

Legislative Council Panel on Transport Safety of Franchised Bus Operation

PURPOSE

This paper updates Members on the actions taken by the Administration and the franchised bus companies to further enhance the safety of franchised bus operation.

BACKGROUND

2. The Legislative Council Panel on Transport (“the Panel”) was briefed in July 2007 on measures to enhance the safety of franchised bus operation. The Administration also issued an information paper (LC Paper No. CB(1)434/07-08(01)) in December 2007 to provide supplementary information.

3. As at end 2007, there were 5,889 buses operating franchised bus services. These services are regulated and monitored by the Transport Department (“TD”) and safety is one of the major areas of concern. All franchised buses that provide services to passengers must meet the safety requirements of the legislation and pass TD’s stringent inspections. TD also issues guidelines on the working hours of bus captains and liaise closely with franchised bus companies on measures to enhance the safety of bus operation, including improvement in bus driver training and publicity on bus safety, etc.

PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF MEASURES TO ENHANCE BUS SAFETY

4. The franchised bus companies have been taking the following actions to further enhance the safety of bus operation :

- (a) Provision of black box¹ – All new buses are equipped with black boxes. The franchised bus companies are also retrofitting black boxes on the existing buses for completion before end 2009.

¹ Electronic tachograph installed on vehicles is commonly known as "black box". It records the operation data of the vehicle, such as journey speed, journey time, distance travelled, bus tilting angle, acceleration and deceleration, door opening, etc. It can be used for monitoring the drivers' performance and accident investigation.

Details of the programme are shown in the table below -

Bus Company	Licensed Fleet	No. of buses installed with black box (%)	Timing for completion of installation work
Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited ("KMB")	4,027	3,199 (79%)	End 2008
Citybus Limited ("CTB") (Hong Kong Island and cross-harbour bus services)	747	131 (18%)	September 2008
CTB (North Lantau and Chek Lap Kok Airport)	172	5 (3%)	End 2009
New World First Bus Services Limited ("NWFB")	694	34 (5%)	End 2009
New Lantao Bus Company (1973) Limited	94	55 (59%)	End 2009
Long Win Bus Company Limited	155	155 (100%)	End 2007
Total	5,889	3,579 (61%)	End 2009

- (b) Provision of seat belts at the exposed seats on all new buses – The franchised bus companies have committed to providing seat belts at the exposed seats of all new buses.
- (c) Retrofitting of seat belts at the front row on the upper deck of the post-1997 design buses – The franchised bus companies have committed to completing the retrofitting of seat belts on all post-1997 design buses operating on expressways by the fourth quarter of 2008, and the remaining post-1997 design buses by July 2009. They now agree to advance the completion of the

retrofitting work on all post-1997 design buses by October 2008.

- (d) Installation of an additional horizontal guard rail across the upper deck windscreen of the pre-1997 design buses – The franchised bus companies have committed to install the guard rails on the pre-1997 design buses running on expressway by March 2008 and the pre-1997 design buses by July 2008. They now agree to expedite their work and complete the installation by May 2008.
- (e) Improvement of working hours of the bus captain – The new guidelines were adopted since July 2007². TD will continue to closely monitor the compliance of the bus companies.
- (f) Deployment of more buses with seat belts at exposed seats to operate on expressways since the fourth quarter of 2007 – An additional 30 buses have been identified for deployment on expressways by end January 2008, in addition to about 1,200 such buses which have already been deployed on routes running on expressways.
- (g) Advancing the replacement of pre-1997 design buses – About 270 buses have been identified for early replacement by one to three years.

FURTHER MEASURES TO ENHANCE BUS SAFETY

Further review on the design and structure of buses

5. In the light of the serious bus accident at Tseung Kwan O on 14 December 2007, TD conducted an expert discussion forum on 10 January 2008 with the academics, professional institutions, bus manufacturer and franchised bus companies to explore feasible measures to further enhance the safety of double deck buses. Having analysed the result of the impact on the buses involved in accident, the bus manufacturer put forward the following two proposals:

² Improvements include lengthening the minimum break period between successive working days from 9 hours to 9.5 hours; and refining the distribution of rest times during a driving duty so that the bus captain will enjoy better rest time, i.e. a rest time of at least 12 minutes in total would be arranged within the first four hours of the duty.

- (a) to strengthen the anchorage of the upper deck front 3 rows of seats by adding stronger plates and bolts on buses; and
- (b) to add an additional front guard rails which would be integrated with the body structure of the bus to further strengthen the body structure.

The experts at the discussion forum considered these proposals useful in enhancing the safety of passengers. TD is pursuing with the bus companies on these improvement proposals.

Restricting passengers from sitting on exposed seats on the upper deck of the buses

6. TD and the bus companies have considered the proposal of restricting the use of the exposed seats on the upper deck of buses. As all franchised buses that provide services to passengers have met the safety requirements of the legislation and passed TD's stringent inspections, and improvement measures are being taken on both the pre-1997 and post-1997 design buses by installing guard rails and retrofitting seat belts on the upper deck front row seats respectively, there is no justification to restrict passengers from sitting on the exposed seats on the upper deck. Furthermore, if these seats are not used, the carrying capacity of buses would be reduced which may affect the service standard.

Bus captain training

7. The franchised bus companies have been providing various training programmes to their bus captains including –

- (a) Basic training for new bus captains – All new recruits are required to attend training programmes which include desktop training and on-the-road training. These training programmes aim at introducing to new bus captains the importance of safe driving, skills and techniques in preventing accidents and handling emergencies, defensive driving techniques, and customer service etc.
- (b) Enhancement / refresh training for serving bus captains – All franchised bus companies have pledged to providing each serving

bus captains at least one enhancement / refresher training course every one to three years starting from March 2008. The refresher training aims to enhance the bus captains' defensive driving skills, update them on new driving rules and legislation, draw to their attention accident black spots, and instil in them the importance of safe driving.

(c) Driving Improvement / Remedial training – These are tailor-made training courses for bus captains to be arranged on a need basis.

8. Apart from the above, KMB has launched in January 2008 new computer based driving simulators to enhance bus captains' training. The new training simulators will enhance bus captains' driving skills and help sharpen bus captains' reactions when facing different driving situations. CTB and NWFB have revised their training syllabus and will issue to every bus captain with a pocket size booklet on safe driving behaviour to enhance their safety awareness.

9. The franchised bus companies will arrange regular checks on the driving behaviour of their bus captains and take appropriate disciplinary actions if improper driving behaviour is established. The franchised bus companies are considering conducting roadside checks on driving discipline at road junctions.

10. TD, in collaboration with the Police, other experts, and the bus companies conduct at least four Road Safety Seminars annually for the bus captains. Road safety experts are invited to introduce to the bus captains the latest safety driving techniques and contributory factors to traffic accidents so as to promote safety awareness and proper driving behaviours.

Publicity on bus safety

11. To remind passengers to be careful when using bus services, franchised bus companies have launched publicity programmes through bus body advertisements, on-bus televisions or other media. The bus companies have been asked to strengthen safety publicity arrangements including deployment of safety ambassadors on buses and broadcasting of safety messages. TD has also produced television and radio announcements of public interest to promote passenger safety awareness.

ADVICE SOUGHT

12. Members are invited to note the above progress in further enhancing the safety of franchised bus operation.

Transport and Housing Bureau
Transport Department
January 2008