

Legislative Council Panel on Transport Bus Accident in Tseung Kwan O and Safety of Franchised Bus Operation

Purpose

On 9 November 2009, a traffic accident involving a bus of the Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited (KMB) occurred in Tseung Kwan O, of which the details are at Annex. In this connection, this paper briefs Members on:

- (a) the franchised bus companies' existing training and monitoring mechanism regarding their bus captains' driving skills and behaviour;
- (b) the measures taken by the franchised bus companies to enhance safety of operation; and
- (c) how the Administration regulates franchised bus companies in the relevant aspects.

Training for Bus Captains on their Driving Skills and Behaviour

2. KMB, the Citybus Limited (CTB), the New World First Bus Services Limited (NWFB), the Long Win Bus Company Limited (LW) and the New Lantao Bus Company (1973) Limited (NLB) arrange various training programmes for their bus captains, including:

- (a) training courses for the new recruits – Subject to the driving qualifications of the individuals, such courses would last for three to four weeks. Unless they possess public bus driving licences, trainee bus captains must pass the driving tests of the Transport Department (TD) before they would be allowed to serve on buses with passengers;
- (b) enhancement/refresher training for serving bus captains – Such training aims at enhancing bus captains' road safety awareness, driving skills and attitudes, including defensive driving techniques. Bus captains receive enhancement training about once every one to three years, depending on the operational arrangements of individual franchised bus companies. Refresher training will be arranged for bus captains when necessary, taking into consideration their driving performance, such as involvement in traffic accidents or upon the advice of the driving instructors;
- (c) special/remedial training – Such training lasts for a few days. It will be arranged for bus captains who are found to have improper driving behaviours or who have been away from driving duties for a long period because of sickness or other reasons.

3. In January 2008, KMB introduced the new driving simulator to strengthen the training on driving skills of their bus captains. As at September 2009, 2,500 bus captains have received such training.

Monitoring of Bus Captains

4. All franchised bus companies have established mechanisms to monitor the driving skills and behaviour of their bus captains, and have put in place relevant incentive and penalty schemes. Drivers with commendable driving skills and service performance are rewarded with bonus. In the past three years, 98% or above bus captains in KMB, CTB, NWFB, LW and NLB were eligible for the monthly safe driving bonus.

5. As regards the monitoring system, all franchised bus companies deploy plainclothes inspectors who possess the qualification of driving instructors to ride on buses as passengers to assess the driving skills and service performance of the bus captains. This covers two categories of bus drivers: those who are involved in passengers' complaints or traffic accidents, and those who are randomly selected by the inspectors for different time slots and routes. In parallel, major bus companies deploy inspectors to traffic accident black spots or locations prone to speeding to check by using laser guns if their buses exceed the speed limits.

6. In the three years from 2006 to 2008, considerable on-board inspections and speed checks using laser guns were carried out by KMB, CTB, NWFB, LW and NLB every year. The bus captains in 97% of such inspections and checks of KMB, 98% of CTB, 97% of NWFB, 97% of LW and 98% of NLB were found to possess satisfactory driving skills and service performance without committing speeding. Details are as follows:

	Average number of bus trips monitored per year from 2006 to 2008 (rounded figures)		
Franchisees	On-board inspections by plainclothes inspectors	Speed checks using laser guns	Total
KMB	62,500	700	63,200
CTB	4,000	1,900	5,900
NWFB	4,000	900	4,900
LW	450	200	650
NLB	150	24	174
Total	71,100	3,724	74,824

7. Besides, franchised bus companies have started to adopt the electronic tachograph commonly known as "black box" to monitor their bus captains' driving behaviour and pattern. The bus companies have committed to equip newly purchased buses with "black box" and will continue to retrofit in-service buses with this device.

As at September 2009, about 70% of franchised buses have already been equipped with “black box”. The bus companies are now studying ways to enhance their random checks of the data retrieved from “black box”. When the record shows irregularities in journey time or upon receipt of passengers’ complaints on the driving behaviour of the bus captains, the bus companies will investigate the cases using the data retrieved from “black box”.

8. To help bus captains who have underperformed in terms of driving skills and behaviour or who have violated the traffic legislations, each franchised bus company has respectively put in place a mechanism to initiate follow-up actions, such as arranging special/remedial training or instructions for bus captains whose driving behaviour is considered improper. Bus companies may, as the circumstances require, impose on these bus captains different levels of penalties ranging from warning, wage deduction, suspension of duty and dismissal, etc. Like all other motorists, bus captains driving on the road are subject to the regulation of the Road Traffic Ordinance and the Road Traffic (Driving-offence Points) Ordinance. Offenders will be prosecuted by the Police and penalised by the Court. The penalties include fine, incurring of driving-offence points and licence suspension.

9. Separately, TD monitors bus operation safety by analysing various data in the operation reports, including statistics, categories and causes of accidents, submitted regularly by the bus companies, as well as complaints and feedback from passengers. Upon receipt of complaints on alleged violation of traffic legislations or poor service of the bus captains, TD will follow up and investigate the cases immediately with the bus companies concerned and require them to take appropriate improvement measures. TD will also engage independent consultants to conduct opinion surveys to solicit feedback from passengers on bus services. According to the survey results in the past three years, the service areas in which respondents generally rated satisfactory or above include compliance with traffic regulations, driving skills and travelling speed.

10. To promote bus operation safety, TD holds a number of workshops for the Road Safety Seminars for Franchised Bus Captains every year. Representatives of the Police are invited to attend the workshops and to brief bus captains on the safe driving skills and behaviour with a view to enhancing bus captains’ awareness of road safety.

11. TD, together with the Police and road safety experts, conducts quarterly review with the management of the bus companies on bus operation safety and requests the bus companies to set their indicators for lowering accident rate. The number of franchised buses involved in accidents per million vehicle-kilometre was 4.07 in 2007 and 3.83 in 2008, whereas the figure in the first three quarters of 2009 was 3.47. At the same time, the severity level of bus accidents has decreased. Compared with that in 2007, the number of fatal accidents in 2008 has decreased by

27.8%, serious accidents by 14.6% and slight accidents¹ by 6.2%. The above record shows that the safety of franchised bus operation has improved.

12. On the other hand, to promote safety awareness among passengers, TD has produced a number of TV and radio Announcements for Public Interest as well as other publicity materials to remind passengers of taking safety precautions when riding on buses. The latest promotional series are being broadcasted on TV and radio. As for the bus companies, they have been promoting safety awareness of the travelling public via different means.

Measures to Further Enhance Safety of Franchised Bus Operation

13. In view of the public concerns about bus service safety subsequent to the recent bus accident in Tseung Kwan O, the Secretary for Transport and Housing has met with major bus companies (KMB, CTB and NWFB). The bus companies have committed to strictly apply their internal monitoring systems to assess bus captains' safe driving skills and service performance, and to enhance bus captains' awareness of such systems. Major bus companies have also strengthened the manpower in their inspections carried out by plainclothes inspectors and their speed checks using laser guns, in particular for the night-time shifts and routes involving higher speed sections. Details of the enhanced improvement measures are as follows:

(a) Enhance On-board Inspections by Plainclothes Inspectors

Following the accident in Tseung Kwan O, franchised bus companies have increased the frequency of daily on-board inspections targeting at overnight bus services. In November and December, KMB would increase the number of on-board inspections for overnight bus trips from a monthly average of around 20 to 240 trips, while CTB and NWFB would each increase theirs from around 33 to 200 trips per month. Despite its infrequent overnight bus services, NLB has started to conduct on-board inspections for the relevant routes since November.

(b) Enhance Speed Checks Using Laser Guns

Major bus companies have strengthened their speed checks using laser guns at locations prone to speeding in the night time to check the travelling speed of the buses. In November and December, KMB would increase their frequency of speed checks from a monthly average of around 80-100 trips to 200-250 bus trips, while CTB and NWFB would increase theirs from around 14 trips to 170 bus trips in total.

¹ A slight accident is one in which one or more persons is injured but not to the extent that detention in hospital is required for more than 12 hours. A serious accident is one in which one or more persons is injured and detained in hospital for more than 12 hours. A fatal accident is one in which someone is injured and subsequently dies of his/her injuries within 30 days of the accident.

(c) Enhance Employees' Awareness of the Monitoring System

To enhance its employees' awareness of the monitoring system, KMB has since November disseminated the results of internal monitoring of bus captains via internal circulars on a monthly basis. Posters are displayed to remind bus captains of driving safety. CTB and NWFB have issued circulars to all bus captains immediately after the Tseung Kwan O accident to urge them to drive safely. It is also stated in the circulars that disciplinary actions will be imposed on offenders according to the companies' existing mechanism. The bus companies will reiterate at the next meeting with the trade unions the consequence of disciplinary actions and penalties induced by non-compliance.

14. As regards the work and rest arrangements for the bus captains, franchised bus companies have followed the Guidelines on Working Schedule for Franchised Bus Drivers (the Guidelines) in scheduling their working hours and rest breaks. Evolving from a number of adjustments and improvements, the existing scheduling arrangements strike a balance between the travelling needs of passengers and the rest time required by the bus captains between two successive bus trips or working days. The bus companies will from time to time consult the trade unions of the bus captains and review the scheduling arrangements. If the actual journey time of certain routes frequently exceed the scheduled hours due to genuine operational grounds, the bus companies will apply to TD for adjusting the journey time to ensure that the bus captains have proper rest. In the three years from 2006 to 2008, major bus companies extended the journey time of a total of 71 bus routes. CTB and NWFB will review the journey time of their bus routes every month while KMB has proceeded with its review of the journey time of its bus network as a whole. Subsequent to the accident in Tseung Kwan O, the bus companies have immediately tightened the relevant measures to ensure as much as possible that the bus captains have proper rest after each trip. In case of any delay due to various reasons such as traffic jam, the bus regulators will take necessary measures such as asking the bus captain concerned to drive the bus directly to an en route stop or the terminus, to cancel one bus trip, or to try their best to arrange a relief driver to serve the coming trip. Such arrangements aim at enabling the bus captains to have proper rest after each trip.

15. TD has been in close contact with franchised bus companies to make sure that measures mentioned in paragraphs 13 and 14 above on enhancing safety of franchised bus operation will be promptly and strictly implemented. In parallel, TD has met with major staff unions of the bus captains to listen to their views and urge them to remind the bus captains of the importance of safe driving.

16. Every year, TD conducts a random survey on the working hours of the bus captains to confirm if their rest time complies with the Guidelines. If non-compliance is identified, TD will request the bus companies concerned to review the situation and make corresponding adjustments. TD is prepared to extend the scope of the survey so as to collect more comprehensive data.

17. On publicity, TD is planning to launch a series of safe driving campaigns in the near future to enhance safety awareness among drivers of passenger vehicles and to promote road safety.

Traffic Safety Measures at the Bus Accident Spot in Tseung Kwan O

18. Subsequent to the accident in Tseung Kwan O, TD has strengthened the traffic safety measures at the scene. The roundabout at the junction of Po Shun Road and Tong Ming Street in Tseung Kwan O conforms to the relevant design standards, with appropriate road markings and traffic signs to remind motorists to slow down before entering the roundabout. In spite of that, in view of the concerns raised by the relevant District Council and the public on the speeding problem at the road section concerned, TD has erected five temporary “Slow” traffic signs at the scene. TD is planning other measures to alert motorists to keep their driving speed within a safe limit.

Advice Sought

19. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Transport and Housing Bureau
Transport Department
November 2009

**Information on the Bus Accident
occurred in Tseung Kwan O on 9 November 2009**

(I) Bus Route Information

Bus Company and Route	KMB Route 692 (Cross-harbour route)
Origin /Departure Time	Central (Exchange Square) / 11:40pm
Destination/Scheduled Arrival Time	Hang Hau (North) / 0:45am
Scheduled Journey Time	65 minutes ¹
Accident Location	At the junction of Po Shun Road and Tong Ming Street in Tseung Kwan O (towards Hang Hau)
Accident Time	9 November, 0:18am

(II) Bus Captain

Term of Employment	Full-time bus captain
Number of years in KMB	3.5 years
Nature of Position	Scheduled replacement captain for Route N293 ²
Number of hours having worked when the accident occurred	1 hour (The working hour was from 11:40pm on 8 November to 5:45am on 9 November)

(III) Vehicle Information

Bus Age	12.8 years
Date of last monthly inspection	1 November 2009
Date of last annual inspection	30 December 2008
Date of last spot check conducted by the Transport Department	28 April 2009
Number of casualties	2 dead and 34 injured

¹ Scheduled journey time generally refers to the average journey time during peak hours.

² The concerned KMB bus captain was a “scheduled replacement captain” of KMB route N293 (Mong Kok East Station – Sheung Tak). The first trip of KMB route N293 sets off at 11:55pm from Sheung Tak every day and the last trip at 5:30 am from Mong Kok East Station and Sheung Tak. The bus captains serving this route work for about five to six hours per shift. Owing to relatively short service hours of N293, some bus captains serving this route are assigned to serve both route N293 and another specified route in the same shift. Besides, all bus captains are entitled to take annual leave and causal leave. When their bus captains take leave or are absent from duty, the bus companies will arrange “scheduled replacement captains” to provide bus services. In order to enable their bus captains to take leave or rest and to maintain bus services, all franchised bus companies adopt the “scheduled replacement captain” arrangement. “Scheduled replacement captains” have all received training in relation to the routes they are assigned to serve. They will not be arranged to serve unfamiliar routes.