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Panel on Environmental Affairs

Meeting on 24 January 2011

Background brief on trial of hybrid buses by franchised bus companies

Purpose

This paper sets out the background on the trial of hybrid buses by franchised bus companies, and gives a brief account of the views and concerns expressed by the Panel on Environmental Affairs (the Panel).

Introduction

2. Franchised buses are the major cause of roadside air pollution on busy corridors. As at end-March 2010, there were a total of about 5 800 buses from the various franchised bus companies in operation. All franchised bus companies are required to operate their franchised bus services with buses under the age of 18, and have been replacing their serving buses accordingly. This arrangement has taken account of the maintenance, operational and financial capability of the bus operators and their obligations to provide proper and efficient service to the public. Of the existing franchised buses, about 2 300 or 40% will retire by 2015, which includes all pre-Euro and Euro I buses and some Euro II buses, leaving about 2 100 Euro II buses in the bus fleet.

3. To reduce emissions from the franchised bus fleet, franchised bus companies have retrofitted their pre-Euro and Euro I buses with diesel oxidation catalysts that can reduce the particulate emissions by 30%. They are also in the process of retrofitting their Euro II and Euro III buses with diesel particulate filter where technically feasible, which can reduce the emissions of particulates, hydrocarbon and carbon monoxide by about 80% or more. The retrofitting work is expected to be completed with 2010. The Administration is also

looking into the feasibility of retrofitting Euro II and Euro III buses with selective catalytic reduction (SCR) devices to reduce nitrogen oxides (NO_x) emissions from the franchised bus fleet.

4. In his 2010-2011 Policy Address, the Chief Executive has announced that the ultimate policy objective is to have zero emission buses running across the territory. When the current bus franchises expire in the coming few years, the Administration will impose additional requirements in the franchises for the bus companies to switch to zero emission buses or the most environment-friendly buses when replacing existing ones, taking into account the feasibility and affordability of bus operators and passengers.

Trial of hybrid buses by franchised bus companies

5. In terms of fuel consumption and other environmental performance, hybrid buses are superior to ordinary diesel buses. Introducing hybrid buses to Hong Kong will help reduce its carbon footprint and improve roadside air quality. However, hybrid buses are more expensive than traditional ones. There are also uncertainties on their ability to cope with the operational requirements of local franchised buses, particularly in respect of the hilly terrain and hot weather that require the use of air-conditioning. To test the operational efficiency and performance of these buses under Hong Kong conditions and to collect operational data, the Administration proposes to fund the full cost of procuring six hybrid buses for use by the franchised bus companies along busy corridors. If the franchised bus companies wish to test other greener buses, such as electric buses, the Administration will be ready to provide them with the same financial support.

Deliberations by the Panel

6. When the proposed trial was discussed in the context of policy initiatives of the Environment Bureau in the Chief Executive's 2010-2011 Policy Address at the Panel meetings on 22 and 25 October 2010, some members considered it unfair that franchised bus companies should be provided with funding to procure six hybrid buses to test the operational efficiency and performance of these buses under Hong Kong conditions, while other transport companies like ferry companies were not eligible for assistance. They requested the Administration to advise the circumstances under which franchised bus companies would be required to use these hybrid buses upon satisfactory trial.

Latest development

7. The Administration proposes to brief members on the trial of hybrid buses by franchised bus companies at the Panel meeting on 24 January 2011.

Relevant papers

The 2010-2011 Policy Address - "Policy Agenda"

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/1011agenda-e.pdf>

Address by the Chief Executive at the Legislative Council meeting on 13 October 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/1011policy-e.pdf>

Information paper provided by the Administration for the EA Panel meeting on 22 October 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/ea/papers/ea1022cb1-41-1-e.pdf>

Minutes of the EA Panel meeting on 22 October 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/ea/minutes/ea20101022.pdf>

Minutes of the EA Panel meeting on 25 October 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/ea/minutes/ea20101025.pdf>

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