAN Kwok-keung
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Dr Hon TANG Siu-tong, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon LAU Ping-cheung

Members absent : Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, JP
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP

Public officers : **Agenda Item IV**
attending

Transport Bureau

Mr Arthur HO
Deputy Secretary for Transport

Mr Patrick HO
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport (1)

Transport Department

Mr Robert FOOTMAN
Commissioner for Transport

Mrs Dorothy CHAN
Deputy Commissioner for Transport/
Operations and Management

Mr Daniel AU
Assistant Commissioner for Transport/NT

Agenda Item V

Transport Bureau

Ms Doris CHEUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport (6)

Transport Department

Mr Robert FOOTMAN
Commissioner for Transport

Mrs Dorothy CHAN
Deputy Commissioner for Transport/
Operations and Management

Mr Peter LUK
Assistant Commissioner for Transport/
Management and Paratransit

Highways Department

Mr W L LAU
Regional Highway Engineer/Kowloon

Attendance by invitation : **Agenda Item V**
Hong Kong Tunnels and Highways Management Company Limited

Dr John H C YEUNG
Managing Director

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

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

Action

I Confirmation of minutes and matters arising

- (LC Paper No. CB(1)562/01-02 - Minutes of special meeting held on 8 November 2001;
LC Paper No. CB(1)375/01-02 - Minutes of joint meeting held with the Environmental Affairs Panel on 29 October 2001; and
LC Paper No. CB(1)564/01-02 - Minutes of joint meeting held with the Environmental Affairs Panel on 26 November 2001)

The minutes of the special meeting held on 8 November 2001 and the joint meetings held on 29 October 2001 and 26 November 2001 with the Environmental Affairs Panel were confirmed.

II Information papers issued since last meeting

- (LC Paper No. CB(1)538/01-02 - Train service disruption on Kwun Tong Line between Kwun Tong Station and Quarry Bay Station on 2 September 2001;
LC Paper No. CB(1)544/01-02 - Grade separation at Light Rail Transit junction LT1 at Tsing Lun Road, Tuen Mun;
LC Paper No. CB(1)561/01-02 - Carparking in Stanley; and
LC Paper No. CB(1)567/01-02 - Tsuen Wan Road upgrading)

2. Members noted the above information papers issued since last meeting. The Chairman also invited members to note that the Administration intended to seek funding approval from the Public Works Subcommittee for the two projects proposed under LC Paper Nos. CB(1)544/01-02 and CB(1)567/01-02 in December 2001 and

Action

January 2002 respectively.

III Items for discussion at the meeting on 25 January 2002

(LC Paper No. CB(1)560/01-02(01) - List of outstanding items for discussion;
and
LC Paper No. CB(1)560/01-02(02) - List of follow-up actions)

3. Members agreed that the following items proposed by the Administration would be discussed at the next regular Panel meeting scheduled for 25 January 2002:

- (a) Better co-ordination of public transport services arising from the commissioning of MTR Tseung Kwan O Extension; and
- (b) Review of incidents related to the Airport Railway.

4. Mr Albert CHAN referred to the recent accident that happened on Tung Chung Road which had led to serious traffic disruption and inconvenience to local residents. He considered that urgent discussion by the Panel on "Improvement of Tung Chung Road" was required, particularly whether oil trucks should be banned from using Tung Chung Road and the contingency arrangements for handling major road obstruction accidents. Expressing agreement with Mr CHAN's suggestion, Mr TAM Yiu-chung opined that the Administration should be requested to expedite the widening of Tung Chung Road. The Chairman said that the matter had also been raised by Islands District Council Members at their meeting with Legislative Council Members held on 13 December 2001.

5. Referring to agenda item IV "Review of the operation of public light buses" for the present meeting, the Chairman informed members that the public light bus trade had requested to appear before the Panel to give views on the matter. Members agreed that the Panel should schedule a meeting to receive views from deputations.

6. After deliberation, members agreed that the items on "Improvement of Tung Chung Road" and "Review of the operation of public light buses" should also be discussed at the next meeting scheduled for 25 January 2002. In view of the heavy agenda for the meeting, members also agreed that the meeting should be held from 8:30 am to 12:45 pm.

7. The Chairman drew members' attention to the Report entitled "2001 Population Census - Summary Results" published by the Census and Statistics Department. She sought members' views on whether a briefing on relevant results in the areas of transport, urban planning and housing, etc. should be arranged. Members agreed that there was no need to hold such a briefing for the Transport Panel.

Action

IV Review of the operation of public light buses

(LC Paper No. CB(1)560/01-02(03) - Information paper provided by the Administration;

LC Paper No. CB(1)560/01-02(04) - Submission from HK Public-Light Bus Owner & Driver Association; and

LC Paper No. CB(1)595/01-02(01) - Submission from the Environmental Light Bus Alliance)

8. The Chairman recapitulated that when the subject on “Policy on public light buses” was previously discussed at the Panel meeting on 15 December 2000, grave concerns had been expressed by members on the role and functions of public light buses (PLBs). As such, the Administration had been requested to conduct a comprehensive review on the operation of PLBs.

9. The Commissioner for Transport (C for T) briefly introduced the Administration’s paper on the subject (LC Paper No. CB(1)560/01-02(03)), which set out the Administration’s views on the operation of PLBs and the measures which would be undertaken or examined by the Administration to help the PLB trade. In particular, he drew members’ attention to the following points:

- (a) In the light of marked improvement in the network of mass carriers over the past years and the ambitious plan to expand further the railway network, the review had re-affirmed the supplementary role played by PLBs in Hong Kong’s transport system. Although having a supplementary role, PLB was still an important public transport mode carrying about 1.6 million passenger trips per day.
- (b) To support PLB’s supplementary role, the Government’s established policies of promoting the conversion of red minibuses (RMBs) to green minibuses (GMBs) and of containing RMBs within their existing areas of operation would continue.
- (c) Within this policy framework, the Administration had been looking into measures to assist the PLB trade, such as by promoting GMB service in private residential development, exploring initiatives to increase their indirect sources of income and introducing initiatives to enhance the quality of service. For RMBs, the Administration would consider allowing short-term parking of RMBs at PLB stands at specified points where feasible and designating drop-off points for RMBs at various locations.
- (d) The Administration would continue to work closely with the PLB trade through different channels to ensure that its future was as viable as possible.

10. The Chairman drew members’ attention to the submissions from HK Public-

Action

Light Bus Owner & Driver Association and the Environmental Light Bus Alliance, which had been issued to members vide LC Paper Nos. CB(1)560/01-02(04) and CB(1)595/01-02(01) respectively. A further submission from HK Public-Light Bus Owner & Driver Association and two submissions from Hong Kong Scheduled (GMB) Licensee Association and a group of public light bus drivers were also tabled at the meeting for members' information.

(Post-meeting note: The submissions from HK Public-Light Bus Owner & Driver Association, Hong Kong Scheduled (GMB) Licensee Association and a group of public light bus drivers tabled at the meeting were subsequently issued to members vide LC Paper Nos. CB(1)628/01-02(01) to (03).)

Restrictions on RMB operation

11. While acknowledging the Administration's efforts to promote the conversion of RMBs to GMBs, Mr Albert CHAN expressed grave dissatisfaction about the Administration's refusal to consider changing its out-dated policy of confining RMBs to their existing areas of operation. He pointed out that as RMBs were denied access to new development areas, they were forced to operate within busy urban areas which had in turn led to worsening air pollution. Citing the Tai Lam Tunnel (TLT) as an example, he considered that if the restriction on RMBs was relaxed, precious tunnel resources would be put to better use and an increased patronage would in turn help relieve pressures for toll increase. Both the passengers and RMB operators would also benefit from a much faster trip. In fact, RMB operators had agreed to reduce fare by \$2 if they were allowed to use TLT.

12. In this connection, Mr CHAN seriously condemned the Administration for failing to take heed to the request endorsed by the Panel at its meeting on 15 December 2000 calling for the Administration to relax the restriction on RMBs to use TLT. In view of the potential benefits of relaxation he had raised earlier, Mr CHAN called on the Administration to revisit its stance on the matter.

13. In response, the Deputy Commissioner for Transport/Operations and Management (DC for T) explained that in accordance with existing policy, RMBs would be confined to their existing service areas. As new expressways were usually built to serve new development areas, access by RMBs were not allowed. Moreover, in planning for such developments, adequate public transport services would have been provided. However, in the event that there were specific demands which the rail or franchised bus network were unable to meet, consideration would be given to meeting such demand by scheduled GMB service in accordance with the generally-accepted policy of encouraging conversion of RMBs into GMBs. Hence, she stressed that it was not a case of restricting PLBs from using TLT. In fact, possible GMB routes via TLT were being planned by the Transport Department (TD) for operation next year.

14. While expressing support for new GMB routes to operate via TLT, Mr Albert

Action

CHAN took the view that as existing RMB operators for the route between Yuen Long and Tsuen Wan/Jordan were not allowed to use TLT, they should be given credits when applying for the new GMB routes via TLT. Notwithstanding the above, he remained unconvinced that the restriction on RMBs should continue to apply. Given that RMBs were allowed to use specified sections of expressways such as the Western Harbour Crossing (WHC), he considered that the Administration's existing restrictions on RMBs were neither justified nor consistently applied.

15. In response, DC for T explained that RMBs were permitted to use WHC as their existing service area had not been enlarged due to such relaxation. She added that when assessing applications for new GMB routes, a basket of relevant factors would be taken into account. In case of an equal score occurred between two applicants, past operating history might also be considered.

16. Concurring with Mr Albert CHAN's views, Mr CHENG Kar-foo considered that the Administration should also review its overall policy on medium and low capacity public transport modes in Hong Kong, including PLBs and Resident's Services (RS). He was particularly concerned that by curtailing popular RS routes to Central and Admiralty, the Administration had ignored the transport needs and aspiration of those commuting public who lived in remote areas not adequately served by rail or franchised bus services. In view of the substantial amount of social resources at stake, he said that the Transport Bureau clearly had the responsibility of ensuring that the transport needs of residents living in remote areas were taken care of in an efficient manner.

17. While acknowledging the member's concern, the Deputy Secretary for Transport (DS for T) reiterated that according to the Government's established policy, priority would be accorded to the mass carriers (i.e. railways and franchised buses) in meeting the transport needs of the community. Under this policy, new projects such as West Rail and the Ma On Shan to Tai Wai Rail Link were being implemented to extend the railway network. As a supplementary public transport service provider, PLBs would have an important role to play as feeders to the mass carriers. In this connection, various measures had been taken by the Administration to assist the trade to develop this feeder role and improve the quality and image of PLB services.

18. Highlighting the need for a clear government policy on RS and other non-franchised bus services, Mr CHENG called for the Administration to consider his request and review the role of medium and low capacity public transport modes. In this connection, the Chairman advised that the matter of "Policy on non-franchised bus services" had been included in the Panel's list of outstanding items for discussion.

19. In reply to Mr LEUNG Fu-wah, the Assistant Commissioner for Transport/NT (AC for T/NT) explained the background for the proposal being considered by TD for opening the New Territories-bound section of Tuen Mun Road between Tsuen Wan and Sham Tseng. He said that road widening works had just commenced on the section of Castle Peak Road between Tsuen Wan West and Ka Lung Tsuen with

Action

completion scheduled for 2005. As Castle Peak Road was the main route for RMBs plying between Tsuen Wan and the North West New Territories, TD was examining the feasibility of providing RMBs with an alternative route to Castle Peak Road via Tuen Mun Road during the works period. If considered feasible, the proposal would be implemented next year.

Conversion of RMBs to GMBs

20. Mr LEUNG Fu-wah was concerned about the measures to be taken by the Administration to expedite the conversion of the remaining 1 902 RMBs to GMBs. In this connection, he asked whether data was available to substantiate this established policy from the financial viability point of view.

21. In response, DC for T stated that TD would monitor the viability of all GMB routes through the financial data provided by the operators. Generally speaking, GMB operation was on the whole financially viable. In recent years, the daily patronage of GMBs and RMBs together was maintained at about 1.6 million passenger trips. She added that the conversion of RMBs to GMBs was generally welcomed by the public as GMB offered a better regulated service. By encouraging conversion to GMBs, less RMBs would operate in busy thoroughfares in urban areas which would facilitate traffic management. Hence, the Administration would continue to work towards encouraging the conversion of RMBs by promoting GMB services. Planning for new GMB routes would be conducted through TD's route selection exercise, and the views of the trade and relevant District Councils would be consulted accordingly. Once finalized, RMBs would be invited to apply for the operation of such routes.

22. Referring to historical data on the patronage of PLBs, the Chairman pointed out that in mid-1990's, the daily patronage of PLBs was near to 1.8 million passenger trips. When compared against the average patronage of 1.5 million in recent years, it seemed to suggest that the overall ridership of PLBs had in fact suffered a substantial decrease. In particular, she was concerned about the overall viability of GMB operation because while the number of GMBs had increased by about 4% this year, the corresponding increase in daily patronage was only 2%.

23. In reply, DC for T reported that over the past ten years, the daily patronage of PLBs had been increasing with some downward fluctuations in recent years. While the average patronage of PLBs was about 1.5 million in the past few years, the figure this year had risen slightly to 1.63 million. According to recent studies undertaken by TD, the utilization rate of the RMB fleet was maintained at 97%. In addition, the daily rental had increased from \$650 in 1995 to \$900 in 2001. All these were indicators that viable operation of the PLB trade was maintained.

24. Given that franchised bus services had been greatly improved in recent years, Mr TAM Yiu-chung expressed concern about the financial viability of PLB operation in general, as well as the increasing difficulty in identifying suitable GMB routes to

Action

entice conversion by RMBs. In this connection, he asked whether the Administration would consider providing assistance to the GMB trade for offering concessionary fares to the elderly during non-peak periods. Mr TAM considered that if such an arrangement could be made, the elderly could benefit while patronage for GMB services would also increase.

25. In response, DC for T stated that assistance would be provided to PLB trade where possible to facilitate their operation. In this respect, many measures had been taken by the Administration to promote GMB services so that new routes could be identified for conversion by RMBs. Regarding concessionary fares for the elderly, she explained that this was not a mandatory requirement for GMB operations. Currently, concessionary fares for the elderly were offered on some GMB routes out of the initiative of individual operators.

26. Mr Albert CHAN however opined that if considered appropriate, TD could impose relevant requirements on the operating conditions of GMB routes. He also remarked that in planning for new GMB routes, TD should consider allowing more overnight service to serve new development areas.

Measures to improve PLB operation

27. To enhance safety, Mr CHENG Kar-foo called for the Administration to expedite its work on the installation of seatbelts in PLBs and enquired about the implementation timetable. In reply, AC for T/NT said that legislative amendments were being prepared to effect new in-vehicle safety requirements for seatbelts and high seat back together with relaxation of the existing weight limit for PLB vehicles to 5 tonnes. It was intended that the relevant proposal would be presented to the Legislative Council in the first quarter of 2002.

28. The Chairman reminded members that deputations of PLB trade would be invited to present their views to the Panel on this matter at the meeting to be held on 25 January 2002.

V Contingency arrangements for handling major traffic and transport incidents

(LC Paper No. CB(1)560/01-02(05) - Information paper provided by the Administration)

29. At the invitation of the Chairman, C for T briefed members on the contingency arrangements for handling major traffic and transport incidents and the findings of TD's review on the Cross Harbour Tunnel (CHT) incident on 26 November 2001. Details were set out in the information paper provided by the Administration on the subject (LC Paper No. CB(1)560/01-02(05)).

30. Mr Andrew CHENG referred to the late submission of the information paper

Action

and reminded the Administration of the need to provide members with discussion papers for Panel meetings in a timely manner.

31. Regarding the formulation and implementation of contingency plans, C for T explained that the Government already had a number of established procedures for handling traffic and transport incidents. Under the system, various government departments and public transport operators all had their roles to play. TD's main role was to liaise with transport operators to ensure that public transport was provided as best as possible during any incident. The second role of TD was to disseminate information to public transport passengers and road users. Over the last few years, TD had been increasing its ability to deal with such incidents. With the establishment of the Transport Incident Management Section (TIMS) in May 2000, TD had a small dedicated team for handling traffic and transport incidents 24 hours a day. On average, about 130 incidents were handled by TIMS per month. Over the last 11 months or so, TIMS had handled some 50 major incidents which included arrangements during typhoons, congestions at Kwai Chung and more recently, the Tung Chung Road closure. In case of major traffic and transport incidents, TD's Emergency Transport Co-ordination Centre would be activated and additional staff would be deployed to assist TIMS's work.

The incident

32. On the CHT incident which happened on 26 November 2001, C for T re-stated the Government's apology for any inconvenience caused to the travelling public. He recounted that during the incident which involved the bursting of an oil pipe of the paver, the newly re-surfaced area of the Kowloon-bound tube of CHT was contaminated. While the remedial works appeared to be quite straightforward initially, it turned out that the problem was underestimated and extended time was taken to complete the task. Hence, there was delay in re-opening the tunnel tube before the critical morning peak hour which had resulted in wide-spread traffic congestion on the tunnel approach roads on Hong Kong Island after 8:00 am.

33. C for T stressed that the incident was indeed a rare one and it had developed in the most unexpected way. After reviewing the incident with relevant government departments and the tunnel operator, improvement measures in respect of better works arrangements, adherence to prescribed alert systems and dissemination of information had been identified.

34. To supplement, the Managing Director of Hong Kong Tunnels and Highways Management Company Limited (MD/HKTHM) briefly accounted for the reasons why the Controller had not immediately activated an alert when he was first informed of the oil leakage at 5:45 am. MD/HKTHM said that based on past figures, the Controller had assessed that traffic could reasonably be accommodated up to about 7:30 am by a single tube. After consulting the contractor of the Highways Department (HyD), he believed that the repair works could be completed in good time before 7:30 am. Considering the unnecessary inconvenience that a premature alert might result, the

Action

Controller had therefore decided not to issue an alert. Acknowledging the serious disruption that was created eventually, MD/HKTHM took the opportunity to offer sincere apology to all those who were affected by the incident.

Workings of the alert system

35. Mr LEUNG Fu-wah said that according to some reports, actions had not been taken by TD in the first instance because it did not recognize a notification from the tunnel operator through telephone. He was concerned that TD's handling of the incident might have been delayed as a result, and sought clarification from the Administration on the proper procedures for activating the alert system.

36. In response, DC for T explained that when an accident occurred, the source operator (i.e. the operator experiencing a problem with his service) should make an evaluation of the possible duration of the disruption and issue alert messages to other affected parties so that their respective contingency measures would be activated as soon as possible to minimize the adverse impacts. To facilitate efficient transmission of such messages, a multi-fax system was adopted which enabled alert messages to be faxed to all parties concerned at the same time. Hence, while TD was informed of the incident over the phone, this had not displaced the need for a formal alert to be issued under the established procedures. In the present incident, an alert message was only sent out by the tunnel operator until 7:40 am. In reply to Mr LEUNG's follow-up question, MD/HKTHM confirmed that the incident would have to be reported to the Tunnel Manager if an alert was to be activated. However, under the circumstances, the Controller had only raised the level of staff involved by reporting the incident to the Chief Controller and the Deputy Tunnel Manager.

37. Mr CHENG Kar-foo opined that notwithstanding the established alert system, the Administration should review whether a clear definition of "major emergency transport incidents" was required so that front-line staff of public transport operators could instantly recognized the need to activate the alert system under those circumstances. He also queried the efficacy of TIMS's monitoring function if its only source of information was the public transport operators. He considered that if direct contacts were established between TD and other relevant departments, such as HyD in the present case, the incident might have been better handled.

38. In reply, DC for T reiterated the importance of activating the alert system. She said that in the event of an alert, all parties concerned would be aware of an emergency situation and their awareness heightened. All necessary contingencies arrangements would also be made accordingly. For this purpose, the duty of tunnel operators in emergencies had already been clearly prescribed in the relevant management contracts or operating agreements. To supplement, the Assistant Commissioner for Transport/Management and Paratransit (AC for T/M&P) advised that in CHT's case, an alert would have to be issued for any incident leading to the closure of a tunnel tube for more than 20 minutes.

Action

39. DC for T further explained that as TD did not have any on-site staff to assess the situation, it would have to rely on the judgement of and information provided by the source operator. While TD would monitor the traffic and transport situation in an emergency, liaise with other departments and agencies on necessary relief measures and disseminate information to the travelling public, other departments and agencies also had their roles to play. One of the improvement measures proposed in the wake of this incident was that the CHT operator would also take part in monitoring works inside the tunnel and would report directly to TD on problems detected. There would also be direct communication between TD and HyD staff so that the problem would be escalated to a senior level as circumstances required.

Admin 40. Notwithstanding the Administration's explanation, Mr CHENG remained of the view that clear procedures and guidelines for handling major transport emergency incidents under the alert system should be properly documented. In this connection, he requested the Administration to provide supplementary information to the Panel after the meeting. DC for T agreed to the request.

41. Mr Albert CHAN expressed concern about TD's lack of vigilance in this incident. He considered that after being informed of possible delays in the re-opening of the Kowloon-bound tube at 5:45 am, TD should have monitored the situation more closely, instead of waiting for the regular hourly updates by the tunnel operator. He thus asked whether TD, in its overseeing role, should issue an alert as and when necessary, instead of relying on the source operator to do so.

42. In reply, C for T acknowledged that TD would need to be more alert in handling such incidents. But he called for members' understanding that with its small set-up, the front-line of TIMS had already done the best they could in the circumstances. Reiterating that it was a most unusual incident, he said that all the parties involved truly believed that the problem was a minor one which was under control. By using their common sense, the established procedures under the alert system were set aside. While this should not have happened, it was most unfortunate that it did happen and had resulted in serious consequences. He assured members that TD was being very proactive in this matter and improvement measures were identified after the review to ensure that similar incidents would not recur. Training sessions would be held to heighten the alert of front-line staff so that the attention of senior staff would be promptly brought to such incidents in future.

Improvement measures

43. While expressing appreciation for TD's sincere attitude in reviewing the incident, Mr CHENG Kar-foo considered that in case of any mismanagement, responsibilities should be carefully identified and sanctions should be imposed where necessary. In this connection, Mr Albert CHAN asked whether the CHT operator would be penalized for failing to activate the alert system during an emergency. AC for T/M&P replied that while no penalty clause for such eventuality was specified in the existing management contract, the matter could be reviewed in future when the

Action

opportunity arose.

44. Mr CHAN considered that it might be useful to have different degrees of alert so that all concerned parties could take actions accordingly. In response, AC for T/M&P explained that under the existing system, the alert had already been classified into two levels, i.e. amber and red alerts, according to the seriousness of the situation. This classification was properly documented for the information of all concerned departments and agencies. Mr CHAN suggested that the public should also be informed of the degree of alert so that they could make travel arrangements accordingly. DC for T noted the member's suggestion.

45. In view of the great impact on the society caused by serious traffic disruptions, Mr LEUNG Fu-wah considered that it would be most important to ensure that adequate training was provided to tunnel staff so that they were capable of handling such emergencies. In this connection, he opined that TD might need to review the mechanism of offering the management contract of tunnels to the lowest bidder. Other factors such as the recruitment of experienced staff should also be considered. His views were noted by AC for T/M&P.

46. In reply to the Chairman's follow-up question, MD/HKTHM stated that the Controller in question had more than twenty years of experience in tunnel control operations. Following the incident, the tunnel company would enhance the training of front-line staff.

VI Any other business

47. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10:35 am.

Legislative Council Secretariat

22 January 2002