

Legislative Council Panel on Transport
Progress on Measures to Enhance Safety of Franchised Bus Operation

PURPOSE

This paper reports on the Administration's discussion with the franchised bus companies on the following suggestions raised by the Legislative Council Panel on Transport ("the Panel") Members at the Panel meeting on 9 July 2007 on measures to further enhance the safety of franchised bus operation -

- (a) re-deploying more buses with seat belts at exposed seats to operate on expressways and restricting buses without seat belts at exposed seats from operating on expressways; and
- (b) advancing the replacement programme of the pre-1997 design buses.

DISCUSSION OUTCOME

(a) Re-deploying more buses with seat belts at exposed seats to operate on expressways and restricting buses without seat belts at exposed seats from operating on expressways

2. The Transport Department ("TD") has reviewed with the franchised bus companies on the deployment of buses on expressways. In general, in considering the deployment of buses on specific routes, a number of factors have to be taken into account, including passenger demand, safety and environmental concerns as well as the need to cater for wheel-chair bound passengers' special needs, etc.

3. As at June 2007, out of the 2,160 buses with seatbelts at exposed seats in Hong Kong, about 1,170 have been deployed on routes running on expressways. The reasons for not deploying the remaining 990 buses of this type on expressways are as follows -

- (i) in order to meet the travel need of the wheel-chair bound passengers, TD and the franchised bus companies have agreed to deploy low floor buses with wheel-chair accessible ramps on a number of bus routes. Whilst many of these wheel-chair accessible buses with seat belts at exposed seats are operating on expressways, some of them have to be deployed on routes operating on routes within the built-up areas. To redeploy more buses with seat belts at exposed

seats to operate on expressways would affect the existing wheel-chair bound passengers who are using these routes; and

- (ii) due to the public's concern on roadside air quality, the Administration and the franchised bus companies are committed to deploying environmentally friendly buses of Euro II or above emission standard on the major busy corridors including Yee Wo Street, Hennessy Road, Queensway, Des Voeux Road Central and Nathan Road as far as practicable. The majority of these environmentally friendly buses are newer buses with seat belts at exposed seats. To redeploy more buses of this type to operate on expressway routes would reduce the number of environmentally friendly buses operating on the busy corridors.

Despite the above constraints, TD and the bus companies have identified 30 more buses with seat belts at exposed seats to operate on expressways as from the fourth quarter of 2007.

4. TD has also examined the feasibility of restricting buses which do not have seat belts at exposed seats from operating on expressways. However, as the number of buses involved would be in the region of 1,180, the level of bus services would be seriously affected if the proposal were implemented. Despite so, to further enhance the safety of bus operation, the franchised bus companies have agreed to retrofitting seat belts on the upper deck front row seats of the post-1997 design buses, and installing additional guard rails across the upper deck windscreen of the pre-1997 design buses. The target is to complete the installation of guard rails on all those pre-1997 design buses operating on expressways by March 2008, and the retrofitting of seat belts on the 225 buses now operating on expressways by the fourth quarter of 2008. All buses deployed to run on expressways will have seatbelts or guard rails with the completion of these works.

(b) Advancing the replacement of pre-1997 buses

5. According to the current programme of the franchised bus companies, the replacement of all the pre-1997 design buses will be completed by 2015. TD has reviewed with the franchised bus companies the scope of advancing the replacement of their pre-1997 design buses as far as their financial situation permits and identified about 270 pre-1997 design buses the replacement

of which can be advanced by one to three years, taking into account a number of factors including the normal serviceable life of buses, the financial capability of the bus companies, the fare implications on passengers and bus resource requirement against the opening of more railways in the coming years. TD will constantly review with the bus companies from time to time to expedite the replacement programme as appropriate.

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