

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)297/04-05

Ref : CB1/PL/TP

Panel on Transport

**Background brief on measures to enhance the safety
of public light bus operations**

Purpose

This paper provides some background information on the various measures to enhance the safety of public light bus (PLB) operations.

Traffic accidents involving PLBs

2. As at end August 2004, there are 4 346 licenced PLBs, of which 1 691 are red minibuses (RMBs) and 2 655 are green minibuses (GMBs). GMBs operate on fixed routes at frequencies and fares determined by the Commissioner for Transport whereas RMBs are not subject to such controls. According to the Administration, the total number of traffic accidents involving PLBs from January 2000 to September 2004 is 4 807. The respective numbers of casualties involving drivers, passengers and pedestrians are 1 867, 4 849 and 1 210. The major causes of these accidents are tailgating and careless lane changing. Details are set out in **Appendix I**. The accident rate and casualty rate of PLBs have been relatively high among all classes of vehicles. The 2003 accident and casualty rates per 1 000 vehicles for PLBs were about 221 and 145 respectively whereas those for all motor vehicles were about 25 and 9 respectively.

3. The Panel on Transport (the Panel) has all along been concerned about the safety of PLB operations. It has reviewed from time to time with the Administration the development and progress of various measures to enhance the safety of PLB operations. These include -

- (a) installation of passenger protection equipment, including seat belts and high back seats on newly registered PLBs;
- (b) measures to combat inappropriate driving behaviour, such as imposition of a maximum speed limit for PLBs, installation of speed

display or speed warning devices on PLBs, use of vehicle blackbox (i.e. tachograph) to record operation data of PLBs, strengthening enforcement against speeding and other inappropriate driving behaviour of PLBs, wider use of red light camera and speed enforcement camera systems, higher penalties for excessive speeding;

- (c) promotion of safe driving; and
- (d) legislative amendments regarding traffic offences.

Installation of passenger protection equipment

4. In view of the relatively high rear seat casualty rate for accidents involving PLB and given that PLB is a popular mode of public transport, the Panel all along holds the view that it is necessary to install passenger protection equipment, including seat belts and high back seats, on newly registered PLBs to enhance passenger safety. Legislative amendments to this effect were passed by the Legislative Council in November 2002. To allow sufficient time for the vehicle manufacturers to develop and produce the new passenger protection equipment, the seat belt legislation only took effect on 1 August 2004. The responsibility of wearing seat belts rests with passengers of PLBs.

5. According to the Administration's response to a written question raised at the Council meeting on 3 November 2004, since the seat belt legislation on PLBs took effect on 1 August 2004, 298 PLBs have been installed with seat belts. During the same period, the Police have issued about 160 verbal warnings to remind PLB passengers to fasten their seat belts. The Police will step up enforcement actions in this respect. The Administration believes that the incentive scheme to encourage PLB owners to change from diesel PLBs to liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) PLBs¹ will speed up the replacement of existing minibuses with new models that are fitted with seat belts.

Measures to combat inappropriate driving behaviour

Speed management

Imposing a maximum speed on PLBs

¹ On 15 July 2002, the Finance Committee approved the Administration's funding request to provide a one-off grant to encourage diesel PLB owners to replace their vehicles early with ones that are run on LPG or electricity. Under the proposal, the Administration agrees to provide a one-off grant of \$60,000 or \$80,000 for each eligible diesel PLB that is replaced by an LPG or electric one respectively. In order to be eligible for the scheme, owners of diesel PLBs aged 10 or above at the time of de-registration must replace their vehicles by end-2004, and owners of diesel PLBs below 10 years old at the time of de-registration must replace their vehicles by end-2005.

6. Currently there is a maximum speed limit of 70 km/h for all medium goods vehicles, heavy good vehicles and buses, as well as motorcycles and motor tricycles driven by holders of probationary driving licences, even though there may be higher speed limits on roads. There have been suggestions that a maximum speed limit for PLBs should be imposed to deter speeding of PLBs.

7. When the proposal of imposing a maximum speed limit on PLBs was discussed at the Panel meetings on 28 April 2000 and 19 January 2001, members expressed diverse views on the matter. Some members considered that adopting a tighter control in the speed limit of PLBs might be effective in tackling the speeding problem of PLBs at source and thus the proposal should be further explored. On the other hand, members had highlighted the following issues regarding the feasibility and effectiveness of such a proposal -

- (a) the proposal might not be feasible as PLB routes might pass through different speed limit zones;
- (b) whether similar restriction should be imposed on other types of vehicles such as taxi and private cars for equitable treatment; and
- (c) imposing a maximum speed limit of 70km/h might not bring about much improvement if the majority of traffic accidents involving PLBs happened when they were travelling at roads with a speed limits of only 50km/h and 70km/h.

8. At the Panel meeting on 5 December 2003, the Administration indicated that it did not intend to pursue the proposal of imposing a maximum speed limit of 70 km/h on PLBs. This proposal would be re-examined if there was substantial increase in the number of speed-related accidents involving PLBs. However, in the light of public concern about the driving behaviour of PLB drivers, the Administration considered that other measures such as the installation of speed display devices on PLBs, promotion of safe driving among PLB drivers, and strengthening enforcement against speeding of PLBs should be useful in reducing PLB-related traffic accidents.

Speed warning devices

9. Speed display units are primarily used to facilitate monitoring by PLB passengers and caution PLB drivers against speeding. At present, there is no legal requirement for the installation of speed display or speed warning devices on motor vehicles. Following a trial scheme launched in 2001, Transport Department (TD) began to install speed display units on GMBs on overnight services in August 2002. By April 2003, all 243 GMBs running overnight routes have been installed with speed display units. As the device has facilitated passengers' awareness of GMB's speed, the number of complaints on GMB speeding increased substantially. The programme was further extended to those GMBs operating along expressways in late 2003. At present, 518

GMBs have been installed with speed display units.

10. During past Panel discussions, members expressed the views that TD should extend the installation of speed display units to other PLBs, the complaint hotline number should be prominently displayed near the speed warning device, and more publicity should be launched to heighten public awareness of the reporting mechanism.

11. Recently, the Administration has indicated that it is considering to make it mandatory for PLBs to install speed display units and require PLB owners to adopt measures to prevent such devices from being tampered with.

Use of vehicle blackbox

12. Another option to deter speeding is to keep a full record of the operating conditions of the vehicle such as average speed per minute, daily highest speed, distance traveled, total number of driving hours, numbers of foot brake application and door opening, whether illumination/indication lights are switched on, etc. To facilitate monitoring of GMB operation and accident investigation, TD has conducted a trial on the use of vehicle monitoring system on four GMBs serving on routes with different operational characteristics. The trial started in December 2003 and lasted for six months.

Penalties for excessive speeding

13. The Legislative Council passed the Road Traffic Legislation (Amendment) Bill on 26 June 2000 which aimed to increase the penalties for excessive speeding offences. The fine for speeding in excess of the speed limit by 30 - 45 km/hour was increased from \$450 to \$600. As regards the driving offence point for such speeding offences, the level would remain unchanged, i.e. five points. The fine and driving-offence point for speeding in excess of the speed limit by over 45 km/hour were increased from \$450 to \$1,000 and from 8 to 10 points respectively. The penalties for the less serious speeding offences were kept unchanged. The revised penalty levels came into effect on 1 January 2001.

Strengthening enforcement against inappropriate driving behaviour

Selective traffic enforcement policy

14. The Hong Kong Police Force has been adopting a Selective Traffic Enforcement Policy (STEP) to target offences that are known to be causes for traffic accidents. There are annual reviews on the list of priority offences under STEP to ensure an efficient allocation of resources and to enhance the effectiveness of enforcement efforts.

15. On 8 November 2004, the Police launched a five-week territory-wide campaign to promote public service vehicle safety. Stringent enforcement would be taken against those drivers who had little regard for their own safety as well as that of other people. Focus would be on offences including speeding, failing to comply with traffic signal and dangerous or careless driving.

Speed enforcement camera and red light camera systems

16. Overseas experience shows that installation of speed enforcement cameras (SECs) at strategic locations is a useful means to combat speeding effectively. Before January 1999, there were only 10 locations along Tolo Highway and Fanling Highway that were installed with SEC onsite equipment. In January 1999, the Administration decided to expand the coverage of SECs to 60 other locations at strategic roads and expressways, and to place eight cameras at these locations on a rotational basis.

17. The red light camera (RLC) system aims to deter drivers from red light jumping which accounts for more than 80% of traffic signal offences. Between 1993 to 1999, 50 road junctions were installed with RLC on-site equipment. As the number of red light jumping cases at these road junctions had reduced substantially by 43 - 55%, the Administration decided to procure 12 additional RLCs and to locate them at 60 additional road junctions.

18. On 9 July 1999, the Finance Committee approved financial commitments of \$25.16 million and \$16.2 million for the procurement and installation of additional SECs and RLCs respectively.

19. The Administration subsequently decided to add another 15 locations (making up a total of 75 additional locations) to the SEC project as the price of the successful bid was lower than the original estimate. The SEC and RLC projects were originally scheduled for completion by September 2002. In December 2003, the Administration informed the Panel that the completion time of the two projects had to be deferred to February 2004 and December 2003 respectively, due to the need to review the technical details at the pre-tendering stage and to resolve the problem of power supply for the SECs at selection locations with the power companies.

20. The Administration has recently indicated its plan to install more SECs and RLCs to provide a stronger deterrent effect.

Installing countdown displays on the traffic signal system

21. During past Panel discussions, some members had called on the Administration to conduct a trial to ascertain the effectiveness of installing countdown displays for motorists in Hong Kong as an additional tool to facilitate the compliance of drivers to stop before red lights. Recently, the PLB trade has also called for early implementation of such a measure, particularly in the light of

the Administration's proposal to increase the driving offence points for red light jumping to provide a stronger deterrent effect².

22. The Administration's response on this proposal at the Panel meeting on 19 November 2003 was that the effectiveness of countdown devices for motorists was inconclusive. Some overseas experiences indicated that such a device might increase the risk of accidents at road junctions as motorists might react differently in the last few seconds of the green signal of traffic lights. Motorists who decided to speed through the junction would subject the pedestrians there to greater danger. Nonetheless, the Administration agreed to keep this matter in view.

Promotion of safe driving

23. To promote safe driving, TD launched the Driver Improvement Scheme in September 2002 to improve the driving behaviour and attitude of motorists. Currently, motorists are encouraged to take part in the Scheme on a voluntary basis, except for those who are directed by the court. Some Panel members have expressed the view that drivers who have accumulated a certain number of Driving Offence Points should be required to attend the Scheme on a mandatory basis.

24. In view of the importance of the driving attitude of drivers, the Administration has also implemented the following measures to enhance PLB drivers' awareness in safe driving:

- (a) cooperating with the Vocational Training Council in the provision of the Skill Upgrading Scheme to improve the driving skills and attitude of PLB drivers;
- (b) stepping up the "Smart Driving" publicity programme with the Road Safety Council;
- (c) conducting workshops for PLB drivers to enhance their awareness in safe driving; and
- (d) distributing regular newsletters to PLB drivers to provide them with the latest road safety information and to remind them to adopt a proper driving attitude.

Legislative amendments regarding driving offences

² At present, the offence of "Failing to comply with traffic signals" attracts 3 driving-offence points.

25. The Panel notes that some legislative amendments targeting at inappropriate driving behaviour are under consideration by the Administration. One of them concerns failure to keep a safe distance from the vehicle in front which is often the cause of multiple collisions. At the moment, this act does not constitute any specific offence under the law, and can only be prosecuted under 'careless driving', for which the collection of evidence is rather complicated. The Hong Kong Police Force are reviewing the feasibility of introducing a new offence against 'failing to keep a safe distance' or 'tailgating', to simplify the prosecution process.

26. Other legislative changes under deliberation include imposition of fixed penalties for failing to drive in the nearside lane of an expressway and using hand-held mobile phone while the vehicle is in motion.

27. When the proposal for legislative changes to combat inappropriate driving behaviour was discussed at the Panel meeting on 19 November 2003, members in general supported the proposals and urged the Administration to expedite the preparatory work and present the relevant proposals for early consideration by members. On the other hand, a member cautioned the importance of avoiding any changes that would make the existing penalty system overly harsh, especially on professional drivers.

Conversion of RMB to GMB operation

28. The PLB fleet has been frozen at 4 350 since 1976. Of the total PLB fleet, 60% are GMBs and 40% are RMBs. GMBs are under the direct monitoring of TD. This would better ensure the quality of service. As such, the Government's established policy is to encourage the provision of scheduled PLB service in the form of GMBs to supplement the high capacity carriers including railways and franchised buses. Consistent with this policy, if the operation of PLBs along individual expressways is considered necessary and appropriate, new PLB services will be introduced in the form of GMB services in the areas concerned.

29. In December 2003, TD launched a trial scheme to help RMB drivers, who could be affected by the WR project, to operate similar GMB routes.

30. To address the safety issue arising from the driving manner of individual drivers, there have been suggestions that if all RMBs are converted into GMB operation, it might help improve the overall safety of PLB operation.

Motion on enhancing the safety of railway and road traffic

31. A motion debate on enhancing the safety of railway and road traffic was held on 17 November 2004.

32. A list of relevant papers is in **Appendix II**.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
22 November 2004

**Number of Casualties in Traffic Accidents
Involving Public Light Buses**

(i) Drivers

Year	No. of Fatalities	No. of Serious Injuries	No. of Minor Injuries	Total No. of Casualties
2000	3	70	308	381
2001	2	59	320	381
2002	5	75	350	430
2003	6	58	315	379
2004 (up to September)	2	55	239	296
Total	18	317	1,532	1,867

(ii) Passengers

Year	No. of Fatalities	No. of Serious Injuries	No. of Minor Injuries	Total No. of Casualties
2000	1	100	920	1,021
2001	2	80	987	1,069
2002	0	76	1,008	1,084
2003	0	76	790	866
2004 (up to September)	0	59	750	809
Total	3	391	4,455	4,849

(iii) Pedestrians

Year	No. of Fatalities	No. of Serious Injuries	No. of Minor Injuries	Total No. of Casualties
2000	16	95	150	261
2001	8	73	152	233
2002	14	85	147	246
2003	17	96	158	271
2004 (up to September)	9	60	130	199
Total	64	409	737	1,210

Measures to enhance the safety of public light bus operations

List of relevant papers

Council/Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Finance Committee (FC)	9 July 1999	Proposal for expanding the speed enforcement camera system to other strategic road sections over the territory at an estimated cost of \$25.16 million http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr98-99/english/fc/fc/papers/fc090737.htm
FC	9 July 1999	Proposal for expanding the red light camera system to other signalised junctions over the territory at an estimated cost of \$16.2 million http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr98-99/english/fc/fc/papers/fc090738.htm
Council meeting	5 April 2000	Question raised by Hon LAU Kong-wah on speeding problem of public light bus (PLB) drivers http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr99-00/english/counmtg/hansard/000405fe.pdf
Transport Panel (TP)	28 April 2000	Administration's paper on measures adopted and proposed measures to tackle speeding activities by PLBs (LC Paper No. CB(1)1435/99-00(06)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr99-00/english/panels/tp/papers/a1435e06.pdf
Council meeting	26 June 2000	Report of the Bills Committee on Road Traffic Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2000 to the Legislative Council http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr99-00/english/bc/bc12/reports/a1922e.pdf

Council/Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Council meeting	22 November 2000	<p>Question raised by Hon LEUNG Fu-wah on red minibuses prohibited from using expressways</p> <p>http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr00-01/english/counmtg/hansard/001122fe.pdf</p>
TP	15 December 2000	<p>Administration's paper on the policy on PLBs (LC Paper No. CB(1)307/00-01(03))</p> <p>http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr00-01/english/panels/tp/papers/a307e03.pdf</p>
TP	19 January 2001	<p>Administration's paper on the findings of the Administration's review of measures to enhance safety of passengers on PLBs (LC Paper No. CB(1)464/00-01(04))</p> <p>http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr00-01/english/panels/tp/papers/a464e04.pdf</p>
<p>Subcommittee on Road Traffic (Safety Equipment) (Amendment) Regulation 2002 and the Road Traffic (Construction and Maintenance of Vehicles) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulation 2002</p>	23 October 2002	<p>Legislative Council brief on extension of seat belt legislation to rear seats of PLBs</p> <p>http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr02-03/english/subleg/brief/148_brf.pdf</p>

Council/Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
House Committee	8 November 2002	<p>Report of the Subcommittee on Road Traffic (Safety Equipment) (Amendment) Regulation 2002 and the Road Traffic (Construction and Maintenance of Vehicles) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulation 2002</p> <p>http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr02-03/english/hc/papers/hc1108cb1-222.pdf</p>
Council meeting	27 November 2002	<p>Question raised by Hon LAU Kong-wah on problem of speeding among PLB drivers</p> <p>http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr02-03/english/counmtg/hansard/cm1127ti-translate-e.pdf</p>
Council meeting	7 May 2003	<p>Question raised by Hon LAU Kong-wah on traffic safety of PLBs</p> <p>http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr02-03/english/counmtg/hansard/cm0507ti-translate-e.pdf</p>
TP	28 November 2003	<p>Administration's paper setting out the basic framework of a possible trial scheme for facilitating incumbent drivers of red minibuses operating in the service area of the West Rail to operate green minibus services via Route 3</p> <p>http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr03-04/english/panels/tp/papers/tp1128cb1-406-5e.pdf</p>
TP	5 December 2003	<p>Report on Enhancement of Highway Safety of the Tuen Mun Road Traffic Incident Independent Expert Panel (LC Paper No. CB(1)455/03-04(01))</p> <p>http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr03-04/english/panels/tp/papers/tp1205cb1-455-1e.pdf</p>
TP	5 December 2003	<p>Administration's paper reporting the development and progress of the measures to enhance passenger safety of PLBs (LC Paper No. CB(1)477/03-04(01))</p> <p>http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr03-04/english/panels/tp/papers/tp1205cb1-477-1e.pdf</p>

Council/Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
TP	19 December 2003	Administration's responses to the Report on Enhancement of Highway Safety of the Tuen Mun Road Traffic Incident Independent Expert Panel (LC Paper No. 586/03-04(03)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr03-04/english/panels/tp/papers/tp1219cb1-586-3e.pdf
Bills Committee on Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2003	3 June 2004	Legislative Council brief on Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2003 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr03-04/english/bills/brief/b29_brf.pdf
Council meeting	30 June 2004	Report of Bills Committee on Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2003 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr03-04/english/bc/bc01/reports/bc010630cb1-rpt-e.pdf
Council meeting	3 November 2004	Question raised by Hon LI Fung-ying on the number of casualties in PLBs related traffic accident http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200411/03/1103183.htm
Council meeting	10 November 2004	Question raised by Hon LAU Wai-hing on measures to curb speeding and red light jumping by drivers http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200411/10/1110176.htm
Council meeting	17 November 2004	Question raised by Hon LAU Kong-wah on traffic accidents involving public light buses http://www.legco.gov.hk/english/index.htm