

立法會

Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)1362/08-09

(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB1/PL/TP/1

Panel on Transport

Minutes of meeting held on Friday, 23 January 2009, at 8:30 am in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon CHEUNG Hok-ming, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo (Deputy Chairman)
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, SBS, S.B.St.J., JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah, JP
Hon Miriam LAU Kin-yee, GBS, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, SBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Hon KAM Nai-wai, MH
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon IP Wai-ming, MH

Members absent : Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP
Hon LEE Wing-tat
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP

Public officers attending : Agenda item IV
Ms Eva CHENG
Secretary for Transport and Housing

Mr Alan CHU King-man

Deputy Secretary for Transport & Housing (Transport) 3

Mr David TO Kam-biu
Assistant Commissioner for Transport / Planning

Miss LUI Ying
Assistant Commissioner for Transport /
Administration & Licensing

Mr CHENG Ting-ning
Project Manager /
Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Hong Kong
Highways Department

Agenda item V

Mr YAU Shing-mu
Under Secretary for Transport and Housing

Mrs Avia LAI
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport and Housing 1

Miss Rosanna LAW
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport and Housing 2

Mr Albert YUEN
Assistant Commissioner / Bus and Railway
Transport Department

Mr CHEUNG Jin-pang
Principal Transport Officer / Bus and Railway 1
Transport Department

Mr David TSANG
Senior Engineer / Vehicle Safety
Transport Department

**Attendance by
invitation**

: Agenda item V

The Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited /
Long Win Bus Company Limited

Mr Edmond HO
Managing Director

Ms Winnie HO
Corporate Affairs Director

Mr SHUM Yuet-hung
Principal Engineer, Bus Engineering

Citybus Limited / New World First Bus Services Limited

Mr Samuel CHENG
Managing Director

Mr William CHUNG
Head of Operations and Planning

Mr Paul LI
Head of Operations and Engineering

Clerk in attendance : Ms Joanne MAK
Chief Council Secretary (1)2

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

Miss Winnie CHENG
Legislative Assistant (1)5

Action

- I Confirmation of minutes**
(LC Paper No. CB(1)632/08-09 - Minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2008)

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2008 were confirmed.

- II Information papers issued since last meeting**
(LC Paper No. CB(1)443/08-09(01) - E-mail from a member of the public regarding complaint about the service of bus route 971
LC Paper No. CB(1)483/08-09(01) - Administration's paper on Route 3 (Country Park Section) toll increase

- LC Paper No. CB(1)483/08-09(02) - Paper on revision of the concessionary tolls of Tai Lam Tunnel effective on 28 December 2008 from Route 3 (CPS) Company Limited
- LC Paper No. CB(1)639/08-09(01) - Submissions from a member of the public on Shatin-Central Link, Kowloon Southern Link and restructuring plan of some cross-harbour bus routes, and the Administration's responses
- LC Paper No. CB(1)639/08-09(02) - Submission from a member of the public complaining about bus passengers bringing with them a dog
- LC Paper No. CB(1)639/08-09(03) - Submission from a member of the public complaining about the imposition of a surcharge on taxi passengers travelling from Ma Wan)

2. Members noted the above papers which had been issued since the last regular meeting.

III Items for discussion at the next meeting scheduled for 27 February 2009

- (LC Paper No. CB(1)614/08-09(01) - List of outstanding items for discussion
- LC Paper No. CB(1)614/08-09(02) - List of follow-up actions)

3. Members agreed that the following items would be discussed at the next regular meeting on Friday, 27 February 2009, at 8:30 am –

- (a) Central Kowloon Route – Progress update;
- (b) PWP Item 6746TH – Reconstruction and improvement of Tuen Mun Road; and
- (c) Traffic safety problems arising from drivers' failure to wear seat belts.

4. As proposed by Mr WONG Kwok-hing, members agreed to add the subject of "Changes made by MTR Corporation Limited to staff welfare after the rail merger exercise" to the list of outstanding items for discussion.

IV Regulatory arrangements for cross-boundary vehicles

(LC Paper No. CB(1)614/08-09(03) - Administration's paper on regulatory arrangements for cross-boundary vehicles

LC Paper No. CB(1)614/08-09(04) - Legislative Council question on cross-boundary private cars raised by Hon CHEUNG Hok-ming at the Council meeting on 17 December 2008 and the Administration's reply)

5. The Secretary for Transport and Housing (STH) and the Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport) 3 (DS(T)3) briefed members on the Administration's proposal to relax the regulatory arrangements for cross-boundary private cars. STH informed members that the existing quota system for private cars would be relaxed through managed control. A trial scheme would be implemented at the Shenzhen Bay Port (SBP) as soon as possible, subject to the sorting out of implementation details. The trial scheme, if implemented successfully, would pave the way for full-scale implementation at the Hong Kong–Zhuhai–Macao Bridge (HZMB).

Implementation approach and programme

6. Ms Miriam LAU and Mr WONG Sing-chi asked about the plan for implementing the proposed system and when full-scale relaxation of the regulatory arrangements for cross-boundary private cars would be considered. STH responded that the current proposal would start with the issue of one-off ad hoc quotas to Hong Kong private cars first, to be followed by Guangdong private cars at a later stage after satisfactory implementation of the proposal for Hong Kong private cars and resolution of practical problems encountered.

7. Members in general welcomed the ad hoc quota proposal to facilitate cross-border traffic to support more frequent and closer economic exchanges between Hong Kong and the Mainland. Ms LI Fung-ying asked whether the Transport and Housing Bureau would take the lead in co-ordinating with all relevant parties to ensure that all necessary supportive measures would be introduced in a timely manner to tie in with the implementation of the proposed system. STH replied in the affirmative, adding that the preliminary target was to announce the arrangements for the first phase (i.e. issuing one-off ad hoc quotas to Hong Kong private cars) and the implementation details within 2009.

The implementation details would be worked out subject to the progress of discussions of the relevant expert group.

8. Mr WONG Sing-chi pointed out that cross-boundary traffic had already given rise to traffic congestion in the Northern and Yuen Long Districts and posed a risk to road safety in those areas. He considered that such problems should be addressed in the detailed proposal on the ad hoc quota system to be worked out, as relaxation of regulatory arrangements for cross-boundary private cars might aggravate those traffic problems. He also asked whether there was a plan to implement the ad hoc quota proposal at other land boundary control points.

9. STH responded that apart from a trial scheme to be implemented at SBP, there was no plan to implement the ad hoc quota proposal at other existing control points because the traffic volume there was already saturated. She pointed out that in relaxing the regulatory arrangements for cross-boundary vehicles, the prevailing handling capacities of the relevant support road networks would be considered. She explained that the proposal would be implemented on an incremental basis having regard to demand, so as to provide effective control on the volume of private cars entering into Hong Kong from the Mainland/Macao. Besides, the pace of incremental implementation had to be agreed with the Mainland/Macao authorities because they were also concerned about the handling capacity of their respective road networks.

10. Mr Jeffrey LAM considered that the procedures for applying for the ad hoc quotas should not be too complicated, in order to facilitate users and to accommodate needs to drive across the border to deal with urgent matters. STH responded that efforts would be made to facilitate applications, such as by permitting on-line application and appointment by telephone. However, the application procedure would inevitably incur certain lead time and drivers would be advised to make early planning where possible.

Law enforcement concerns

11. Mr WONG Kwok-hing was concerned how enforcement actions could be taken against visiting Mainland/Macao private cars in the event of contravention of Hong Kong's traffic regulations or failure to meet Hong Kong's vehicle emission standards. He was also concerned how summonses could be served on the drivers concerned and what actions could be taken if they did not appear in court.

12. STH and DS(T)3 responded that the Administration would collaborate the Guangdong and Macao authorities to address concerns on environmental, road safety and security aspects in drawing up a practicable framework to facilitate proper implementation of the ad hoc quota proposal. As far as law enforcement was concerned, the Administration would make

reference to overseas experience such as that of the European Union (EU). In case of non-appearance in court in answer to summonses, penalties such as restriction from applying for the ad hoc quotas again would be considered. Moreover, the necessary details of the visiting drivers, e.g. driving records, could be obtained by Hong Kong at the ad hoc quota application stage through co-operation with the Mainland and Macao authorities. As to safeguarding the environmental standards, the Administration would seek the Environmental Protection Department's views and the initial thinking was that visiting private cars might be required to meet preset/prevaling emission and vehicle standards of Hong Kong. In this connection, a pre-qualification system would be considered to facilitate enforcement of such requirements.

13. Ms Miriam LAU pointed out that ferries and other types of vehicles were already operating between Hong Kong and other Mainland cities. She opined that a system for cross-border vehicle registration should be considered to be introduced under the framework being contemplated for ad hoc quota.

14. Referring to paragraph 8 of the Administration's paper, Mr Andrew CHENG considered that the proposal of allowing visiting Mainland/Macao vehicles with a short duration of stay not to carry Hong Kong registration marks might pose law enforcement difficulties. Mr IP Wai-ming shared Mr CHENG's view and expressed concern about difficulties in taking enforcement actions against these drivers if they contravened Hong Kong laws.

15. STH responded that visiting drivers had to abide by Hong Kong laws. By virtue of the existing legislation, visiting drivers could drive in Hong Kong on the strength of their domestic driving licences without a need to apply for Hong Kong driving licences. She agreed that the need to require visiting Mainland/Macao vehicles with a short duration of stay to carry Hong Kong registration marks would be further considered. DS(T)3 supplemented that the Administration would make arrangements to ensure that only suitable private car models which met Hong Kong's emission standards and drivers with a clean driving record would succeed in applying for the ad hoc quotas. He further said that publicity and educational efforts would be made to remind visiting drivers of the need to abide by Hong Kong laws. These matters would be further followed up at expert group meetings with the Guangdong authorities.

Vehicle inspections and differences in driving practice

16. Ms Miriam LAU enquired whether visiting Mainland private cars applying for ad hoc quotas would need to go through car inspection to ensure compliance with Hong Kong's emission and vehicle standards beforehand. Mr Jeffrey LAM highlighted Hong Kong's higher emission and vehicle standards, and expressed concern that if Hong Kong did not impose any vehicle inspection requirement, visiting Mainland vehicles might emit black smoke and

cause air pollution in Hong Kong. Ms LAU considered that a system for mutual recognition of the results of vehicle inspection either carried out in Hong Kong or on the Mainland should be considered. She pointed out that many cross-boundary goods vehicle drivers had been complaining that in addition to the Mainland's heavy road tolls, they had to take out vehicle insurance separately in Hong Kong and on the Mainland and all these had added to their operational cost.

17. STH responded that the visiting vehicle must have valid third party insurance covering their whole period of stay in Hong Kong, and that cross-boundary motor vehicle insurance would be available sooner or later should there be sufficient market demand. As to Ms LAU's suggestion of establishing a system for mutual recognition of the results of inspection of cross-boundary vehicles, STH said that the matter would be followed up at expert group meetings with the Guangdong authorities. She added that it would be discussed whether only Mainland vehicles which complied with a specified emission standard would be permitted to come to Hong Kong and vice versa.

18. Mr Albert CHAN said that it was necessary to address safety issues relating to differences between left-hand steering wheel cars and right-hand steering wheel cars under the ad hoc quota proposal. STH responded that consideration might be given to tackling problems caused by such differences through publicity and education initiatives, such as offering courses on the driving practices and regulations of the Mainland and Hong Kong by respective governments. She said that these issues would be followed up at expert group meetings with the Guangdong authorities.

19. Mr Jeffrey LAM said that two-way traffic on the same lane was allowed for most roads in the rural areas of the Mainland. He expressed concern about the road safety risks that might be posed by visiting Mainland drivers who were accustomed to such road usage practices. He asked whether only private cars registered in Mainland cities would be allowed to apply for the ad hoc quotas at the early stage. STH responded that this and other related matters such as measures to familiarize Mainland drivers with the driving practices and traffic regulations of Hong Kong would be discussed at the expert group meetings with the Guangdong authorities.

Supportive measures to facilitate implementation of the ad hoc quota proposal

20. Mr Albert CHAN considered it necessary to ensure the availability of necessary road management and road use facilities before implementing the ad hoc quota proposal, and urged the Administration to rectify the inadequacy of signage on Hong Kong roads and to widen the application of the global positioning system (GPS) technology in Hong Kong. Mr Jeffrey LAM shared Mr CHAN's concern and urged the Administration to make improvements.

21. STH took note of members' concern and pointed out that the need to familiarize Mainland drivers with the road use facilities in Hong Kong through education and publicity initiatives would be considered at the expert group meetings. Regarding the application of GPS in Hong Kong, STH explained that due to the existence of many high-rise buildings in Hong Kong, time gaps in data reception was inevitable. However, the problem could be rectified with technological development.

22. Mr Albert CHAN stressed the need for full-scale application of GPS in Hong Kong to avoid lagging behind in GPS application. STH informed members that the Administration was already subsidizing the development, in collaboration with the Hong Kong Productivity Council, of an On-board Trucker Information System which utilized GPS technology for some 500 trucks. It aimed to provide a common platform that provided backend support to truckers and facilitated effective communication between logistics players and truckers. It was hoped that the commercial application of GPS would in time help promote GPS application among private cars.

23. Mr KAM Nai-wai declared that he was a consultant of a company engaged in the development of GPS technology. He pointed out that more transmitters should be provided in urban Hong Kong as soon as possible to enable Hong Kong to catch up with other modern cities, and to improve the application of GPS in Hong Kong to help visiting vehicles find their way as they grew in number. He further pointed out that the development of electronic maps in Hong Kong was sufficiently advanced to support wider application of GPS. STH responded that the Administration believed that GPS service would improve with increased demand, and efforts would be made by the Administration to expedite its development.

Park-and-Ride scheme

24. Mr Andrew CHENG considered that visiting Mainland/Macao drivers should not be allowed to drive directly to central business districts, in consideration of the traffic and environmental impacts that would otherwise arise in those districts, e.g. Central. He also reminded the Administration of the congestion problem with the Cross Harbour Tunnel. He called on the Administration to consider implementing a mandatory Park-and-Ride (PnR)

scheme at the early stage of the proposed system. He further enquired about the Administration's estimates of the number of visiting private cars from the Mainland/Macao and the likely impacts.

25. STH responded that Mr CHENG's views would be considered. However, there was also concern that a mandatory PnR scheme might offset the attractiveness of ad hoc quotas for cross-boundary private cars. She assured members that the trial scheme would be implemented in phases. Through prudent control on the level of ad hoc quotas, increases in the resulting traffic would be gradual and incremental. To mitigate the impacts, the Administration would also examine with the Mainland authorities the option of issuing ad hoc quotas to more Hong Kong private cars than to Guangdong private cars.

26. Mr KAM Nai-wai opined that the Administration should be more positive towards the suggestion of a mandatory PnR scheme to help minimize ad hoc quotas' adverse impacts on Hong Kong's road system and environment. STH responded that the Administration had an open mind on the matter. However, there was a need to strike a balance between considerations including whether a mandatory PnR scheme would offset the attractiveness of the proposed ad hoc quota system. Mr KAM suggested that on top of the current proposal which imposed no restriction on the places where the visiting vehicles could travel to, the Administration should consider introducing another kind of ad hoc quotas for visiting vehicles the drivers of which would be willing to use PnR to get around after leaving their vehicles at a stipulated location in Hong Kong. STH responded that the Administration would consider the suggestion.

27. Mr Andrew CHENG opined that a mandatory PnR scheme would not undermine the attractiveness of the ad hoc quotas as the proposed system could greatly enhance the flexibility of travel for private cars. He urged the Administration to adopt a phased approach, and switch to a voluntary PnR scheme only when it was certain that the issue of ad hoc quotas to private cars had no adverse traffic and environmental impacts. He also considered that the Administration should at least introduce mandatory PnR for drivers who intended to travel beyond the New Territories.

28. The Chairman also expressed concern that, if PnR was not introduced, the increase in cross-boundary traffic might cause Tuen Mun Road or Route 3 to reach saturation even before 2016 as originally forecast. STH reiterated that through control on the level of ad hoc quotas, increases in the resulting traffic would be gradual and incremental. She also invited members to note that many road improvement works would be carried out to improve the handling capacities of the major roads, such as widening of Tuen Mun Road and Tolo Highway.

Regulatory arrangements for other vehicles

29. Ms LI Fung-ying noted that the traffic consultant engaged to explore and review possible options for regulating cross-boundary vehicles after the commissioning of HZMB also studied the regulatory arrangements for other types of cross-boundary vehicles, i.e. coaches/hire-cars/goods vehicles. Pointing out that the regulatory arrangements might affect the employment opportunities of relevant drivers, Ms LI asked whether the relevant trades, particularly driver associations, had been consulted before drawing up relevant recommendations. The Assistant Commissioner for Transport/Administration & Licensing said that a quota system was in place for hire-cars and cross-boundary coaches registered in Hong Kong and employing Hong Kong drivers. The existing quota system would continue to apply to these commercial vehicles, whereas the proposed ad hoc quota scheme would only apply to private cars. STH added that should there be recommendations proposing any changes to the existing regulatory arrangements for cross-boundary coaches/hire-cars/goods vehicles, consultation would be conducted with the relevant trades first.

V Recent bus fire/smoke incidents

- (LC Paper No. CB(1)614/08-09(05) - Administration's paper on recent bus fire/smoke incidents
- LC Paper No. CB(1)466/08-09(01) - Administration's paper on the bus fire/smoke incidents on 10 December 2008
- LC Paper No. CB(1)1986/07-08(01) - Administration's paper on update on review of recent bus fire incidents
- LC Paper No. CB(1)614/08-09(06) - Press cuttings on bus fire incidents)

30. The Assistant Commissioner for Transport/Bus and Railway (AC for T/B&R) briefed members on the updated findings of the investigations on the three bus fire/smoke incidents which occurred on 10 December 2008 and the improvement measures taken by the operators to prevent recurrence of similar incidents.

Probable causes of bus fire/smoke incidents and improvement measures

31. Mr WONG Kwok-hing asked whether the number of bus fire drills had been increased after occurrence of the three incidents to ensure safe evacuation of passengers, and the estimated minimum evacuation time.

32. AC for T/B&R responded that bus companies were required to regularly conduct fire drills. Apart from the fire drill requirement, there were also legislative requirements regarding bus design and bus body materials to help prevent and handle bus fire/smoke incidents. For example, buses were required to have emergency exits, devices for breaking the, bus windows to provide exit for escape, and the width and height of bus doors should be sufficient to facilitate evacuation. The Administration also required bus companies to include in the training of bus captains fire extinguishing skills and passenger evacuation procedures, and to include such details in bus captains' handbooks/circulars. In the aftermath of the three incidents, the Administration had urged the bus companies to gear up bus captain training in this regard, and to liaise with their bus manufacturers on improvements to bus design and materials. The Administration would further examine with the bus companies on areas for improvement in training.

33. Mr Edmond HO, Managing Director of The Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited/Long Win Bus Company Limited (KMB/LWB), added that KMB/LWB attached great importance to bus safety. However, since different passengers were transported during different bus trips and the number of passengers which KMB/LWB carried per year exceeded 1 billion, KMB/LWB had focused on familiarizing its bus captains with the proper procedures in handling fire incidents instead of conducting fire drills involving individual passengers. He further elaborated that KMB/LWB provided comprehensive training for its bus captains which included route training, bus type training, remedial training, driving enhancement training and defensive driving combining not only classroom training but also practical sessions. In particular, procedures in handling emergency and evacuation of passengers had been made compulsory parts of the training programme to ensure that in the event of a bus fire incident, bus captains would be able to properly respond, readily help extinguish fire, efficiently evacuate passengers, and report the incident to the relevant authorities in a timely manner.

34. Mr Albert CHAN opined that buses in Hong Kong were neither strong enough to prevent tearing off of bus tops in accidents nor sufficiently fire-resistant to prevent buses from burning down. He also opined that the Administration's papers on the three incidents had failed to identify the true causes of the three incidents for rectification. In particular, he considered that the proposed preventive measures highlighted in paragraph 12 of LC Paper No. CB(1)466/08-09(01) should have been taken long before instead of being newly worked out in response to the three incidents. He opined that the re-routing of hoses, cables and other heat-susceptible components in existing buses away from heat sources as far as practicable should all along have been made a standard measure. He queried whether the Transport Department (TD) had properly performed its duty to ensure bus safety.

35. The Under Secretary for Transport and Housing (USTH) responded that all Hong Kong buses were manufactured overseas, meeting international design and safety standards. In particular, double-deck buses were mainly manufactured in the United Kingdom (UK) or European Union (EU) countries according to EU standards. He further pointed out that the proposed preventive measures had been mapped out in conjunction with bus companies in the light of findings of investigations into the causes of the three incidents. AC for T/B&R supplemented that the measures highlighted by Mr Albert CHAN above were targeted at improving existing buses which had already been serving Hong Kong before the present regulatory and safety requirements were in force. As to the other proposed preventive measures, some of them were related to the rectification of inevitable wear and tear problems.

36. Mr Albert CHAN considered that the Administration should have imposed an overall set of safety standards for all Hong Kong buses to comply, and should ensure all buses that entered Hong Kong complied with the standards. AC for T/B&R confirmed that every new bus model had to undergo type approval by TD to ensure that its design and construction complied with Hong Kong's regulatory and safety requirements before it was put into service. Mr Albert CHAN considered that the Administration still owed the public an explanation of why buses which met the safety standards still had the defects as revealed in the three incidents.

Admin

37. Ms Miriam LAU requested information on the following issues to enable members to ascertain the causes of bus fire/smoke incidents and assess the proposed preventive measures –

- (a) The Administration's and the bus companies' responses to the views of experts on how to prevent bus fire incidents as reported by Wen Wui Pao dated 8 January 2009 -
 - (i) as the occurrence of bus fire/smoke incidents might be related to bus age, it was necessary to more regularly carry out maintenance on buses over 10 years old, and to remind maintenance staff to pay special attention to components that might pose fire hazards as they aged; and
 - (ii) that there was a need to improve the air circulation of bus air-conditioning systems to prevent overheating;
- (b) Whether the occurrence of bus fire/smoke incidents was related to bus age;
- (c) As bus fire/smoke incidents were mainly related to

overheating, whether suitable devices could be introduced to alert bus captains of overheating so that they could take timely actions; and

- (d) How fire-proof were the bus body materials presently used, and what improvements in this regard could be made to existing buses to prevent bus fire incidents.

38. The Senior Engineer/Vehicle Safety, Transport Department responded that bus age should not be a cause of bus fire/smoke incidents because major bus components were regularly checked and replaced as necessary. As to overheating detection devices, AC for T/B&R responded that new buses already had such devices. The Administration had also been examining with bus companies and bus manufacturers on whether the devices could be retrofitted on existing buses. As for the other information requested, the Administration would provide them after the meeting.

39. Mr IP Wai-ming saw a need for greater efforts to ensure that all Hong Kong buses could meet fire safety standards, especially where bus body materials and design were concerned. AC for T/B&R reiterated that Hong Kong buses were already required to use materials that were both fire retardant and met EU standards. As to bus body design, all buses were required to be provided with emergency exits on both the upper and lower decks, and had to meet the height and width requirements of the passenger gangways to facilitate safe evacuation of passengers during emergency situations.

40. Mr WONG Kwok-hing urged the Administration to consider the following suggestions on the handling and prevention of bus fire/smoke incidents –

- (a) That the Administration should ensure that the bus companies would conduct fire drills in conjunction with the Fire Services Department (FSD) every year. Publicity in this regard should also be geared up to alert the public to what they should do in the event of a bus fire/smoke incident;
- (b) That TD and the bus companies should ensure that the hammers for breaking the windows of the upper deck of a bus were all properly and conspicuously put in place to facilitate use when necessary; and
- (c) Passengers should be strictly forbidden to carry inflammable materials on board a bus as the consequence could be fatal. Publicity and enforcement actions in this regard should both be geared up.

41. AC for T/B&R responded that the Administration would follow up the suggestions with bus companies. Mr Edmond HO of KMB/LWB added that bus captains' handbooks/circulars had clear guidelines reminding bus captains to watch out for passengers carrying on board a bus dangerous goods, including inflammable items, items that could be used as weapons, explosives and compressed gases. In defining dangerous goods, reference had been made to the relevant legislation. In addition, publicity stickers were also posted inside buses reminding passengers not to carry dangerous goods on board a bus. As to fire drills, KMB/LWB would liaise with TD to examine the implementation details.

42. Mr William CHUNG, Head of Operations and Planning of Citybus Limited/New World First Bus Services Limited, said that they were willing to conduct fire drills and had already conducted fire drills in 2008 as an internal exercise. The involvement of TD and FSD would be most welcome.

Findings of the investigations

43. Mr Andrew CHENG expressed disappointment at the Administration's latest paper on the three incidents (LC Paper No. CB(1)614/08-09(05)), which in his view contained no new details but was only a summary of the preliminary report that had been provided immediately after the incidents (LC Paper No. CB(1)466/08-09(01)). He also cast doubt on the validity of the conclusions that there had not been significant increase in bus fire/smoke incidents, and that the three incidents were not due to maintenance deficiency and were isolated incidents. Highlighting the role of bus as a mode of mass public transport and hence the importance of ensuring passenger safety, he considered the above conclusions too hastily made and irresponsible.

44. USTH responded that the Administration had in fact carefully examined the reports of the investigations from Citybus Limited and KMB. The Administration had also examined the relevant statistics and considered that there had really not been any significant increase in bus fire/smoke incidents recently. As no common cause could be traced from the three incidents, it was concluded that they were isolated incidents.

45. Mr Andrew CHENG opined that the Administration's papers contained too little information to enable members to ascertain whether the above conclusions were valid. At his request, the Chairman directed that the Administration should provide the full investigation reports to the Panel after the meeting.

46. Referring to the press cuttings on bus fire incidents (LC Paper No. CB(1)614/08-09(06)) which showed that there were 19 bus fire/smoke incidents in 2008 compared with 9 in 2007, Mr WONG Kwok-hing disagreed

that there had not been any significant increase in such incidents. Mr Albert CHAN shared his view, and pointed out that bus fire/smoke incidents had been rare in the past.

47. Ms LI Fung-ying expressed doubt on the finding of the investigations that the three incidents were not due to maintenance deficiency, quoting claims from the staff unions of the bus companies concerned that to save cost, their companies had in recent years made significant adjustments to their maintenance programmes, such as cancellation of the five-yearly full body overhaul of buses, shortening of the hours spent on servicing a bus from some 100 to only 50 hours, etc.. AC for T/B&R explained that there was no longer a need to conduct full overhaul of bus body every five years because buses were presently made of aluminum alloy instead of iron, which was more susceptible to corrosion. As to bus servicing hours, the Administration had made detailed inquiries in this regard and had obtained the bus companies' confirmation that there had been no reduction in maintenance resources in recent years. Notwithstanding, the Administration had stepped up surprise spot checks of buses operating on the road, in order to ensure the quality of the bus companies' maintenance.

48. Ms LI Fung-ying and Mr Andrew CHENG enquired whether the Administration had ascertained the maintenance issue with the staff unions. AC for T/B&R replied in the affirmative, adding that the Administration had regular direct contact with bus staff unions, and would follow up any concern they might have. Ms LI opined that apart from the above regular contact, the Administration should specifically seek staff unions' views on bus maintenance and whether this was related to the recent increase in bus fire/smoke incidents.

(To allow sufficient time for discussion, the Chairman extended the meeting by 15 minutes.)

49. Mr Andrew CHENG also queried why the Administration had concluded from the investigations that the three incidents were unrelated to maintenance, pointing out that all the buses involved had passed their latest monthly inspections before the respective incidents.

50. AC for T/B&R responded that apart from studying the reports of the investigations, TD had also closely monitored the servicing and maintenance programmes of the franchised buses and held regular meetings with the bus operators to discuss bus examination results and, where appropriate, to formulate measures to enhance bus safety. There was so far no evidence suggesting that the monthly inspection quality of the concerned bus companies was not up to standard. USTH supplemented that the Administration attached great importance to bus fire/smoke incidents. Emphasis had been placed on ensuring that the design of the bus could facilitate evacuation and early detection of smoke, so that passengers would normally have sufficient time for

evacuation.

51. Noting that TD had stepped up surprise spot checks of buses, Ms LI Fung-ying sought more details in this regard. AC for T/B&R responded that TD had in January 2009 deployed additional resources to increase the number of spot checks (including those immediately after monthly inspections) per working day from an average of 14 buses to 17 buses, focusing on buses which had just passed the companies' monthly routine inspection to ensure that buses were maintained properly and could meet safety standards. Once safety-related defects were identified, the buses concerned would immediately be forbidden to run on the road until the defects were certified rectified by TD's vehicle examiners. He assured members that so far most of the defects identified were general problems unrelated to safety. On the basis of such findings, there was no evidence suggesting that the monthly inspection quality of the concerned bus companies was not up to standard nor that the incidents were related to the quality of vehicle maintenance.

52. Ms LI Fung-ying asked the Administration to provide a comparison of the daily and monthly numbers of buses covered in spot checks before and after the three incidents, as well as the number of safety problems so identified, and the actions taken to address them.

Admin

53. Pointing out that the buses involved in the three incidents had all passed the latest monthly inspection, Ms Miriam LAU said that it was necessary to improve bus inspections and maintenance. Mr IP Wai-ming was also concerned about the quality of bus maintenance. He asked whether TD required the bus companies to use spare parts produced by the original manufacturers and, if not, how it could ensure the quality of bus spare parts and bus maintenance quality.

54. AC for T/B&R responded that although TD had not imposed any requirement on the source of body components of buses, all parts of the bus bodies assembled in Hong Kong were provided by the original bus body manufacturers. In addition, to ensure that the assembly standards could meet the design requirements set by the manufacturers, the assembly work was undertaken by professionally trained personnel and the process was supervised by engineers from the bus body manufacturers. Mr IP Wai-ming enquired whether similar bus fire/smoke incidents occurred in the UK or other European countries using the same bus models. Mr SHUM Yuet-hung, Principal Engineer, Bus Engineering of KMB/LWB, responded that they did not have the relevant figures in hand.

55. In reply to Mr IP Wai-ming's enquiry, Mr Edmond HO of KMB/LWB said that all spare parts used were endorsed by the bus manufacturers concerned. In fact, to ensure validity of bus warranties, KMB/LWB had been maintaining stringent maintenance standards, regularly

meeting with the manufacturers on maintenance improvements, and closely liaising with them to ensure that the materials used could meet required standards. Mr SHUM Yuet-hung of KMB/LWB added that basically spare parts, especially those concerning bus safety, were provided by the original bus manufacturers. Where spare parts were not available because the original manufacturers no longer produced them, spare parts produced by other manufacturers but verified by the original manufacturers would be provided for use.

56. The Chairman reminded the Administration to provide the full reports of the investigations to the Panel after the meeting. Members agreed to examine the reports before deciding whether to revisit the agenda item at a future meeting. In this regard, Mr Andrew CHENG proposed that if the item was to be revisited, the staff unions of the bus companies concerned should be invited to advise on whether there had been any adjustment to the bus companies' maintenance programmes.

(Post-meeting note: The full reports were issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(1)749/08-09 dated 6 February 2009.)

VI Any other business

57. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10:45 am.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
22 April 2009