

立法會
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Panel on Environmental Affairs

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Friday, 20 October 2006, at 9:35 am
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP (Chairman)
Hon Martin LEE Chu-ming, SC, JP
Hon WONG Yung-kan, JP
Hon Miriam LAU Kin-ye, GBS, JP
Hon CHOY So-yuk, JP
Hon LEE Wing-tat
Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, SBS, JP
Hon TAM Heung-man
- Members absent** : Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon SIN Chung-kai, JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah, JP
- Members attending** : Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
- Public officers attending** : **For item I**

Dr Sarah LIAO
Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works

Ms Anissa WONG
Permanent Secretary for the Environment, Transport
and Works (Environment)

Dr Mike CHIU
Deputy Director of Environmental Protection (1)

Mr Raymond FAN
Deputy Director of Environmental Protection (2)

Mr Roy TANG
Deputy Director of Environmental Protection (3)

Mr Esmond LEE
Deputy Director of Environmental Protection (4)

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

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

Miss Mandy POON
Legislative Assistant (1)4

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I. Briefing by the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works on relevant policy initiatives in the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2006-2007

(The 2006-2007 Policy Address – “Policy Agenda”

Address by the Chief Executive at the Legislative Council meeting on 11 October 2006

LC Paper No. CB(1) 34/06-07(01) — 2006-2007 Policy Agenda - Policy Initiatives of the Environment, Transport and Works Bureau)

The Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (SETW) briefed members on the initiatives in the 2006-2007 Policy Agenda relevant to the environmental portfolio of the Environment, Transport and Works Bureau by highlighting the salient points in the information paper.

(Post-meeting note: A copy of SETW's speaking note tabled at the meeting was circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(1) 131/06-07.)

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Air quality

2. Mr Albert CHAN expressed concern about the deteriorating air quality which had been affecting public health. He enquired if targets would be set for improving the air quality in an attempt to regain blue skies and if so, the time-table for achieving the targets. He said that reference should be made to overseas experience like Los Angeles which had been successful in eliminating smog. SETW agreed that the experience of Los Angeles was relevant to Hong Kong given the similarities between the two cities, both of which were densely populated, highly developed and faced with cross-border pollution problems. Opportunity had been taken to exchange views with the Mayor of Los Angeles during his recent visit to Hong Kong. It was noted that efforts to improve air quality were initiated in Los Angeles some 20 years ago and air quality improvement measures similar to those in Hong Kong were adopted. On top of the many measures introduced to improve air quality, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) would commission an 18-month study in early 2007 to fully review the Air Quality Objectives and the long-term air quality management strategy. The review would include extensive consultation and public engagement. Cooperation within the Pearl River Delta Region was also required.

One-off grants for replacement of old diesel commercial vehicles

3. Ms Miriam LAU said that she had been urging the Government to provide incentives to encourage owners of old diesel commercial vehicles to replace their vehicles with more environment-friendly models since 1999. While appreciating that such a request had finally been acceded to, she was concerned about the participation rate having regard to the preliminary views collected from the cargo/container trades. She pointed out that the success of the Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) Taxi Scheme with a 99% conversion rate was mainly attributed to the provision of a one-off grant of \$40,000 which was a significant contribution to the replacement cost of a LPG taxi which was about \$200,000 each. However, the situation was very much different nowadays. According to the trades, the cost of replacement with a cleaner Euro II or III model was about \$300,000 to \$400,000 back in 1999 and 2000. The exemption of First Registration Tax was quite an attractive incentive. Given the much higher cost of Euro IV vehicles which ranged from \$600,000 to \$700,000, the proposed one-off grant of about \$40,000 to \$60,000 was much less attractive as owners would still have to bear a large part of the replacement cost. They would need to assess their affordability and road worthiness of their vehicles before deciding on whether to participate in the scheme, particularly when the future remained dim. Besides, there were technical problems which had to be resolved as some Euro IV models required special additives in fuels which were not available in most filling stations. There were also concerns on the availability of suitable replacement models and whether the Euro IV models would be able to adapt to fuels sold in the Mainland for those cross-border vehicles. These economic and technical problems would have to be sorted out between the Administration and the trades as soon as practicable with a view to encouraging participation in the replacement scheme.

4. As the replacement scheme would be discussed in greater detail at the Panel meeting on 23 October 2006, SETW said that she would only provide a brief response to Ms Miriam LAU's questions. She explained that the proposed one-off grant would be about 12% and 18% of the average taxable values of the pre-Euro and Euro I diesel vehicles to be replaced respectively. A percentage instead of a fixed amount was proposed to take into account the substantial price difference of pre-Euro and Euro I diesel vehicles which ranged from small light vans to large container trucks. The Administration would consult the trades as soon as possible and endeavour to resolve the economic and technical problems with a view to encouraging early replacement of more polluting vehicles.

5. While welcoming the proposed provision of a one-off grant to encourage owners to replace their old diesel commercial vehicles with Euro IV vehicles, Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that owners might have reservations on taking up the offer as they would still have to bear 80% of the replacement cost. SETW stressed that the one-off grant was a voluntary incentive scheme, and that owners were free to participate taking into account their own situations, such as the conditions of their vehicles and financial implications arising from early replacement of their vehicles. She noted that the LPG Taxi Scheme was highly successful with a 99% conversion rate.

6. Miss CHOY So-yuk held the view that a carrot-and-stick approach should be adopted. Apart from providing an incentive to encourage early replacement of polluting vehicles, which was in fact a repeated request from members, there should also be disincentives to discourage the use of these vehicles, such as banning vehicles which had been in use for a certain of time from running on the streets, as otherwise the incentive would become futile. Mr LEE Wing-tat echoed that consideration should be given to prohibiting more polluting heavy vehicles which had been in use for say 15 or 20 years from running on the streets. SETW said that proposals put forward by members would involve the complicated issue of government intervention on personal property. Besides, if old diesel vehicles were to be banned in Hong Kong, facilities had to be put in place for disposal of such vehicles as otherwise these would be sold to the Mainland for continued use, thereby transferring the problem across the boundary without resolving it. In response to Mr LEE's concern that owners of ageing heavy diesel vehicles might not be interested in participating in the incentive replacement scheme given the small one-off grant, SETW said that it would be premature to speculate on the effectiveness of the incentive scheme which had yet to be launched. It would take time to encourage the switch, as in the case of the LPG Taxi Scheme.

Provision of tax incentives to encourage the use of environment friendly cars

7. Referring to Annex C to the information paper, the Chairman held the view that EPD should upload on its website a list of type-approved environment friendly private car models to enable members of the public to make an informed choice when making their purchase. The Deputy Director of Environmental Protection (3) (DDEP(3)) said that the Administration would consult the trades to work out the final list of environment-friendly private cars. In order to be qualified for the proposed

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concession of 30% in the First Registration Tax, the environment friendly private vehicles had to meet the pre-determined emission and fuel efficiency standards. These included emissions of hydrocarbons and nitrogen oxides not exceeding 50% of the Euro IV or the Japan emission standards. The fuel efficiency should be at least 40% better than the average fuel efficiency of vehicles of the same class by weight. As fuel efficiency standards were only adopted in Japan, it would take time to work out the relevant standards for other European models in consultation with the trades. As such, the Administration planned to introduce the incentive scheme in April 2007.

8. The Chairman enquired about the Administration's plan to give priority to environment friendly vehicles in the replacement programme for the government fleet. DDEP(3) said that most environment friendly cars were hybrid models which used a combination of electricity and petrol. Given the limited availability of hybrid models in the market, the replacement of the entire government fleet with these vehicles might have the disadvantage of stereotyping which might jeopardize certain government operations, particularly those undercover operations by law enforcement agencies. Notwithstanding, the Administration would try to replace existing small and medium sized vehicles used for general purposes with environment friendly models when their service lives were due to expire. It was expected that most of these vehicles would be replaced in seven to eight years' time. SETW added that some of the heavy vehicles used in construction projects would be exempted as there were no suitable hybrid models available for replacement of these vehicles. At the request of the Chairman, the Administration undertook to provide the timetable and details of the programme on the replacement of government fleet with environment friendly models.

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Emissions from vehicles

9. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that recent surveys had indicated that temperature of franchised bus and train compartments was too low. The low temperature not only meant higher energy consumption, resulting in higher emissions, but also caused discomfort to passengers. SETW said that action had been taken by the Transport Department to deal with complaints about the low temperature of bus and train compartments. However, as some buses did not have temperature controls, the temperature would tend to become too cool when there were a few passengers on board. While the Mass Transit Railway Corporation and the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation had installed temperature controls for their trains, these had to be suitably adjusted to take account of the number of passengers.

10. Mr LEE Wing-tat asked if franchised bus companies would be required to replace their buses with more environment friendly models. SETW said that by comparison, pre-Euro and Euro I franchised buses contributed less than 1% of respirable suspended particulates (RSP) and nitrogen oxides (NO_x), which were less polluting than diesel commercial vehicles which accounted for about 18% and 10% of total RSP and NO_x emissions respectively. This also explained why it would be more cost effective to provide incentives to encourage early replacement of old diesel commercial vehicles. Notwithstanding, the need to use environment friendly buses had been clearly set out in the franchise agreements with bus companies upon renewal. The bus companies had been trying out the use of Euro IV double-decker buses and a

careful choice had to be made on the model to be adopted given the high cost of these buses amounting to \$3 million each. The investment in the bus fleet would be reflected in the bus fares. Meanwhile, bus companies were required to retrofit their existing buses with emission reduction devices. Efforts had also been made to reduce the number of buses in busy commercial districts like Central and Tsimshatsui with a view to reducing emissions.

11. Mr Martin LEE said that Members of the Democratic Party had all along been urging for the introduction of bus-bus interchange (BBI) schemes in business districts, such as Central and Causeway Bay, in an attempt to relieve traffic congestion on the one hand and to improve air quality on the other. Consideration should be given to requiring all cross-harbour bus lines from Kowloon and the New Territories via Western Harbour Crossing or Cross Harbour Tunnel/Eastern Harbour Crossing to end at Sheung Wan and Causeway Bay respectively. Interchanging passengers could then make use of shuttle services run by environment friendly buses for onward journeys. This arrangement could effectively reduce bus trips and had had the consent from all relevant parties, including bus and tram companies. As the principal official in charge of the environment, transport and work portfolios, SETW should be able to better coordinate the proposed BBI arrangements for the benefit of the public. SETW said that on-going efforts had been made to rationalize bus routes and to locate suitable sites for BBI at Causeway Bay and Sheung Wan but so far, no suitable sites had been identified. As regards Mr LEE's suggestion of providing BBI underground at Victoria Park, SETW said that the option had been dropped after careful consideration and she would look into the reasons leading to such a decision.

12. On control of idling vehicles with running engines (idling vehicles), Miss CHOY So-yuk said that instead of banning all idling vehicles territory-wide which had wider implications, consideration could be given to banning these vehicles at sensitive areas like schools and hospitals as a start. SETW said that as members of the public were more conscious of the need to ban idling vehicles and drivers were quite cooperative in switching off engines of their vehicles, it would be more appropriate to ban idling vehicles territory-wide instead of at selected places, which was rather difficult to implement.

Emissions from power plants

13. As emissions from power plants were far more polluting than vehicles, Mr WONG Kwok-hing considered that a more effective means to improve air quality was to incentivize power companies to install cleaner generation units. SETW said that incentives were usually provided to small enterprises and individuals. As power companies were both capable and obliged to adopt environmental practices as part of their corporate responsibility, it might not be necessary to incentivize them to install cleaner generation units. Besides, the two power companies were required under the Scheme of Control Agreement (SCA) to implement emission reduction measures, such as installation of desulphurization facilities. Caps would continue to be imposed on the emissions from power plants.

Green rooftops

14. Mr WONG Kwok-hing enquired if the Administration would take the lead to introduce green rooftops to public buildings and schools to reduce indoor temperature, which would in turn economize the use of electricity for air conditioning. SETW advised that about 30 public buildings constructed by the Architectural Services Department had been provided with green rooftops and there would be 30 more of such buildings under construction. Some schools had already transformed their rooftops into greenhouses to foster an interest in gardening among students. While it was the Administration's policy to promote green rooftops, the provision of green rooftops had to be considered on a case-by-case basis as this might not be suitable for some buildings.

Noise pollution

15. Miss TAM Heung-man said that she had earlier written to the Administration complaining about the noise and emission problems associated with a large number of buses stopping at common bus stops. She asked if the noise nuisance, particularly during acceleration and braking, was associated with the ageing of vehicles and if so, whether action would be taken to require bus companies to tackle the noise problem with a view to reducing the adverse environmental impact on the neighbouring community. SETW said that the provision of common bus stops for various bus lines was an integral part of BBI schemes to offer more convenience for passengers from a transport point of view. This would inevitably create an adverse impact on the neighboring environment. She added that while franchised buses were required to meet the prescribed noise standards, there were situations where noise would still be generated by bus compressors. She assured members that the noise and emission problems would be dealt with when BBI schemes were considered. On the number of buses which were not able to meet the noise standards, SETW said that different types of buses had different noise standards, and that all franchised buses had to meet their respective noise standards before these were put to use.

16. Miss TAM Heung-man considered that the Administration should review the noise tolerance limit of 70 decibels as noise at such level was very annoying to residents at night. SETW said that the noise tolerance limit of 70 decibels was in line with international standards. Besides, noise levels were measured from the outside at a distance of one metre from the receiving premises. Such a practice was considered acceptable for the Hong Kong situation.

Water quality

17. Mr Albert CHAN expressed concern about the water quality of the marine environment, particularly Victoria Harbour and the beaches in Tsuen Wan. He said that the pollutants discharged from the Stonecutters Island Sewage Treatment Works (SCISTW) and other industrial activities had destroyed the marine ecology of surrounding beaches at Tsuen Wan. Pollutants deposited in the seabed had completely depleted the oxygen content and eliminated other live forms in the sea. He considered that proactive measures had to be taken to improve the water quality

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and conserve the marine environment. Efforts should also be made to rehabilitate the Tsuen Wan beaches for the benefit of Tsuen Wan and Tsing Yi residents.

18. SETW said that the beach water quality could not be improved unless and until the source of pollutants was removed. To this end, funding would be sought early next year for the construction of advance disinfection facilities at SCISTW as part of the Harbour Area Treatment Scheme (HATS) Stage 2A. Upon the commissioning of the disinfection facilities in 2009, the beach water quality would be much improved and it was expected that the Tsuen Wan beaches affected by HATS Stage 1 could be reopened for swimming activities. Thereafter, if investigations showed the continued presence of polluted sediments, rehabilitation could be pursued.

19. Mr WONG Yung-kan pointed out that effluent discharged from the Mainland was affecting the river and marine ecology of Hong Kong. Hence, there was a need to step up control over such discharge to ensure long-term improvement to the river and marine environment in Hong Kong. SETW said that a special panel on water quality protection had been set up under the Hong Kong-Guangdong Joint Working Group on Sustainable Development and Environmental Protection. The special panel now focused on the development of a Pearl River Delta Water Quality model. To protect the fisheries resources in the region, a moratorium on fishing activities was imposed during a specified period but this had not been strictly observed by some Mainland fishermen. Enforcement actions had been stepped up to protect the marine parks and marine reserves from damage. Cooperation was also being sought from the public and the private sectors to manage the precious marine resources.

20. Mr WONG Yung-kan expressed concern about the odour nuisances associated with sewage and industrial discharge, particularly in Sha Tau Kok. SETW said that the Drainage Services Department and EPD were working closely to implement sewerage systems in the unsewered areas, which would improve the sanitary conditions of these areas. However, the provision of sewerage connections in built-up village areas served by septic tanks was not an easy task.

Waste management

21. Noting that the umbrella legislation on Producer Responsibility Schemes (PRSs) was to be introduced together with the regulatory control on at least one PRS by the end of the year, Miss CHOY So-yuk was not optimistic that the target could be achieved since consultation on PRSs was still underway. SETW advised that while the umbrella legislation itself could be prepared within a relatively short period of time, the implementation details of individual PRSs had yet to be worked out. Subject to the consultations with stakeholders and the public on individual PRSs, it was expected that the legislation on PRSs would be introduced within the current legislative session.

22. Regarding the pilot programme on Source Separation of Waste, Miss CHOY So-yuk expressed concern about the participation rate as this was implemented on a voluntary basis with no financial incentives for the sorting of waste. SETW advised that at present, some 1.8 million residents of different housing estates had taken part in the waste separation at source programme. While no financial

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incentives were provided, they had voluntarily taken part in the programme through concerted efforts of the management companies and owners' corporations. Under the pilot programme, recyclables were separated within each estate and sold to recyclers direct without the need to go through central sorting facilities, which made the operation more cost-effective.

23. The Deputy Director of Environmental Protection (2) said that a three-month trial scheme would be launched in November 2006 in 20 housing estates to study the feasibility of charging for municipal solid waste. As announced publicly in the previous week, the study would examine the logistical arrangements for distributing garbage bags, collecting waste and auditing as well as other measures, such as separating food waste at source. No charging would be involved during the trial period and participation was on a voluntary basis. Upon members' request, the Administration agreed to provide further details of the trial scheme.

Role of SETW

24. Mr Martin LEE opined that in order to have the needed improvement to the environment, the principal official in charge of the environment portfolio should have the undivided attention to environmental issues and should not be overburdened with other portfolios like transport and works. SETW said that the implementation of environmental policies, such as greening, could be better coordinated with public works projects. With the concerted efforts of the works departments, a total of 7.35 million trees had been planted in the past three years. Where conflicting interests arose among the different policy areas, the principal official in charge was expected to strike a proper balance. Mr Martin LEE held the view that the principal official in charge of the environment portfolio should have the overriding power and hence the post should be upgraded to the rank comparable to that of the Chief Secretary. His suggestion was supported by Miss CHOY So-yuk.

II. Any other business

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