

Legislative Council Panel on Transport

Proposed creation of one permanent Principal Transport Officer post in the Management and Paratransit Branch of Transport Department

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on our proposal to create one permanent Principal Transport Officer (PTO) (D1) post in the Management and Paratransit Branch (MPB) of the Transport Department (TD) to deal with the increasingly complex issues relating to taxi services, ferry services and transport services for people with disabilities (PwDs). We plan to submit the proposal to the Establishment Subcommittee of the Finance Committee (FC) for consideration at its meeting on 16 May 2007 and for FC approval on 8 June 2007.

JUSTIFICATION

2. The Ferry and Paratransit Division (FPD) of the MPB, which is responsible for the planning, development, regulation, management and monitoring of paratransit services, comprises three sections, namely, the Taxi Section, Ferry Section and Disabled Transport Section. A Chief Transport Officer heads each section and reports directly to the Assistant Commissioner for Transport/Management and Paratransit (AC/MP) who is not supported by any directorate rank officer on a long-term basis. In view of the increasing complexity of paratransit operation as detailed in the ensuing paragraphs, an officer at directorate level is required to assist AC/MP to review and formulate suitable policies and strategies from time to time to ensure proper and efficient operation of the paratransit services so as to better meet the public demand.

Changing Operating Environment for Trades Providing Paratransit Services

3. Over the past years, the commissioning of six new railway lines¹ and improvements of public transport services have led to very keen competition among different transport modes. The public demand for different types of transport services and their travelling patterns are continuously changing. Not only that the paratransit trades need to adapt and adjust themselves to meet the latest development of the market, conflicting interests both among different transport trades and within the same trade are also common.

4. All these changes have increased the complexity in TD's planning, development, regulation, management and monitoring of paratransit operation which need to be handled strategically for the trades concerned to cope with the fast evolving public transport market and for striking a balance between the conflicting interests of various stakeholders.

5. In the light of these developments, a dedicated directorate officer with good professional knowledge, wide experience in trade management and good inter-personal skill is required on a permanent basis to oversee the related policy and legislative matters, identify areas for improvement, map out strategies, and implement corresponding measures in consultation with trade members and other stakeholders in the changing operating environment for trades providing paratransit services. This officer will be tasked to provide strategic inputs and assistance to AC/MP in overseeing the development of the three areas of taxi services, ferry services and transport services for PwDs with a view to ensuring effective provision of these paratransit services.

Taxi Issues

6. As at end-December 2006, there were over 18 000 taxis operating in the territory, including 15 250 urban, 2 838 New Territories (NT) and 50 Lantau taxis. The taxi trade is highly fragmented, comprising taxi dealers, a large number of owner-drivers and rentee-drivers. The latter two groups constitute

¹ The six railway lines are the MTR Tseung Kwan O Line, the West Rail, the East Rail Extension to Tsim Sha Tsui, the Ma On Shan to Tai Wai Rail Link, the MTR Disneyland Resort Line and the Airport Railway Line Extension to Asia-World Expo.

more than 85% of the taxi trade operators and most of them are not managed by any major companies. Given such characteristics and the diverging stances of different types of taxi trade members, regulating and managing the taxi trade are becoming increasingly complicated.

7. At present, taxi matters are handled by the Taxi Section of TD comprising a team of one Chief Transport Officer, one Senior Transport Officer and one Transport Officer. With the present staffing level, the team can only maintain contacts with the taxi trade through the three regular taxi conferences with the urban, NT and Lantau taxi trades, and ad hoc meetings with operators for special issues. Given the volume of the more imminent matters that need to be dealt with, the team can only spare relatively limited efforts on the long-term development of the taxi services. In view of the changing transport market, it is particularly important to devise a long-term strategy and continually enhance the quality of the taxi services to enable the trade to meet rising public expectations and increasing competition for point-to-point personalised transport service. Hence, there is a need to strengthen the support to AC/MP by deploying a directorate officer to supervise the Taxi Section. Possessing breadth and depth of professional transport knowledge and experiences, and sophisticated communication and inter-personal skills, the officer should be capable of commanding the changing operating situation of the taxi trade, formulating comprehensive and long-term measures to further enhance taxi services, and mobilising suitable resources expeditiously within the Government machinery to address controversial issues when they arise.

8. Under the leadership of the proposed PTO, the Taxi Section will –
- (a) improve both the frequency and quality of the formal and informal contacts with the taxi trade, to cultivate more effective communication with the trade including various trade members with diversified interests for developing and taking forward improvement initiatives;
 - (b) monitor taxi operation more closely, improve the handling of complaints on taxi operation and driver behaviours, and develop suitable measures to address malpractices of individual operators such as bad driver behaviour;
 - (c) conduct reviews from time to time on the mode of taxi operation to fully appreciate the quickly changing transport market and

diversity of the issues facing the taxi trade and formulate measures to continuously improve the taxi services. The Transport Advisory Committee has recently started a review on taxi operation with a view to enhancing the competitiveness of the taxi trade. The Taxi Section is expected to provide extensive support for the review, and help the formulation and implementation of measures to strike a balance between the inter and intra-trade interests and public aspirations, which requires inputs from a directorate officer with extensive knowledge in public transport policy, operation and trade management. Depending on the outcome of the review, adjustments may be required from time to time to suit the prevailing operating environment;

- (d) better support the Quality Taxi Service Steering Committee² and identify ways to enhance service training to taxi drivers in collaboration with other organisations such as Vocational Training Council. This will not only help bring continued improvement in the quality of the taxi services, but also help promote tourism and the image of Hong Kong as a first class cosmopolitan city. The input required of the Taxi Section is to negotiate and partner with the taxi trade to secure their support for new initiatives, and develop effective strategies to implement the requisite measures. Support from commercial entities and various organisations will need to be solicited for sponsorship and provision of volunteers for the service enhancement campaigns; and
- (e) map out measures such as identifying new vehicle models to enable the taxis to provide multi-purpose services to meet demand from different market segments, e.g. the elderly and PwDs.

With the above improvements, it is expected that taxi services will become more competitive and responsive to changing market demands.

² The Quality Taxi Service Steering Committee is chaired by a member of the Transport Advisory Committee. Its regular members comprise representatives of Environment, Transport and Works Bureau, Transport Department, District Councils, Hong Kong Tourism Board, Consumer Council and taxi trade associations. Its main role is to advise on the planning and launching of projects or any other matters relating to the improvement of the quality of taxi services.

Ferry Issues

9. Ferry matters are currently handled by the Ferry Section of TD comprising a team of one Chief Transport Officer, two Senior Transport Officers and two Transport Officers. A supernumerary PTO post has been created under delegated authority from the FC in the section since 4 December 2006 for six months to handle the renewal of Star Ferry franchise which is due to expire in March 2008 and to formulate strategies for the re-tendering of 11 ferry services, the licences of which will expire in 2008.

10. There are at present two franchised and 30 major licensed ferry services run by 13 operators plus over 70 kaito ferry services. It is necessary to maintain the operation of the essential ferry services serving the major outlying islands where no land transport alternative is available. However, the ferry services are facing challenges posed by declining patronage (market share dropped from 14% in 1972 to less than 1.5% in 2006), rising expectation of passengers on the level of services and increase in the operating costs (in particular the fuel cost).

11. In view of the increasingly challenging operating environment for the ferry operators, there are strong needs for TD to have a permanent directorate officer who has sound professional knowledge and sophisticated communication skill to lead the Ferry Section to perform the following tasks –

- (a) to identify measures to help operators to save costs and to increase non-fare box revenue so as to improve the financial viability of ferry services with a view to ensuring the services are provided at publicly acceptable fares and service level;
- (b) to improve the communication with the relevant District Councils, Area Committees and relevant government departments such as district offices to gather requisite information for further improvement and upgrading of the ferry services to cope with the changing demand to meet the passengers' needs and enhance the sustainability of the ferry services;
- (c) to oversee the tendering of new and existing licensed ferry services and from time to time review licence conditions to enhance service monitoring and quality to meet passengers' expectation; and

- (d) to co-ordinate with various government departments to improve pier management and facilities so as to render better services to the public in view of the rising public expectations.

With a PTO leading and steering the continuous monitoring of the ferry operation, it will help enhance the sustainability and quality of ferry services.

Transport Services for People with Disabilities (PwDs) and “Transport for All”

12. It is the government’s policy to provide a barrier-free physical environment and an accessible transport system to facilitate PwDs and the elderly to participate and integrate into the community. At present, there are about 270 000 PwDs³ and over 850 000 elders aged 65 and above in Hong Kong. These groups of people rely heavily on accessible transport services and traffic facilities for their daily activities. Transport matters for these people are currently handled by the Disabled Transport Section of TD comprising one Chief Transport Officer, one Senior Transport Officer and one Transport Officer. The tasks of the team, among others, include public education programme on “Transport for All”; continuous improvement of the accessible facilities for railways network; conversion of franchised buses and other public transport modes into wheelchair accessible ones; retrofitting and modification of accessible facilities at footbridges, subways and public transport interchanges; and expansion of pedestrian areas and parking facilities for disabled drivers, etc. In addition, the team is responsible for controlling and monitoring the annual government subvention (involving \$27.45 million in 2007-08) for the Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation (HKSR) to manage and operate the rehabuses. The team has to work closely with HKSR to optimise the use of the limited government resources and identify ways to meet the increasing demand for rehabuses.

13. The pressure for improving transport services and facilities for the disabled and elderly is expected to be on the increase in view of the aging population. There are diverse views from different stakeholders on how to improve the services and facilities. In addition, new measures to improve

³ This figure does not include mentally handicapped persons.

accessibility of transport services often require changes in existing practices, as well as planning and design standards. In the light of the increasing importance of this subject matter, it is necessary to strengthen the leadership and supervision of the team by a directorate officer with wide experience and professional knowledge. The proposed PTO will be tasked to –

- (a) identify new areas of needs and prioritise actions in consultation with different groups of PwDs to better facilitate the PwDs' integration into the community;
- (b) improve the overall liaison and consultation with representatives of the relevant organisations and management of the public transport companies to facilitate smooth implementation of improvement measures for PwDs;
- (c) chair the regular meetings on Access to Public Transport by People with Disabilities, attended by non-government organisations and public transport operators, to steer discussions, and to identify mutually acceptable solutions for dealing with improvement requests expeditiously;
- (d) formulate public education strategies and programmes in respect of provision of accessible transport services and facilities to relevant stakeholders, including public transport and railway operators, organisations representing PwDs and the general public; and
- (e) ensure proper use of the government subvention for rehabuses, and optimise the use to benefit most people.

Need for a permanent PTO

14. Other than the complex issues required to be handled as mentioned above, there will be keen competition between operating environment of paratransit services with the planning and commissioning of new railways and strategic roads in the coming years and the rising aspirations for good quality service. All these issues would require the attention of an officer at directorate level to formulate suitable policies and strategies, as well as to give steer and make adjustments from time to time to ensure timely implementation of suitable measures to improve the operating efficiency, competitiveness and sustainability of the services. This is also on a par with the arrangement in other divisions of TD, all of which are currently headed by a directorate (D1) officer.

Encls 1
& 2

There is thus an imminent need to create a permanent PTO post in the FPD to assist AC/MP for better planning and implementation of the complex issues relating to the paratransit services. The job description of the proposed PTO post is at **Enclosure 1**. The proposed organisation chart of FPD is at **Enclosure 2**.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

15. We have critically examined the possibility of assigning the responsibilities to the existing five PTOs in TD but considered it not feasible as all of them are occupied with other equally important tasks.

16. The PTO in the Management Services Division (MSD) which is also under the charge of AC/MP is heavily committed to the daily duties in overseeing the operation of five work sections in the division, the main responsibilities are as follows -

- (a) the Tunnel and Tsing Ma Section and the Transport Facilities Management Section are responsible for the overall management and control of the contractors in the operation and maintenance of the Tsing Ma Control Area and the future Tsing Sha Control Area, six government tunnels, 14 multi-storey public carparks, the Central Mid-Levels Escalator System, and about 18 000 on-street metered parking spaces in the territory;
- (b) the Infrastructure Management Planning Section is responsible for management planning of new strategic highway routes, including Route 8 between Tsing Yi and Sha Tin, Central–Wanchai Bypass, HongKong–Zhuhai–Macao Bridge project, Tseung Kwan O–Lam Tin Tunnel and other routes under planning;
- (c) the Business Management Section is responsible for drawing up of contracts, tendering of new management contracts, and re-tendering of existing contracts due to expire in respect of contracts awarded in (a) above; and
- (d) the Transport Incident Management Section is responsible for operation of the Emergency Transport Co-ordination Centre which

operates throughout the year on a 24-hour basis to handle traffic and transport incidents in the territory, formulating and arranging contingency traffic and transport plan, and dissemination of timely information about the incidents to the public.

As the direct supervisor of five Chief Transport Officers heading the above sections, the PTO in MSD is fully stretched as he is required to oversee the management and operation of a large number of traffic and transport infrastructure and attend to major incidents at any time.

17. On the other hand, the two PTOs in the regional offices are fully committed to their normal duties of monitoring public transport services, traffic administration, tackling illegal transport services, as well as planning and implementation of new transport facilities and services at boundary control points. There are also other special functional duties being taken up by them, including the management of the goods vehicles and cross boundary bus trades, dealing with traffic and transport issues relating to new projects or infrastructure, managing the public light bus trade and overseeing the public light bus issues such as safety, fare revisions, etc.

18. As for the two PTOs in the Bus and Railway Branch, they are heavily involved in policy, planning and regulation matters of franchised buses, non-franchised buses and HK Tramways, pursuing bus rationalisation measures and safety issues, pursuing environmental initiatives with bus operators, regulation and monitoring of the Mass Transit Railway and Kowloon-Canton Railway services, and ensuring co-ordination of provision of other public transport services with new railway projects and other important tasks relating to the proposed merger of the Mass Transit Railway and Kowloon-Canton Railway systems.

19. In the light of the above, there is neither spare capacity nor scope of reprioritisation/delegation for the five incumbent PTOs in TD to absorb the demanding portfolio of the proposed PTO post. We have also considered the possibility of continuing to put the key tasks under the direct supervision of AC/MP. At present, AC/MP oversees the operation of the MPB which comprises the FPD and MSD. FPD is placed under the direct supervision of AC/MP whereas MSD is under the supervision of a PTO. Given the increasing complexity and workload in the paratransit services, AC/MP no longer has

sufficient capacity to closely supervise the planning and implementation of all the complex issues of FPD, without the support of a dedicated PTO.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

20. The proposed creation of the permanent directorate post will bring about an additional notional annual salary cost at mid-point of \$1,144,200 and in full annual average staff cost of \$1,460,000. The additional resources required will be met by internal redeployment of existing resources within the Environment, Transport and Works Bureau. The proposal is covered in ECI(2006-07)8 on “Update on Overall Directorate Establishment Position” issued by the Administration in November 2006.

ADVICE SOUGHT

21. Members are invited to give their views on this paper and indicate support for the staffing proposal.

Environment, Transport and Works Bureau

April 2007

Job Description for Principal Transport Officer/Ferry and Paratransit

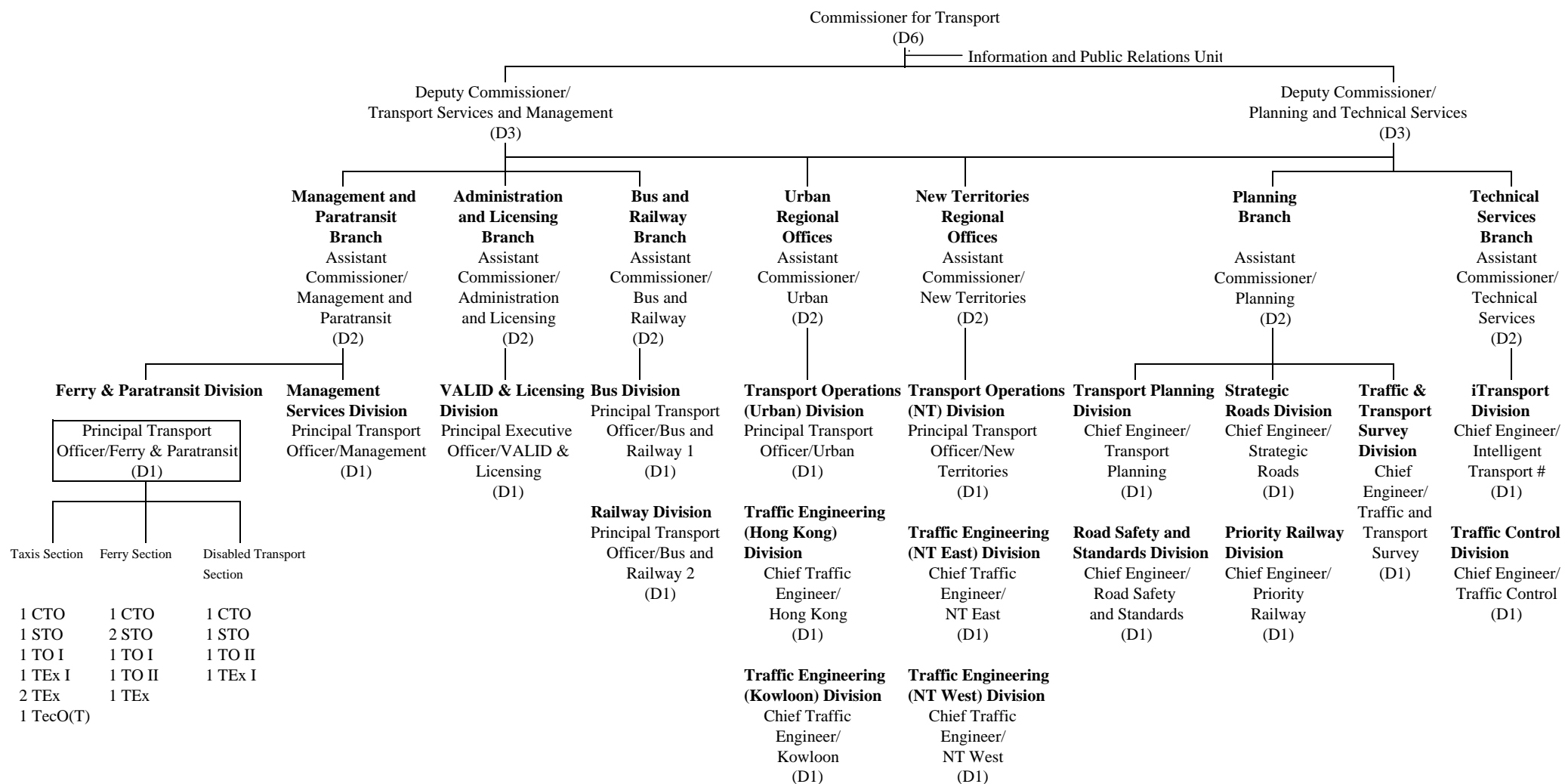
Rank : Principal Transport Officer (D1)

Responsible to : Assistant Commissioner for Transport /Management and Paratransit (D2)

Main Duties and Responsibilities -

1. To assist in the formulation of policy on development of taxi services, ferry services and transport services for people with disabilities.
2. To formulate overall strategy to monitor and help ensure sustainability of taxi services and ferry services.
3. To review and oversee legislative amendments, if any, to existing Ordinances and Regulations in connection with taxi and ferry services.
4. To formulate strategy for the management of the taxi trades and monitoring of their sentiment.
5. To oversee the planning and implementation of various quality taxi service projects.
6. To direct the regulation and monitoring of the operation of franchised and licensed ferry services and the performance of the ferry operators, and to ensure smooth transition in case of a change of ferry operator.
7. To plan tendering exercises for new and existing ferry services.
8. To oversee the management of public piers and public landing steps.
9. To plan and monitor the subvented Rehabus services operated by the Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation.
10. To formulate strategy and implement measures to improve the accessibilities of public transport services and transport facilities to serve people with disabilities and the elderly.
11. To chair regular conferences with the taxi trades and people with disabilities.

Proposed Organisation Chart of Transport Department



Legend:

Supernumerary Chief Engineer (CE) approved by FC for 5 years from 22.6.2001 to 21.6.2006. Approval has been given by FC for the CE post to be extended up to 21.6.2008.

Permanent Principal Transport Officer (PTO) post proposed for creation.

- CTO Chief Transport Officer
- STO Senior Transport Officer
- TO I/II Transport Officer I/II
- TecO(T) Technical Officer (Traffic)
- TEx I Transport Executive I [Non-Civil Service Contract staff]
- TEx Transport Executive [Non-Civil Service Contract staff]
- NT New Territories