

立法會

Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)2301/07-08

(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB1/PL/TP/1

Panel on Transport

**Minutes of meeting held on
Monday, 30 June 2008, at 9:00 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo (Chairman)
Hon CHEUNG Hok-ming, SBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, SBS, S.B.St.J., JP
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah, JP
Hon Miriam LAU Kin-ye, GBS, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon LEE Wing-tat
Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, SBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
- Members attending** : Hon Bernard CHAN, GBS, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
- Members absent** : Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon TAM Heung-man
- Public officers attending** : **Agenda item V**
Miss Shirley YUEN
Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport)

Mrs Avia LAI
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport)

Mr Don HO
Assistant Commissioner/Management and Paratransit
Transport Department

Mr Carey WONG
Principal Transport Officer/Management
Transport Department

Agenda item VI

Miss Shirley YUEN
Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport)

Mrs Avia LAI
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport)

Mr Don HO
Assistant Commissioner/Management and Paratransit
Transport Department

Mr Ken HUI
Chief Transport Officer/Planning/Taxi
Transport Department

Agenda item VII

Mr Francis HO
Permanent Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport)

Miss Shirley YUEN
Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport)

Mrs Avia LAI
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport)

Mr Don HO
Assistant Commissioner/Management and Paratransit
Transport Department

Mr Ken HUI
Chief Transport Officer/Planning/Taxi
Transport Department

Agenda item VIII

Mr Francis HO
Permanent Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport)

Mr CHEUNG Hing-wan
Deputy Director of Highways

Mr CHU Kin-hong
Regional Highway Engineer/New Territories
Highways Department

Miss Cindy LAW
Assistant Commissioner/ New Territories
Transport Department

Mr Carey WONG
Principal Transport Officer/Management
Transport Department

Agenda item IX

Mr Francis HO
Permanent Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport)

Miss Rosanna LAW
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport) 2

Mr Alan WONG
Commissioner for Transport

Mr Anthony LOO
Acting Deputy Commissioner/Planning & Technical Services
Transport Department

Mr T F LEUNG
Chief Engineer/Road Safety & Standards
Transport Department

Mr W L TANG
Senior Engineer/Housing & Planning/New Territories East
Transport Department

Attendance by invitation : **Agenda item V**
The "Star" Ferry Company, Limited

Mr Frankie YICK
Managing Director

Mr Johnny LEUNG
General Manager

Agenda item VI

Transport Advisory Committee
Public Transport Services Sub-Committee

Professor JIM Chi-yung
Chairman

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

Staff in attendance : Ms Sarah YUEN
Senior Council Secretary (1)6

Miss Winnie CHENG
Legislative Assistant (1)5

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I Confirmation of minutes and matters arising
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1975/07-08 - Minutes of the meeting held on
25 April 2008)

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2008 were confirmed.

II Report of the Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1988/07-08 - Report of the Subcommittee on
Matters Relating to Railways)

2. Members noted the report of the Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways as presented by Ms Miriam LAU, Chairman of the Subcommittee.

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III Endorsement of the report of the Panel for submission to the Council

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1980/07-08 - Draft report of the Panel for submission to the Council)

3. The report of the Panel for the 2007-2008 legislative session was endorsed.

IV Information papers issued since last meeting

Papers from the Administration

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1556/07-08(01) - Administration's paper on replacement of the high voltage switchboards and power transformers of the power supply system in the Cross-Harbour Tunnel

LC Paper No. - Administration's paper on
CB(1)1556/07-08(02) replacement of specialized vehicles for the Tsing Ma Control Area, Lion Rock Tunnel, Aberdeen Tunnel and Kai Tak Tunnel

LC Paper No. - Administration's paper on
CB(1)1556/07-08(03) replacement of the Traffic Control and Surveillance System in the Shing Mun Tunnels

LC Paper No. - Administration's paper on design of
CB(1)1936/07-08(01) control boxes attached to traffic light poles at pedestrian crossings and pedestrian flashing green countdown displays

LC Paper No. - Administration's paper on various
CB(1)1936/07-08(02) issues raised by members as follows:
- measures to enhance pedestrian safety, in particular preventing traffic accidents arising from pedestrians listening to MP3 while crossing the road;
- use of two-wheeled motorized human transporter in Hong Kong; and
- legislative amendments relating to lighting, reflectors and markings of vehicles

LC Paper No. - Administration's paper on update on
CB(1)1986/07-08(01) review of recent bus fire incidents

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LC CB(1)1999/07-08(01)	Paper	No. -	Administration's paper on 823TH – Tseung Kwan O-Lam Tin Tunnel and 822TH – Cross Bay Link, Tseung Kwan O
LC CB(1)2062/07-08(01)	Paper	No. -	Administration's paper on review of public light bus operations

Submissions received and the Administration's responses

LC CB(1)1646/07-08(01)	Paper	No. -	Submission on building of a barrier-free city from The Salvation Army Hong Kong & Macau Command
LC CB(1)1775/07-08(01)	Paper	No. -	Submission on construction of the ventilation shaft of the University Station of the West Island Line under Hill Road Flyover from 西港島綫居民關注組
LC CB(1)1844/07-08(01)	Paper	No. -	Submission on punishment/education of drivers who do not comply with road safety legislation from a Mr KONG
LC CB(1)1879/07-08(01)	Paper	No. -	Administration's response to the submission on safety issues relating to the road transport system
LC CB(1)1938/07-08(01)	Paper	No. -	Submission on complaint about bus body advertising from a Mr KONG
LC CB(1)1974/07-08(01)	Paper	No. -	Submission on proposed measures to effect even distribution among the three road harbour crossings from Taxi & PLB Concern Group
LC CB(1)2032/07-08(01)	Paper	No. -	Submission on 823TH – Tseung Kwan O-Lam Tin Tunnel and 822TH – Cross Bay Link, Tseung Kwan O from Association for Geoconservation, Hong Kong
LC CB(1)2049/07-08(01)	Paper	No. -	Submission on staff-related matters arising from the merger exercise from Hong Kong Railway Workers General Union and Hong Kong Railway Employees Union
LC CB(1)2064/07-08(01)	Paper	No. -	Submission on 823TH – Tseung Kwan O-Lam Tin Tunnel and 822TH – Cross Bay Link, Tseung Kwan O from Ms Christine FONG, a Sai Kung District Councillor

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LC CB(1)2069/07-08(01)	Paper	No. -	Submission on operation of taxis in Ma Wan from Taxi & PLB Concern Group
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Referrals

LC CB(1)1998/07-08(01)	Paper	No. -	Referral from Legislative Council Members' Meeting-cum-luncheon with Sha Tin District Council on 22 May 2008 on provision of a station for Hin Keng in the current Shatin to Central Link scheme
LC CB(1)2055/07-08(01)	Paper	No. -	Referral from the Complaints Division on transport policy)

4. Members noted the information papers issued since last meeting. As proposed by Mr WONG Kwok-hing, the Panel agreed to follow up in the next legislative session the submission on staff-related matters arising from the merger exercise from Hong Kong Railway Workers General Union and Hong Kong Railway Employees Union (LC Paper No. CB(1)2049/07-08(01)).

V Star Ferry's fare increase application for franchised services

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1977/07-08(01) - Administration's paper on Star Ferry's fare increase application for franchised services)

5. With the aid of PowerPoint, Mr Frankie YICK, Managing Director of the Star Ferry Company, Limited (SF) briefed members on the justifications for increasing the fares of SF's franchised ferry services, namely the 'Central – Kowloon Point' and the 'Wanchai – Kowloon Point' routes as follows:

- (a) Patronage of ferry services
the patronage of SF's franchised ferry services had recorded a significant drop from 2006 onwards upon the relocation of piers in Central, the decline in patronage was as high as some 18% and was maintained more or less at that level thereafter.
- (b) Financial viability
SF's franchised ferry services were operating at a loss in recent years, amounting to some \$5 million and \$10 million in 2007 and 2008 respectively. Depending on the timing of the fare increase, it was anticipated that a loss of about \$5 million to \$8 million would still be recorded in 2008 and another \$1 million in 2009.

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- (c) Increasing operating cost
there was a significant increase in operating cost. Fuel prices had sharply risen from \$2.12 per litre in 2000 to \$8.77 per litre as at the date of this meeting. In keeping with the inflationary trend, there was also a leap in the expenditure on staff remuneration. With the Central pier relocation and the subsequently enlarged scope of pier premises under SF's management, other operating expenses such as security and cleaning services also rose.
- (d) Service performance
as revealed by a passenger opinion survey conducted by the Transport Department (TD) in 2007, SF was well received by the public with an acceptance rate of 97.2%. SF also earned a number of commendations in the past decade and a SF tour across the Victoria Harbour had been included by the National Geographic of Traveller as one of the fifty places in the world one should travel during a lifetime. To add value to its services, SF had endeavoured to make improvements on various fronts, such as rolling out concessionary fares for passengers with disabilities in 2003, implementing Octopus payment system at all piers, enhancing ventilation in the waiting area and furnishing it with television and additional benches, improving the hygienic conditions and facilities of washrooms and retrofitting vessels and sloping passage way at the piers with slip resistant installation where necessary. Efforts were made to beautify pier premises through greening and soft landscaping.
- (e) Cost saving measures
SF also strived to reduce operating cost to enhance the viability of its ferry services. Intelligent lighting system was installed at piers to reduce power consumption and expenses. Other measures included optimizing the locations of the entrance turnstiles to enhance the operating environment of retail and commercial premises at the pier, automating the manual change arrangement by token-vending machine to save manning resource and replacing the power-generation system of vessels to save maintenance expenses.
- (f) Boosting non-fare box revenue
SF had endeavoured to let out retail outlets in the piers to generate non-fare box revenue so as to cross-subsidize ferry operation. To attract pedestrian flow to the piers, activities and exhibitions were launched in collaboration with charities or non-profit-making organizations. Non-fare box revenue was also brought about by letting out advertising panels at the pier premises. Where feasible, SF would continue to open up new sources of revenue.

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Measures to increase patronage of ferry services

6. As SF was a collective memory of the people of Hong Kong, Mr WONG Kwok-hing supported the continued operation of its services. However, he opined that a significant fare increase by some 25% was totally unacceptable which had ignored public affordability. In his view, there were alternatives to enhance the sustainability of ferry services, such as offering concessionary monthly tickets to local passengers to boost patronage. He also urged the Administration to improve the accessibility between the piers in Central and the MTR station. An automated people mover system could be installed for the purpose.

7. Pointing out that SF had been providing concessionary monthly tickets in the past, the Chairman enquired about the rationale for cancelling the scheme. In his opinion, SF should aim at revamping the monthly ticket scheme by means of price reduction or collaboration with other public transport operators to increase their attractiveness. He also said that the tourist ticket scheme should not be cancelled and consideration might be given to increasing its price to cover the associated costs.

8. Mr Frankie YICK of SF responded that the monthly ticket scheme was not popular among the travelling public. Given the irregular working hours and diversified life styles, local passengers might not choose to use SF for both bounds of the journeys. A survey conducted by SF revealed that the average utilization of the monthly ticket holders was about 48 trips per month. Based on this usage rate, the average cost per trip by a monthly ticket holder was higher than the fare paid by a single journey ticket holder. This explained why only some 40 tickets could be sold on average each month and keeping this ticket was unjustified. The sales of tourist tickets was not satisfactory either, with only some 12 tickets per month. Having regard to the low sales volume, high administration costs, and growing abuse by courier companies, SF subsequently arrived at the decision to remove both the monthly and tourist tickets under the fare adjustment proposal.

9. Mr WONG Kwok-hing did not subscribe to the explanation on abolishing the monthly ticket scheme and suggested SF to offer concessionary fares through the Octopus system so as to save the related administration costs. The Chairman also indicated support for the suggestion and urged SF to explore the feasibility of introducing a joint promotional scheme with the Disneyland, Ocean Park and the Peak Tram to increase the attractiveness of tourist tickets. He also remarked that SF should note the benefits that could be reaped in the long run in retaining the concessionary offers to the public. In his view, it was more a question of how the monthly and tourist tickets could be re-packaged to boost sales.

10. Mr Frankie YICK of SF reiterated that he had doubt on room to improve the sales of monthly ticket and tourist ticket, and added that there might be cost implication in offering monthly concessionary pass through Octopus, as software alteration was required. Nevertheless, SF would further explore the feasibility of the proposal.

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11. Addressing members' concerns, the Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport) (DS(T)) said that the Administration would exercise due care in considering the fare increase application, taking into account public affordability as well as the financial position and past performance of the ferry operator.

12. Mr Ronny TONG enquired whether SF would consider other concessionary fare schemes in place of the monthly ticket and tourist ticket schemes. Mr Frankie YICK of SF pointed out the fare level after the proposed adjustment was still very low and probably among the lowest in the public transport sector. Taking the proposed weekday fare for upper deck as an example, the fare increase from \$2.2 to \$2.5 entailed only a difference of \$0.3 in monetary terms, whereas for weekends and public holidays the fare level for upper deck was just \$3. Annual passenger opinion survey conducted by SF suggested that public acceptability of the fare level of SF services used to be high. Indeed, SF would still operate at a loss despite a fare increase while free rides for the elderly and concessionary fares for passengers with disabilities would still be offered.

13. The Chairman said that in considering the knock-on effects of SF's fare increase on other public transport modes, the assessment could not simply be on the actual monetary terms.

14. Mr Ronny TONG opined that the target groups and major users of ferry services should be identified in order to fully assess the impact of the proposed fare increase. In this connection, he enquired whether SF had studied about the prevailing composition of ferry passengers, i.e. the proportion of local residents and tourists. He suggested that consideration should be given to attracting more tourists in using ferry services. As SF's ferry services were valuable collective memories of the public, consideration should be given to helping the operator to maintain the services. Mr TONG also cautioned that the planned removal of the public bus terminus outside the SF pier in Tsim Sha Tsui (TST) might further aggravate the drop in patronage of ferry services. Mr Daniel LAM shared this worry.

15. Mr Frankie YICK of SF responded that around 70% of the current patronage were local residents whereas the remaining 30% were tourists. He shared concern on the adverse effects that might be brought about by the removal of the public bus terminus outside the SF pier in TST. Upon a consultancy study, it was anticipated that there would be a drop by 8% to 11% in the patronage, compared with a 5% decrease estimated by the Government.

16. DS(T) responded that in developing the open piazza outside the SF pier in TST, the Administration had duly taken into account the need to enhance the linkages for ferry passengers with other public transport modes. It was also planned that the development of the open piazza near the pier, as part of the broader initiative to develop tourism in TST, would achieve synergies by attracting more pedestrian or tourist flow in the area and increasing patronage of ferry services. The Assistant Commissioner for Transport/Management and Paratransit (AC for T/M&P) supplemented that, under the current scheme, buses to SF pier would be allowed up to the turning point near Hong Kong Cultural Centre and a total of 11 bus routes would remain to travel via this area to

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pick up and drop off passengers. Hence, the impact on ferry services in terms of convenience for bus-ferry interchange was expected to be marginal. Although inconvenience in interchange would be unavoidable during the construction stage, the new developments outside the SF pier in TST would bring about positive effects on tourism and ferry patronage in the long run.

Measures to increase non-fare box revenue

17. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that the Government should focus on measures to help ferry operator to boost its non-fare box revenue so as to alleviate the pressure for fare increase. More efforts should be made to explore new sources of revenue to cross-subsidize ferry operation.

18. Ms Miriam LAU shared this concern and pointed out that, unlike other sectors, the public transport trades were facing serious difficulties in operation. On one hand, fuel prices rose sharply. On the other hand, there was a unique regulatory mechanism in fare adjustment. She took the view that fare increase could not be a long-term and sustainable solution to ease the situation. Similar to the measures to tackle the problem in the operation of outlying island ferry services, the Administration should step up actions to help ferry operators boost their non-fare box revenue by improving the pedestrian flow at the pier premises. Referring to a recent SF's application for additional premises at the Central Ferry Pier (CFP) to operate non-fare business and the hurdles encountered in putting the application through smoothly, Ms LAU advised that the existing procedures should be streamlined among the various departments concerned so as to speed up the process of vetting applications from ferry operators with regard to renting and subletting pier premises. Mr Daniel LAM shared this concern and urged the Administration to expedite the process, in view of the critical situation of ferry operation and the continued surge in fuel price. He also enquired if there were ways to further cut down the operating cost of ferry services.

19. DS(T) responded that the Administration had put in place various measures to help ferry operator reduce operating costs and increase non-fare box revenue to cross-subsidize the ferry operation. Such measures included, inter alia, taking over pier maintenance responsibility, waiving fuel duty and allowing ferry operators to sub-let premises at piers for commercial and retail activities. Regarding the recent application for use of land at the ground floor of CFP No. 7 to 8 for exhibition and commercial purpose, prior approval from the Town Planning Board (TPB) was required as the application entailed changes in land use. TPB would study the case and hold its meeting in July 2008.

20. Mr Daniel LAM expressed concern about the timeliness in granting approval to SF for the land use application at CFP No. 7 to 8. He advised that the Administration should liaise with SF, the Development Bureau and other departments concerned in ensuring that the documents to be submitted by SF for relevant approval would be adequate, so as to avoid delay caused by re-submission. DS(T) noted this suggestion and reassured members that the Administration was working along this line. There were

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internal communication among the bureaux and departments concerned to accelerate the vetting procedures as soon as approval from TPB was obtained.

21. While the outlook and facilities of the piers in Central had been significantly enhanced after relocation, Ms Miriam LAU pointed out that there was a need to increase the pedestrian flow to uplift non-fare businesses. The Chairman shared this concern and opined that there was room for attracting more pedestrian flow in the footbridges and walkways connecting the piers with the vicinity. Considerations should be given to enhancing the operation and varieties of commercial and retail activities therein. Given the asset of the harbourfront view nearby as a scenic spot and tourist attraction, there was a great potential to vitalize non-fare businesses with local specialties and unique features in the area. He also drew the Administration's attention to the leakage and dripping problem in the covered footbridges.

22. DS(T) responded that with the provision of covered footbridges and walkways, the pedestrian flow had steadily increased, and was expected to improve further with the development of the Central Harbourfront and ancillary facilities, such as pedestrian walkway network, in connection with the Urban Design Study for the New Central Harbourfront commissioned by the Planning Department. As for the dripping problem in the existing footbridges, necessary actions would be taken to rectify the defects, if any.

23. Mr Frankie YICK of SF said that SF would continue to discuss with the Government on possible ways to increase the non-fare box revenue, taking reference from the experience with the outlying island ferry operation. One direction was to explore whether an additional floor could be constructed at the piers in Tsim Sha Tsui for the development of a food and beverage outlet.

24. Concluding the discussion, the Chairman pointed out that, despite an understanding in the difficulties of ferry operation, members remained unconvinced and dissatisfied with the justifications for a fare increase in SF services. Members generally did not support the level of increase sought by SF. The Administration was requested to carefully consider the proposal and devote more efforts to help ferry operators to increase their non-fare box revenue in the long run.

VI Review of taxi operation

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1977/07-08(02) -	Administration's paper on review of taxi operation
LC Paper No. CB(1)2068/07-08(01)	No. - Submission on review of taxi operation from Taxi & PLB Concern Group
LC Paper No. CB(1)2068/07-08(02)	No. - Submission on review of taxi operation from The Environmental Light Bus Alliance

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LC	Paper	No. -	Submission on review of taxi operation from China Hong Kong and Macau Boundary Crossing Bus Association)
CB(1)2068/07-08(05)			

Briefing by Chairman of the Public Transport Subcommittee of the Transport Advisory Committee (TAC)

25. Professor JIM Chi-yung, Chairman of the Public Transport Subcommittee of TAC, briefed the meeting on the "Report on Review of Taxi Operation", by highlighting the salient points in the Report.

Discussion

26. Mr Jeffrey LAM was concerned that in setting the taxi fares under the "front-loaded and thereafter on a varying descending scale for incremental charges" system (hereafter referred to as the "descending scale fare system"), it would be difficult to define short, medium- and long-haul trips, e.g. whether the trips should be defined by distance or duration.

27. The Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport) (DS(T)) responded that in view of the different operating conditions of different types of taxis, it would be better for the taxi operators themselves to propose how to define the short, medium- and long-haul trips for their particular type of taxis in the light of their own operating environments.

28. Ms Miriam LAU remarked that while the taxi operators generally accepted the descending scale fare system and the proposed initial charge of \$18, taxi owners and drivers held divergent views as to the level of reducing charges for medium and long-haul trips. Ms LAU asked whether there would be measures to balance the interests between the taxi operators and drivers. Ms LAU further asked whether, given the rising operating costs of taxis, the Government would consider allowing the taxi operators to impose a fuel surcharge on taxi fares.

29. DS(T) responded that the Government would consider applications for change of taxi fares on the merits of each individual case. The Government did not consider it appropriate for taxis to impose surcharge on passengers as this would pass on fuel cost fluctuation directly to passengers and taxis were one of the public transport modes used daily by members of the public in Hong Kong.

30. Mr Jeffrey LAM enquired as to why it was difficult to prosecute passengers and/or drivers for bargaining taxi fares.

31. DS(T) responded that the Government and TAC held the view that passengers should pay according to the meter. Nevertheless, it was noted that in many major cities, fare bargaining by taxi passengers was not prohibited as the drivers were not obliged to

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agree to the fare discount proposed by the passenger. Moreover, if the taxi driver and passenger agreed to a discounted fare, it would be difficult to collect evidence to prosecute them.

32. Mr LAU Kong-wah was concerned about the proposal to impose higher fares for short-trips since, based on the statistics in paragraph 13 of the TAC Report, more than 65% of passengers in the urban area, and 80% of passengers in the New Territories took taxis for short trips, i.e. less than 4 kilometers, which meant that most passengers would have to pay higher fares under the descending scale fare system. Mr LAU remarked that confusion might arise as a result of the varying fare structures adopted by different types of taxis. He doubted whether the proposed descending scale fare system could effectively alleviate the discount gang problem.

33. DS(T) responded that the descending scale fare system was proposed because it was in line with the market situation and was commensurate with the fare structure of other modes of public transport, e.g. railway and buses. The objective of the revised fare structure was mainly to enhance the competitiveness of taxis and it might help reduce the activities of the discount gang. The Government would be very careful in considering applications for revision of taxi fares, in particular the proposed increase in the initial flagfall for taxis and its impact on short-trip passengers. DS(T) pointed out that any changes to the fare scales for different types of taxis would be subject to approval by the Chief Executive-in-Council and negative vetting by the Legislative Council, and would be promulgated and displayed in taxis for public information. Professor JIM Chi-yung supplemented that members of the public were familiar with the operation of the three types of taxis and taxi passengers should pay according to the meter. Given the existing market situation, there was no plan to merge the different types of taxis.

34. The Chairman opined that taxi passengers should pay according to the meter. If passengers were allowed to bargain on taxi fares, the discount gang phenomenon would persist. The Chairman pointed out that all passengers of public transport paid fares according to the laid down fare schedule. He was of the view that passengers should be prohibited from fare bargaining and such a prohibition would not discourage people from taking taxis. Ms Miriam LAU concurred with the Chairman, and said that passengers should not be allowed to bargain on taxi fares. Ms LAU was also concerned that even after the introduction of the descending scale fare system, the discount gang would still offer discounts to passengers which would adversely affect the business of the law-abiding taxi operators.

35. DS(T) explained that TAC had studied the practices of taxi operation in 14 major cities and none of them imposed penalty on passengers for fare bargaining. Taxi drivers could in fact turn down requests from passengers for discounted fares. The Government and TAC maintained that passengers should pay according to the metered fares, having noted that the public held divergent views on whether penalty should be imposed on passengers for fare bargaining.

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36. Mr Jeffrey LAM opined that the regulatory regime for the taxi trade in Hong Kong should take into consideration the local market situation, and the practices of other places might not be applicable to Hong Kong. Mr LAM enquired as to how the sampling cities were selected for study and whether 14 cities were adequate for review purpose. He asked whether there were places where penalty was imposed to prohibit passengers from fare bargaining. Mr LAM further asked whether, given the sharp increase in fuel prices, an assessment had been made on the latest situation of the discount gang phenomenon and about the prosecution figures against the discount gang.

37. Professor JIM Chi-yung responded that TAC had visited and studied the taxi operations in Tokyo, Singapore, New York and London, and reviewed the regulatory regime for taxis in Shenzhen, Beijing, Shanghai, Melbourne, New Zealand, Vancouver, Toronto, Frankfurt, the Netherlands and Seoul. In all these places, no penalty was imposed on passengers involved in fare bargaining although passengers were prohibited from bargaining taxi fares in Beijing, Shanghai, Vancouver, Toronto, Melbourne and Seoul. In eight places (Tokyo, Beijing, Shanghai, Vancouver, Toronto, Frankfurt, Melbourne and Seoul), taxi drivers were not allowed to charge the passengers at a rate lower than the metered fares. In most places, penalty was imposed on taxi drivers and/or operators rather than the passengers for fare bargaining. Professor JIM explained that the 14 cities were selected for study mainly because their size, economic situation and mode of taxi operation were similar to Hong Kong.

38. Mr LAU Kong-wah was concerned that the fare bargaining situation might aggravate if TAC's proposal in paragraph 23 of the Report was accepted, i.e. Hong Kong in longer term should consider moving towards a more flexible taxi fare regulatory regime, such as allowing individual taxi operators to apply to the Government for setting different fare scales, subject to the maximum flagfall and subsequent incremental charges prescribed by the Government. Mr Ronny TONG and Ms Miriam LAU were of the view that the proposed flexible taxi fare regime was unacceptable as it would only cause more confusion and malpractices, especially when most of Hong Kong taxis were owned by individual operators.

39. Professor JIM Chi-yung explained that in places like Tokyo and Singapore where 75% to 80% of taxis were owned by corporate operators, the government only set the maximum rate of taxi charges and company operators might apply to the government for charging the passengers at a rate lower than the maximum rate. When the majority of Hong Kong taxis were operated by corporate companies, the Government could consider adopting a more flexible taxi fare regime.

40. Mr Jeffrey LAM enquired about the arrangements for provision of premium taxi services to visitors for the Olympics equestrian events held in August.

41. AC for T/M&P responded that TD had distributed a CD to taxi drivers to enhance their ability in handling English and Putunghua-speaking passengers. TD also had distributed an updated version of taxi service guidebook to taxi drivers and would arrange an award presentation ceremony of the Taxi Driver Commendation Scheme in

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July 2008 to remind taxi drivers of the importance of courtesy in dealing with visitors for the Olympics equestrian events.

42. Dr Fernando CHEUNG enquired about measures to enhance the wheelchair-accessible taxi services, pointing out that more than 9 000 calls for rehabilitation bus service had been turned down last year due to lack of wheelchair-accessible vehicles. Ms Miriam LAU shared Dr CHEUNG's concern and remarked that the Government should actively consider ways to introduce alternative types of petrol/LPG-driven wheelchair-accessible taxis into Hong Kong as the issue had already dragged on for many years.

43. DS(T) responded that the Transport and Housing Bureau was discussing with the relevant Government bureaux/departments the feasibility of relaxing the fuel type restriction for wheelchair-accessible taxis under the Air Pollution Control (Vehicle Design Standards) (Emission) Regulations (Cap. 311J). DS(T) stressed that the Government was actively pursuing the issue.

44. Ms LI Fung-ying was concerned about the impact of the fixed route fixed fare taxi service on other modes of public transport. She was concerned that the service might contradict the policy of requiring passengers to pay according to the meter, and discourage the public to use mass transit systems.

45. DS(T) replied that the Government would engage the taxi trade in considering the detailed implementational issues concerning fixed route fixed fare taxi service, e.g. the appropriate routes of such services, the mode of operation etc. and whether the proposal should first be carried out on a pilot scheme basis. The Government would discuss the issue with the taxi operators at its regular meeting with the trade in August 2008.

46. Ms LI Fung-ying opined that since many taxi drivers were self-employed and would lose income if they spent time on training, the Government should provide incentive such as subsidies to encourage taxi drivers to attend training courses, and avoid making the training courses a pre-requisite for licencing, etc.

47. Professor JIM Chi-yung responded that having taken into consideration the views of the taxi trade and the public, TAC had recommended that the organizers of taxi driver training courses should provide courses of shorter duration, and drivers who had attended the training courses would be awarded with higher scores in the Enhanced Taxi Driver Commendation Scheme.

VII Lantau and urban taxi fare adjustment applications

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1977/07-08(03) - Administration's paper on Lantau and urban taxi fare increase application

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LC CB(1)2068/07-08(03)	Paper	No. -	Joint submission on Lantau and urban taxi fare increase from Tai Wo Motors Limited and The Taxi Operators Association Limited)
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General

48. Ms LI Fung-ying expressed concern that as the last taxi fare adjustment was only made in February 2008, she was worried about the public acceptability of the proposed fares, particularly in the light of the current inflation and price rises. She urged the Administration to give due consideration for a reasonable arrangement that could tackle the difficulties the taxi trade was facing while taking into account the impact of fare adjustment on the travelling public. The Chairman shared this concern and pointed out that, despite the proposed increase in flagfall charge was only two dollars in monetary terms, the impact would be heightened by the cumulative effect of fare increase in other modes of public transport.

49. The Permanent Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport) (PST) explained that the latest \$1 fare adjustment in 2008 was only an interim measure to partially address the impact of rising fuel prices on the taxi trade. He recapped that in August 2007 some taxi associations proposed introducing a one-dollar taxi fuel surcharge so that passengers would share part of the increasing fuel expenses. The proposal was not supported by the Administration because this would pass on the full impact of fuel price fluctuation directly to the passengers. There were also concerns over possible confusion caused to passengers in the event of frequent fuel surcharge adjustment following fuel price fluctuation. The taxi trade subsequently submitted an application to increase flagfall charge from \$15 to \$16 as an interim measure while the taxi associations were deliberating among themselves on longer term proposals to revise the taxi fare structure. In response to the enquiry of Ms Miriam LAU, DS(T) clarified that the net incomes of owner-drivers and rentor-owners set out in paragraph 17 of the Administration's paper had taken into account maintenance and repairs, insurance, parking and other miscellaneous expenses.

50. Ms LI Fung-ying urged the Administration to exercise caution in dealing with fare adjustment proposal and to heed the public's grievances possibly brought along. It was vital for the Government to play a role in assessing and balancing all the factors with regard to interests of both the taxi trade and the public. She was particularly concerned that the effectiveness of fare increase to curb problems in taxi operation would be short-lived given that the fuel price might continue to surge. A mechanism should therefore be put in place to monitor oil companies with a view to enhancing the transparency of oil product prices and safeguarding customers and the public against high fuel prices.

51. PST responded that the issue of auto-fuel price adjustments and the transparency of oil product prices had been discussed by the Panel on Economic Development at various meetings. He drew members' attention to the fact that the last adjustment of taxi

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fare was made in 1998, apart from the one-dollar increase of the flagfall charge effected in early 2008. In view of the escalating fuel prices, the adverse operating environment and the inflationary trend, it was deemed an appropriate time to consider another taxi fare adjustment. In considering the proposal, the Administration reckoned that taxis, unlike other major road-based public transport services, provided a personalized point-to-point service for passengers and there was a need to maintain a reasonable differential between taxi fares and those of other public transport modes.

52. Ms Miriam LAU expressed concern about the long duration for the fare adjustment to take effect and the difficulties the taxi trade still had to face in the interim.

53. PST explained that, after considering the views of the Panel on Transport, the Administration would consult TAC before putting forward recommendations to the Chief Executive-in-Council. Subsidiary legislation amendment related to fare adjustment would be subject to negative vetting by the Legislative Council. Hence, it was expected that the legislative exercise would complete within the last quarter of 2008 for the fare adjustment to take effect.

Taxi fare structure

54. The Chairman pointed out that, while there was a change in the taxi fare structure from 'front-loaded and the subsequent incremental charges being calculated at the same rate' to 'front-loaded and thereafter on a varying descending scale' for incremental charges to broaden the business opportunities of the taxi trade, there was still a need to further study the problem of fare bargaining and discount gangs in order to protect the interests of taxi drivers. Noting from the Administration's paper the two-tiered incremental charge on a descending scale for journey distance before 8km/11km and from 8km/11km onwards under the two proposed fare structures of urban taxis, he suggested that consideration might be given to adopting a three-tiered incremental approach so as to cater for short-, medium- and long-haul trips and further alleviate the problem of fare bargaining.

55. Ms Miriam LAU shared Mr Andrew CHENG's concern. In her view, there could be an additional increment on descending scale in between the jump from \$1.5 to \$1.0 for every 200m for journey distance before and after 8km/11km subsequent to the first 2km. In this way, the level of payment would reduce in a more gradual and reasonable manner along the scale.

56. PST pointed out that the Administration would consider the taxi fare increase applications in the light of members' suggestions and public opinions. It would study the feasibility of building in additional tier in the proposed fare structure. As two different proposals for fare adjustment were received from urban taxi associations, further discussion with the taxi trade and other parties concerned would be conducted in coming to a final and agreeable proposal.

57. Ms Miriam LAU was glad to note that the Administration would continue to discuss with the taxi trade on the details of the new fare structure. Recalling the

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diverged views from the taxi trade over a previous proposal of taxi fare reduction in 2004, she looked forward that the proposal for fare increase under discussion would be ultimately supported without dissent by the taxi trade as a whole. PST responded that the present fare adjustment proposals were put forth by the taxi associations themselves, which should reflect basically their interests and concerns.

Suggestion to review the number of Lantau taxis

58. Mr WONG Kwok-hing opined that the Administration should review and increase the approved number of Lantau taxis, in accordance with public demand and the development of the island.

59. AC for T/M&P explained that the Administration had all along been keeping watch of public demand for Lantau taxi services and conducting surveys regarding the service level from time to time. While there was a higher service demand and a longer waiting time during peak hours such as mornings of public holidays, the service level was generally sufficient to cope with the service demand.

60. Mr WONG Kwok-hing did not subscribe to this view and pointed out that the last review on the number of approved Lantau taxis was conducted 10 years ago, i.e. in 1998. A review should be conducted to address the changes in the rapid development of Lantau Island, especially where growth in tourism and improvement in road infrastructures were concerned. With the increased traffic throughput of the upgraded Tung Chung Road, there should be a way forward in planning for more Lantau taxis to meet the anticipated increase in service demand.

61. AC for T/M&P explained that the number of Lantau taxis was increased from 40 to 50 in 1998 to address the needs spurred by the new town development in Tung Chung and relocation of the new airport to Lantau. The Administration was aware of the latest developments of the island including improvement of Tung Chung Road and the growth of new tourist attractions such as Ngong Ping 360. While the prevailing number of Lantau taxis was deemed sufficient, the Administration would closely observe the situation regarding the supply and demand for Lantau taxi services.

62. Mr WONG Kwok-hing expressed great dissatisfaction with the unpragmatic and imprudent approach of the Administration in assessing the needs and planning for Lantau taxi services.

Concerns about fare bargaining

63. Ms Miriam LAU doubted the effectiveness of taxi fare increase and restructuring taxi fare mechanism to curtail discount gang activities, especially when there was no legislative prohibition against fare bargaining. In her view, the justification for the new fare structure would not be substantial if the proposal could not help crack down this problem. She pointed out that, while the implementation of a new fare structure would increase the competitiveness of taxi services and the new metered fares for long haul trips would come closer to discounted fares under the prevailing fare

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bargaining phenomenon, discount gang activities would still thrive on flexibly charging below the metered fare and offering services, such as telephone booking, at no additional charge.

64. PST responded that although the new fare structure on a varying descending scale might not completely stifle discount gang activities, it was anticipated that the competitiveness of the taxi services would be enhanced and the operating environment improved to a certain extent.

65. Mr WONG Kwok-hing was disappointed to note that the Administration had not come up with effective measures to curb the problem of taxi fare bargaining amid strong requests from the taxi trade. He sought explanation for not putting in place legislative amendment to forbid fare bargaining by passengers.

66. DS(T) responded that the problem of fare bargaining had been discussed in connection with the review of taxi operation at this meeting. It was noted that the TAC had considered carefully the desirability and feasibility of legislating against fare bargaining by passengers. TAC took the view that taxi passengers should pay according to the meters and considered that supporting this principle did not equate to concurring in taking the extreme course of action to enact legislation to impose penalty on passengers for fare bargaining. It was also concerned that if a mere verbal enquiry about fare discount by passengers would result in criminal penalty, the public might be deterred from using taxi services. Feedback from passengers also showed that they were generally not in favour of putting in place legislative prohibition against fare bargaining. There were also enforcement difficulties and evidential problems if none of the parties, i.e. drivers and passengers, would testify against the other. TAC also noted that no other major cities in the world penalize passengers on fare bargaining.

67. Mr WONG Kwok-hing expressed deep regrets at the stance taken by the Administration in not actively considering legislative measures to suppress the problem of fare bargaining. He did not subscribe to the Administration's view that lack of overseas practices was a relevant consideration to determine whether legislative amendment against fare bargaining should be implemented in Hong Kong. He pointed out that there were incidents from time to time in which some taxi drivers, on refusing to accept lower fares requested by passengers, got assaulted or verbally abused. In his view, the Administration had seriously underestimated the problem and had not taken heed of the advice of members to consider legislative amendment. He strongly urged the Administration to look into the situation and take necessary remedial actions.

68. Concluding the discussion, the Chairman urged the Administration to exercise caution and avoid delay in dealing with the problem of fare bargaining. He opined that a revised fare structure per se would not offer a thorough and prudent solution. The Administration should work concurrently in the direction of legislative amendment instead of procrastinating until the effectiveness of fare adjustment was revealed. He requested the Administration to report back to the Panel on the fare increase application in the next session of the Legislative Council.

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VIII Closure of Keung Shan Road and the associated temporary traffic and transport arrangements

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1977/07-08(06) -	Administration's paper on closure of Keung Shan Road and the associated temporary traffic and transport arrangements
LC Paper No. CB(1)1960/07-08(01)	Submission on ferry services serving Tai O after the closure of Keung Shan Road leading to Tai O as a result of an earlier landslip from 暴雨後關注大澳重整小組)

Ferry service

69. Mr WONG Kwok-hing considered it inadequate that the existing "Tuen Mun – Tung Chung – Sha Lo Wan – Tai O" ferry service (the existing ferry service) only operated four regular round trips from Mondays to Saturdays. PST responded that under normal circumstances where bus service was available, the existing ferry service could adequately meet Tai O residents' transport needs. Whenever bus service was affected by landslips or rainstorms, emergency service would be provided as necessary. The Assistant Commissioner for Transport/New Territories (AC for T/NT) supplemented that there was already an arrangement with the ferry operators concerned that where necessary, special ferry service between Tai O and Tung Chung could be arranged within two hours, and Tai O residents, the media, the Islands District Office and the Tai O Rural Committee notified of the arrangements through established channels. The shuttle bus service from the Tung Chung Development Pier to the Tung Chung MTR Station would also be strengthened accordingly. However, the frequency of the additional sailings would hinge on the weather and sea conditions.

70. Dr Fernando CHEUNG commended the Highways Department (HyD) for early completion of the repair works on the section of Keung Shan Road (KSR) that had been blocked by landslips (the affected KSR section) to enable road transport service for Tai O to resume quickly. However, inclement weather had necessitated road closure and Tai O residents' reliance on ferry service again and, while additional sailings between Tai O and Tung Chung were provided during the closure, he considered their frequency during non-peak hours, being four hours apart, undesirable. AC for T/NT responded that TD had already been closely monitoring and adjusting the special ferry service in response to passenger needs. In fact, as at 20 June 2008, 14 additional sailings between Tai O and Tung Chung were provided on weekdays, with 17 additional sailings on Sundays and public holidays. As a result, there were trips every hour during peak hours.

71. Dr Fernando CHEUNG saw a need to improve the notification arrangements for the above additional sailings, which he found confusing and inefficient because of problematic co-ordination among relevant parties. To address the problem, he called for designation of a hotline for enquiries in this regard and assignment of a department to

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co-ordinate dissemination of relevant information. In response, PST undertook to review and improve the notification arrangements as necessary. AC for T/NT supplemented that the confusion might have been caused by the deferral due to unfit sea conditions of the first special sailing arranged soon after road closure on 25 June 2008. Although a press release on the deferral was immediately issued, confusion inevitably arose because, owing to uncertain sea conditions, the Administration had not been able to specify when the sailing could really take place until passenger safety could be ensured.

Remedial measures

72. In reply to Mr WONG Kwok-hing on when repair works on the affected KSR section would complete, the Deputy Director of Highways (DD of Hy) reported that the section had already been repaired and one of its lanes re-opened on 20 June 2008. The debris from the natural slopes above KSR had also been completely cleared on 12 June 2008. As to the stabilization works on these natural slopes identified, it was estimated that given the scale of works involved, the works would not complete until late September 2008 though weather permitting, the Administration would endeavour to complete the works as early as practicable.

73. While acknowledging that the Administration had been able to repair and re-open the affected KSR section quite expeditiously, Ir Dr Raymond HO enquired about measures to monitor the natural slopes there in future to ensure that road closures and temporary traffic and transport arrangements could be expeditiously introduced as necessary in case of landslips. He also opined that the Administration should as he had long urged, allocate more resources for stabilization works on natural slopes, especially works on hilly Lantau Island.

74. In response, PST elaborated that although the affected KSR section had already been repaired and re-opened, to ensure public safety it would be kept under monitoring so that under special weather conditions, such as when a red/black rainstorm warning or a landslide warning was issued, it would be closed again and contingency transport arrangements made expeditiously as AC for T/NT described above. DD of Hy advised that for stabilisation works on natural slopes, as announced earlier, half of the resources for slope stabilization would be used on natural slopes. There was already a data base on natural slopes with their risks of landslide assessed according to their past performance. The priority of conducting slope stabilization works on them had also been set according to certain factors. While slope stabilization would be ensured through long-term measures in due course, where problems had emerged such as in the case of the North Lantau Highway, a series of temporary measures had already been worked out with some implemented in conjunction with the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) and the Drainage Services Department. Efforts had also been made to ensure more timely response to emergency situations in future.

75. Dr Fernando CHEUNG enquired about the progress and timetable of stabilization works on certain natural slopes the landslide risks of which had necessitated the evacuation of some twenty Tai O families from their homes. PST responded that

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since the above arrangements involved the Home Affairs Department and CEDD, it might not be appropriate for him to provide details on their behalf.

IX Enhancement of the safety of long downhill roads

- (LC Paper No. CB(1)1977/07-08(04) - Administration's paper on enhancement of the safety of long downhill roads
- LC Paper No. CB(1)1977/07-08(05) - Submission on enhancement of the safety of long downhill roads from Sai Kung District Council Members Mr CHAN Kuen-kwan and Mr HIEW Moo-siew
- LC Paper No. CB(1)2068/07-08(04) - Submission on enhancement of the safety of long downhill roads from Ms Christine FONG, a Sai Kung District Councillor
- LC Papers Nos. - Submissions on measures to prevent traffic accidents involving vehicles going down slope from a member of the public
CB(1)1449/07-08(01) and (02)
- LC Paper No. CB(1)1485/07-08(01) - Submission on measures to enhance road safety from Community for Road Safety
- LC Paper No. CB(1)1587/07-08(01) - Submission on imposition of statutory requirements on the procedures vehicles should follow when going down slope from a Mr KONG
- LC Paper No. CB(1)1596/07-08(01) - Submission on independent road safety review for New Hiram's Highway from Community for Road Safety
- LC Paper No. CB(1)1792/07-08(01) - Submission on measures to prevent traffic accidents involving vehicles going down slope from a Mr KONG)

Provision of speed enforcement cameras (SECs)

76. Mr LEE Wing-tat asked whether SECs would be provided on all the 29 long steep downhill road sections in the territory which the Administration had identified (the 29 road sections). The Acting Deputy Commissioner for Transport/Planning & Technical Services (DC for T/P&TS) explained that the need to install fixed SECs was determined on the basis of accident records and the Police's observation of speeding activities. Along this line, the Administration had already proposed to provide SECs to two locations in Chai Wan Road and Clear Water Bay Road respectively. In the wake of the Garden Road accident, the Administration would also review the need to provide SEC there.

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77. The Chairman, however, opined that in consideration of the fatal risks of downhill road sections as exposed by the two recent accidents that occurred on New Hiram's Highway and Garden Road respectively, SECs should be provided on all the 29 road sections. During the site visit to the scene of the New Hiram's Highway accident, the Panel had also proposed that SECs or camera housings be provided on all long downhill road sections identified. Moreover, the cost so incurred was insignificant, and the fiscal surplus for the 2007-2008 financial year was huge. Mr LAU Kong-wah shared his view, and added that during the visit, members had also proposed the provision of anti-skid surfacing for long downhill road sections to enhance their safety standards.

78. In response, the Commissioner for Transport (C for T) explained that the provision of SECs was determined according to resource availability and a number of criteria. In the case of Garden Road for example, its accident rate during the past three years, at 32 only and none involved fatalities, was comparatively low given its large traffic volume, and was only half of the territory's overall accident rate. Moreover, it had yet to be ascertained whether the Garden Road accident had been caused by the driver factor, road environment factors or vehicle maintenance problems. Where resources permitted, the Administration would provide SECs or camera housings on more roads but still, priority had to be accorded to those in greater need.

79. Mr WONG Kwok-hing expressed dissatisfaction and regrets at the above approach adopted in providing SECs, which he considered passive and insensitive, in particular the determination of need on the basis of whether fatalities had been caused. He also considered it unacceptable that the planned additional SECs should take two years to install, and said that as an interim measure camera housings should be installed first. Mrs Selina CHOW shared his view on the installation progress. In response, C for T stressed the importance of deciding the provision of SECs on the basis of solid facts and statistics and to accord priority to accident blackspots identified through TD's continuous monitoring of the territory-wide situation. DC for T/P&TS added that apart from fixed SECs, the Police also flexibly stepped up mobile enforcement actions using laser gun at various locations at different times of the day as necessary.

80. Keen to ensure timely provision of SECs for the 29 road sections, the Chairman urged the Administration to seek additional funding for the purpose at the last Finance Committee (FC) meeting in this legislative session, and said that many members would support the relevant funding proposal. Mr WONG Kwok-hing echoed his view, and proposed that to save costs, at some locations arrangement could be made to install camera housings first.

81. PST and C for T welcomed members' support for granting additional resources to enhance road safety. PST however emphasized that SECs were only a part of the whole package of measures to deter speeding. Time was also required to responsibly identify the housing locations. As such, the Administration could only assess the need to provide SECs for the 29 road sections expeditiously and seriously, and arrange for installation as necessary. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung, however, stressed the need to

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positively respond to public views and hence members' call for providing SECs for the 29 road sections early.

82. Mr LAU Kong-wah considered it undesirable that the Administration seemed to have decided to provide SEC for Garden Road mainly because of the recent accident there. C for T explained that this was because the accident had changed TD's perception of the potential for occurrence of traffic accidents on Garden Road, and took the opportunity to inform Members of the criteria used in determining the location of SECs as follows -

- (a) accident records with particular emphasis on accidents caused by vehicle speeding;
- (b) prevalence of speeding activities observed by the Police;
- (c) the need for an even distribution of SEC housing locations to provide an area-wide deterrent effect;
- (d) strategic or trunk roads with higher traffic speed and traffic flow; and
- (e) geological and environmental factors surrounding the sites.

C for T further elaborated that apart from the above general principles, the 29 road sections' need for SECs would also be examined in the light of members' views expressed at this meeting. In fact, the conditions of different road sections were regularly reviewed and analyzed to ensure SECs would be installed where necessary in a timely manner.

83. Suspecting that yellow light or even red light jumping might be the cause of certain accidents on downhill road sections, Mrs Selina CHOW urged the Administration to install SECs near all traffic lights on downhill road sections to deter such offences. DC for T/P&TS explained that the recent review of the 29 road sections had already taken into consideration all relevant factors, including the above factor.

84. The Chairman reckoned that members' proposal to provide SECs for the 29 road sections would incur less than \$10 million and hence might not need to go through FC. To take forward the proposal, he suggested writing a letter to the Chief Executive on behalf of the Panel. In recognition of members' strong view on their SEC proposal, PST undertook to provide SEC housings for all the 29 road sections, and to advise the Panel of the relevant installation timetable in writing before the end of this legislative session, after determining the housing locations. The Chairman showed appreciation for his undertaking.

Admin.

(Post-meeting note: The requested information was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(1)2156/07-08 dated 11 July 2008.)

Other measures to enhance the safety of long downhill roads

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85. Ms Miriam LAU saw a need to impose on long downhill roads, in particular those steep and narrow ones, more stringent speed limits than the 50 km/h generally applicable to roads in the urban area, and to require drivers to adopt low gear when operating on long downhill roads. PST responded that the drivers involved in the two recent accidents were professional drivers and should be able to adjust the speed of their vehicles according to road and weather conditions notwithstanding the speed limit, which indicated the maximum speed allowed under normal road and traffic condition. Moreover, measures to enhance the safety of the road environment, such as provision of anti-skid surfacing, had already been implemented on many downhill road sections in the territory. C for T echoed his view and added that in setting the speed limit for any section of a road, many factors had to be taken into consideration, e.g. enforceability, traffic volume, design of the road and road geometry. There was a need to strike a proper balance between smooth traffic flow and road safety. Notwithstanding, the Administration would consider imposing more stringent speed limits than 50 km/h on certain road sections should the need arise.

86. Mr LEE Wing-tat opined that in response to the two accidents, more precautionary measures should be introduced to enhance the safety of long downhill roads, such as modification/addition of warning/advisory signs and road markings, installation of close-circuit television, etc. He also saw a need for greater publicity and public education efforts to remind drivers to adopt low gear instead of solely depending on footbrake for retardation when operating on such roads.

87. C for T responded that drivers were already reminded in the Guide to Private/Public Light Bus and Private/Public Bus Driving Test published by TD that when driving down slopes, they should engage in low gear to avoid brake-fade, which according to him and the Chief Engineer/Road Safety & Standards of TD (CE/RS&S) could result if the brake was applied when the vehicle was running down slope for a long distance, causing the temperature of the brake shoes to rise and thereby lowering the braking efficiency. CE/RS&S further advised that other relevant publicity and education efforts were also being made. In particular, a television announcement in the public interest in this regard was under production. C for T added that even at low gear, heavy vehicles might not safely operate on certain road sections such as Magazine Gap Road which was winding, steep and narrow. Under the circumstances, imposition of traffic management measures such as prohibition of long vehicles or heavy goods vehicles would be considered to ensure road safety.

88. Dr Fernando CHEUNG enquired whether an in-depth review of the 29 road sections had been conducted, and whether the recommendations on enhancement measures set out in paragraph 6 of the Administration's paper were all that identified. In his view, more measures should be mapped out in response to the two recent accidents, in particular setting of different speed limits for ordinary vehicles and heavy vehicles as in overseas, and tightening of vehicle inspection and maintenance requirements.

89. C for T responded that all heavy vehicles and buses had to undergo annual inspection, which should be sufficient in consideration of the age and condition of the

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vehicles operating in Hong Kong. Moreover, a professional driver should drive responsibly and ensure that the vehicle he was driving was in good order. In the wake of the New Hiram's Highway accident, the Administration had already urged and assisted as necessary non-franchised bus operators to enhance driver training and safety awareness. DC for T/P&TS supplemented that the territory-wide review of long steep downhill roads conducted at the Panel's request had revealed that with the existing traffic facilities, the 29 road sections were already in compliance with the prevailing safety standards. Notwithstanding, the Administration had identified a number of measures which would provide further alert to motorists, and further enhance the safety of the road environment. These included traffic control measures (4 locations), improvements to traffic signs and road markings (28 locations), road barriers (10 locations), road surfacing (3 locations) and the provision of SECs (2 locations). Where Garden Road was concerned, although warning traffic signs and road markings were already available, improvements to the signs and markings would be made to advise drivers to adopt low gear and to indicate the gradient. A crash cushion would also be provided near the Zoological and Botanical Gardens. All the above improvements would be implemented in a few days' time. Additional improvements might also be introduced in the light of the outcome of the relevant Police investigation.

90. In response to Mr WONG Kwok-hing on further improvement measures to Garden Road, C for T pointed out that there were already many traffic signs and road safety measures on Garden Road. Care therefore had to be exercised to ensure that additional improvement measures would not distract drivers' attention. In this regard, DC for T/P&TS supplemented that anti-skid surfacing had already been provided for the section of Garden Road between St. John's Building and Queen's Road Central. There were also many warning/advisory signs and road markings along Garden Road, such as the "double bend ahead" sign, the "use low gear" sign, the "reduce speed now" sign, and the "pedestrian crossing ahead" sign.

91. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung saw a need to commission independent consultants to provide neutral advice and innovative ideas on how to enhance the safety of the 29 road sections. If not, the Administration would not be able to convince members that there were additional effective enhancement measures other than SECs. For example, speeding could be deterred by some sort of speeding detection and driver warning mechanism made possible by the global positioning system as he had experienced in Vienna; serious traffic accidents could be prevented by tackling vehicle maintenance problems and the problem of driver exhaustion from poor working conditions.

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92. In response, PST and C for T elaborated that the Administration was already actively making efforts to minimize traffic accidents through introducing improvements to the road conditions and traffic facilities, as well as to driver training and vehicle maintenance. On the proposal to engage external consultants, C for T emphasized that equipped with transport engineering professionals and regular exchange with HyD and the Traffic Branch of the Police, TD's expertise was comparable to that of any transport consultants locally or overseas. Notwithstanding, where necessary and resources permitting, TD would commission a consultant to provide additional expert advice on the 29 road sections. Professional judgement of the findings would however be made by the experts on the research committees under the Transport Advisory Committee and the Road Safety Council. As to the driver factor, C for T pointed out all drivers, especially professional drivers, had the legal obligation to refrain from driving if their physical or mental conditions were unfit. The Administration had therefore approached relevant trade associations for assistance in promoting a responsible driving culture. It had also urged them to ensure proper vehicle maintenance. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung was however unconvinced.

93. Mr LAU Kong-wah cast doubt on the effect of the above efforts, and said that the maintenance requirements on non-franchised bus operators should be tightened to tally with those on franchised bus operators. C for T responded that the maintenance requirements on the latter were more stringent in consideration of their franchise, their significantly larger scale of operation, and their ability to maintain their vehicles more systematically with their own depots and engineers. However, the required safety and roadworthiness standards of the vehicles of non-franchised bus operators were similarly high, and the conditions of their vehicles generally acceptable. Where necessary, the Administration was willing to consider tightening the requirements of the annual examination of these vehicles and even increase the examination frequency. However, such a decision would need to be made with great care in consideration of its impacts not only on buses but also on other heavy vehicles and the whole trade. Highlighting the high accident rate of non-franchised buses, Mr LAU stressed the need to ensure their examination frequency was comparable to that of franchised buses though consultation was necessary before taking this step. He requested the Administration to take forward the matter immediately, and report back on the developments in the next legislative session.

Admin.

94. The Chairman said that in consideration of the high degree of fatality of traffic accidents involving buses or heavy vehicles, professional drivers should be required to attend safety awareness and vehicle maintenance courses regularly. C for T undertook to examine the proposal in detail and take action as necessary.

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X Any other business

95. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:10 pm.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
18 September 2008