

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)439/09-10

Ref : CB1/PL/TP

Panel on Transport
Meeting on 27 November 2009

Background brief on measures to enhance safety
of public light bus operations

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the Administration's measures to enhance the safety of public light bus (PLB) operations, and summarizes the views expressed by members of the Panel on Transport (the Panel) at previous discussions, including the Panel's latest discussion on 26 June 2009 as summarized in paragraphs 18 to 21.

Background

2. According to the Administration, from January 2000 to September 2004, the number of traffic accidents involving PLBs was 4 807, with the respective numbers of casualties involving drivers, passengers and pedestrians at 1 867, 4 849 and 1 210. The accident and casualty rates of PLBs among all classes of vehicles were relatively high. In late 2004, the Administration put forth a package of measures covering legislation, enforcement, publicity, education and technology application to enhance road safety and, in particular, the safety of PLB operations. Those measures that specifically relate to PLBs can be categorized as follows -

- (a) Promotion of safe driving among PLB drivers (paragraphs 3 to 10);
- (b) Measures to combat inappropriate driving behaviours of PLB drivers, such as imposition of a maximum speed limit for PLBs, installation of speed display or speed warning devices on PLBs, use of the vehicle blackbox (i.e. tachograph) to record operation data of PLBs, strengthening enforcement against speeding and other inappropriate driving behaviours of PLBs, etc (paragraphs 11 to 16); and
- (c) Installation of passenger protection equipment, including seat belts and high back seats, on newly registered PLBs (paragraph 17).

Promotion of safe driving among PLB drivers

By education and publicity

3. The Administration has implemented the following measures to improve the driving skills and behaviours of PLB drivers -

- (a) Encouraging PLB drivers to attend continuous in-service training by organizing various refresher training and skill upgrading courses;
- (b) Conducting refresher workshops or seminars for PLB drivers to enhance their awareness of the importance of safe driving;
- (c) Organizing large-scale PLB safety campaigns to enhance the road safety awareness of PLB drivers;
- (d) Distributing regular newsletters to PLB drivers to provide them with the latest road safety information and to remind them to adopt a proper driving attitude;
- (e) Carrying out regular targeted publicity for PLB, taxi and non-franchised bus drivers; and
- (f) Promulgating the PLB Driver Safety Charter.

4. The Administration introduced a PLB Driver Training Programme in 2003 to improve the driving attitude and the customer service skills of PLB drivers. In 2004, the programme was developed into an Advanced PLB Driver Training Course launched and managed by the Vocational Training Council. Since 2005, Transport Department (TD) has been organizing PLB Driver Safety Workshops jointly with the Police and PLB associations to promote road safety awareness among frontline PLB drivers.

5. TD also organizes a variety of publicity programmes to promote safety awareness among PLB drivers from time to time. The PLB Driver Safety Charter was first launched in March 2005.

By strengthening the management of drivers through recruitment, management and pay

Recruitment

6. At the Panel meeting on 19 December 2005, some members suggested that repeat traffic offenders should be banned from being PLB drivers. In response to the suggestion, the Administration has examined the following

additional entry requirements for applicants for PLB driving licence as a start:

- (a) Requiring applicants for the PLB licence to attend pre-service training courses that focused on driving behaviour and attitude; and
- (b) Banning drivers who have been convicted of traffic offences repeatedly or whose driving licences were suspended within a specified period (say, three to five years prior to their application for PLB licence) from applying for the PLB licence.

7. As the PLB trade is generally supportive of the above suggestions, the Administration has indicated that it is formulating a detailed proposal and would submit the relevant legislative proposal in due course.

Management

8. The Administration has urged all green minibus (GMB) operators to review and strengthen their management of and monitoring over GMB drivers hired by them, with particular emphasis on the driving behaviour of these drivers. It has further promulgated, after consultation with the PLB trade, Codes of Practices for PLB drivers and guidelines for picking up and setting down passengers in the past few years. The Administration has promoted the guidelines through TD's regular liaison with the trade.

Pay

9. It is generally considered that, as different from red minibus (RMB) drivers who are all self-employed, GMB drivers are not under any pressure to speed so as to run more trips to maximize incomes. As such, to help improve the overall safety of PLB operation, the Government's established policy is to seek to convert RMBs into GMB operation where appropriate. As at end May 2008, there were 2,912 GMBs operating in Hong Kong, accounting for almost 70% of the local PLB fleet.

10. In addition, TD conducts site inspections and liaises with GMB operators to ensure drivers' working schedule was reasonable. The Guidelines on Bus Driver Working Hours have also been given to the operators for reference.

Measures to combat inappropriate driving behaviour of PLB drivers

By limiting speed of PLBs

11. Currently there is a maximum speed limit of 70 km/h for all medium goods vehicles, heavy goods vehicles and buses, as well as motorcycles and motor tricycles driven by holders of probationary driving licences, even though there may be higher speed limits on roads. The Administration has studied a

proposal to “lock the speed of PLBs at a predetermined level” preferably by speed limiters, which could limit the vehicle speed to a specified level by controlling the fuel feed. However, technical problems have emerged in installing such a device on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) PLBs because LPG and diesel are two different types of fuels and the engines were different. At the Panel meeting on 26 June 2009, the Administration reported that it was exploring with PLB suppliers the feasibility of installing speed limiters on new generations of PLBs, and would consult the PLB trade in due course.

By enhancing awareness of speeding through the installation of speed display devices

12. Speed display devices (SDDs) are primarily used to facilitate monitoring by PLB passengers and caution PLB drivers against speeding. Following a trial scheme launched in 2001, TD began to install SDDs on GMBs on overnight services in August 2002. By April 2003, all GMBs running overnight routes had been installed with SDDs. As the device can facilitate passengers’ awareness of GMBs’ speed, the number of complaints on GMBs speeding had as a result increased substantially. The programme was further extended to those GMBs operating along expressways in late 2003.

13. In April 2005, mandatory installation of SDDs on PLBs was made a new vehicle licence condition upon issue or renewal of a PLB licence. By the end of June 2006, all PLBs had been installed with SDDs. With effect from 1 May 2008, any misuse or malfunctioning of the devices would constitute an offence under the Road Traffic (Vehicle Construction and Maintenance) Regulations (Cap. 374A).

By facilitating speeding complaints through display of complaint hotline and the driver name plate

14. It is the Panel's view that the Transport Complaint Unit (TCU)'s hotline number should be prominently displayed near the SDD, and more publicity be launched to heighten public awareness of the reporting mechanism. In response, the Administration has since November 2005 incorporated the requirement for all PLB operators to display the TCU hotline inside the PLB as a Passenger Service Licence condition. At the Panel meeting on 23 June 2006, the Administration was requested to further consider a member’s proposal of requiring PLB operators to display driver name and the complaint hotline on the body of PLBs, and to incorporate it as a condition in the Passenger Service Licence. However, the Administration subsequently reported that the PLB trade had raised strong objection to the proposal on grounds that it would exert unnecessary pressure on PLB drivers, and might invite abuse of the complaint channel.

By recording driving behaviours through use of vehicle blackbox

15. Another option to deter speeding is to keep a full record of the operating conditions of the vehicle such as average speed per minute, daily highest speed, distance travelled, total number of driving hours, numbers of foot brake application and door opening, whether illumination/indication lights are switched on, etc. To facilitate monitoring of GMB operation and accident investigation, TD has since 2004 been conducting trials on the use of the vehicle monitoring system (vehicle blackbox) on PLBs. These trials have however been unsuccessful because the device was found suffering from data loss and damage. At the meeting on 23 June 2006, the Panel decided to write to local universities, vehicle manufacturers and the Hong Kong R&D Centre for Automotive Parts and Accessory Systems of the Hong Kong Productivity Council to seek their views on the feasibility of installing vehicle monitoring systems on PLBs and the latest technological trend. Responses from these organizations showed that such devices were relatively developed but not all PLBs had the relevant sensors installed.

By strengthening enforcement efforts

16. The Police have from time to time carried out large-scale covert operations during night time and early morning to combat inappropriate driving behaviour of PLB drivers. Such operations involve plainclothes undercover agents, observation posts, uniformed police on roadblock duties, and the use of in-car video systems or laser guns. TD has since 2008 also launched together with the Police and the PLB trade the “Project Safe Ride” scheme. Under this scheme, the Police has set up a dedicated hotline for passengers riding on RMB and GMB services to report the speeding behaviour of frontline PLB drivers.

Installation of passenger protection equipment

17. In view of the relatively high rear seat casualty rate for accidents involving PLBs, the Panel has actively pursued the installation of passenger protection equipment, including seat belts and high back seats, on PLBs to enhance passenger safety. Legislative amendments were passed in November 2002 to require newly registered PLBs to be fitted with seat belts and high back passenger seats, and to require PLB passengers to wear seat belts where such are available. The maximum penalty for failing to do so is \$5,000 and three months' imprisonment. To allow sufficient time for the vehicle manufacturers to develop and produce the new passenger protection equipment, the seat belt legislation only took effect on 1 August 2004. The Administration also introduced an incentive scheme to encourage PLB owners to change from diesel

PLBs to LPG PLBs¹ to speed up the replacement of existing minibuses with new models that were fitted with seat belts.

Recent discussion of the Panel on safety of PLB operations

18. In the wake of a serious fatal accident involving a GMB on Mong Kok Road on 12 June 2009, the Panel discussed the accident and safety of PLBs at its meeting on 26 June 2009. Members urged the Police to strengthen enforcement actions, in particular undercover operations, against dangerous practices of PLBs to minimize accidents.

19. The Administration informed members that efforts had been made to convert RMBs into GMB operation where appropriate to help improve the overall safety of PLB operation. A member, however, commented that the conversion scheme could serve little purpose because GMBs would also speed. In particular, noting that over 80% of PLB operators were remunerating their drivers with a basic salary plus bonus, members opined that the pay structure would lure PLB drivers to speed. The Administration was urged to look into the pay structure and provide information on its various components which should be itemized and quantified in percentage terms.

20. Some members also pointed out that the installation of SDDs on PLBs would serve little purpose as most PLBs continued to speed regardless of the warnings given by SDDs. The Administration explained that since SDDs were calibrated at a speed of 80 kilometres but GMBs plying expressways might operate beyond 80 kilometres, GMBs might not be speeding even when the SDDs on them were giving warnings. Highlighting the use of exterior speed display lights, a member urged the Administration to examine the feasibility of requiring PLBs to install the device.

21. Members were particularly dissatisfied with the lack of progress made by the Administration in exploring the installation of the blackbox and the speed limiter on PLBs. The Administration responded that despite repeated efforts made to pursue the mandatory installation of the devices, the blackbox available in the market could not fit into the operational characteristics of PLBs, which had to stop and start frequently, hence resulting in data loss and frequent malfunctioning. The meeting resolved that the Administration should submit reports to the Panel at quarterly intervals on issues including progress of implementation of measures to enhance road safety for PLBs and installation of devices to monitor vehicle speed; and statistics of law enforcement and

¹ On 15 July 2002, the Finance Committee approved the Administration's funding request to provide a one-off grant to encourage diesel PLB owners to replace their vehicles early with ones that were run on LPG or electricity. Under the proposal, the Administration agreed to provide a one-off grant of \$60,000 or \$80,000 for each eligible diesel PLB that was replaced by an LPG or electric one respectively. In order to be eligible for the scheme, owners of diesel PLBs aged 10 or above at the time of de-registration had to replace their vehicles by end-2004, and owners of diesel PLBs below 10 years old at the time of de-registration had to replace their vehicles by end-2005.

undercover operations against speeding of PLB drivers.

Latest developments

22. To follow up the discussion at the Panel meeting on 26 June 2009, the Administration has proposed to give a progress report on measures to enhance road safety for PLBs at the meeting scheduled for 27 November 2009.

Relevant papers

23. A list of relevant papers is in **the Appendix**.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
24 November 2009

Measures to enhance safety of public light bus operations

List of relevant papers

Panel/Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Transport Panel (TP)	28 April 2000	Administration's paper on measures adopted and proposed measures to tackle speeding activities by PLBs (LC Paper No. CB(1)1435/99-00(06)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr99-00/english/panels/tp/papers/a1435e06.pdf
TP	15 December 2000	Administration's paper on the policy on PLBs (LC Paper No. CB(1)307/00-01(03)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr00-01/english/panels/tp/papers/a307e03.pdf
TP	19 January 2001	Administration's paper on the findings of the Administration's review of measures to enhance safety of passengers on PLBs (LC Paper No. CB(1)464/00-01(04)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr00-01/english/panels/tp/papers/a464e04.pdf
TP	28 November 2003	Administration's paper setting out the basic framework of a possible trial scheme for facilitating incumbent drivers of red minibuses operating in the service area of the West Rail to operate green minibus services via Route 3 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr03-04/english/panels/tp/papers/tp1128cb1-406-5e.pdf
TP	5 December 2003	Report on Enhancement of Highway Safety of the Tuen Mun Road Traffic Incident Independent Expert Panel (LC Paper No. CB(1)455/03-04(01)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr03-04/english/panels/tp/papers/tp1205cb1-455-1e

Panel/Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
		.pdf
TP	5 December 2003	Administration's paper reporting on the development and progress of the measures to enhance passenger safety of PLBs (LC Paper No. CB(1)477/03-04(01)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr03-04/english/panels/tp/papers/tp1205cb1-477-1e.pdf
TP	19 December 2003	Administration's responses to the Report on Enhancement of Highway Safety of the Tuen Mun Road Traffic Incident Independent Expert Panel (LC Paper No. 586/03-04(03)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr03-04/english/panels/tp/papers/tp1219cb1-586-3e.pdf
TP	19 December 2005	Information paper provided by the Administration (LC Paper No. CB(1)526/05-06(01)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr05-06/english/panels/tp/papers/tp1219cb1-526-1e.pdf Minutes of meeting http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr05-06/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp051219.pdf
TP	23 June 2006	Information paper provided by the Administration (LC Paper No. CB(1)1789/05-06(03)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr05-06/english/panels/tp/papers/tp0623cb1-1789-3e.pdf

Panel/Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
		Minutes of meeting http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr05-06/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp060623.pdf
TP	23 March 2007	Information paper provided by the Administration (LC Paper No.CB(1)1996/06-07(01)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/panels/tp/papers/tp0323cb1-1149-4-e.pdf Minutes of meeting http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp070323.pdf
TP		Information paper provided by the Administration (LC Paper No.CB(1)2062/07-08(01)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/english/panels/tp/papers/tpcb1-2062-1-e.pdf
TP	26 June 2009	Information paper provided by the Administration (LC Paper No.CB(1)1982/08-09(08)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/tp/papers/tp0626cb1-1982-8-e.pdf Minutes of meeting http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp20090626.pdf