

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1) 1482/11-12
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB1/PL/TP/1

Panel on Transport

**Minutes of meeting held on
Monday, 5 December 2011, at 4:30 pm
in Conference Room 3 of the Legislative Council Complex**

- Members present** : Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo (Chairman)
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, SBS, S.B.St.J., JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah, JP
Hon Miriam LAU Kin-ye, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, GBS, JP
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Hon KAM Nai-wai, MH
Hon Starry LEE Wai-king, JP
Hon CHAN Hak-kan
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon IP Wai-ming, MH
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon Tanya CHAN
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
- Members absent** : Hon CHEUNG Hok-ming, GBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon LI Fung-ying, SBS, JP
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP

**Public Officers
attending** : **Agenda item IV**

Ms Rebecca PUN Ting-ting, JP
Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing
(Transport)2

Mr José YAM Ho-san
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport and
Housing(Transport)4

Mr Albert YUEN Lap-pun
Assistant Commissioner/Management &
Paratransit
Transport Department

Mr Albert SU Yau-on
Principal Transport Officer/Management
Transport Department

Agenda item V

Mr YAU Shing-mu, JP
Under Secretary for Transport and Housing

Ms Rebecca PUN Ting-ting, JP
Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing
(Transport)2

Ms Carolina YIP, JP
Deputy Commissioner for Transport/Transport
Services & Management
Transport Department

Miss LUI Ying
Assistant Commissioner for Transport/Bus and
Railway
Transport Department

Agenda item VI

Miss Janet WONG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport and
Housing (Transport)1

Miss LUI Ying
Assistant Commissioner for Transport/Bus and
Railway
Transport Department

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

**Attendance by : Agenda item IV
invitation**

Mr Johnny LEUNG Tak-hing
General Manager
The "Star" Ferry Company, Limited

Miss Elim WONG
Operations Manager
The "Star" Ferry Company, Limited

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

Staff in attendance : Ms Macy NG
Senior Council Secretary (1)2

Ms Emily LIU
Legislative Assistant (1)2

Action

- I Confirmation of minutes of meeting**
(LC Paper No. - Minutes of special meeting on
CB(1)475/11-12 26 October 2011)

The minutes of the special meeting held on 26 October 2011 were confirmed.

II Information papers issued since last meeting

(LC Paper CB(1)329/11-12(01) (02)	Nos. -	Administration's response to a submission from a member of the public on tram waiting kiosk at Queensway and a further submission from that member of the public
LC Paper CB(1)337/11-12(01) (02)	Nos. -	Press releases on free rides offered by KMB and Long Win for people with disabilities on "International Day of Disabled Persons"
LC Paper CB(1)379/11-12(01)	No. -	Administration's response to a submission from a member of the public on the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge related infrastructure projects in Hong Kong
LC Paper CB(1)429/11-12(01)	No. -	Administrations' response to a submission from a member of the public on the queue jumping problem at Tung Chung Bus Terminus
LC Paper CB(1)429/11-12(02)	No. -	Submission from a member of the public on MTR's Student Travel Scheme)

2. Members noted the above papers issued since the last meeting.

III Items for discussion at the next meeting scheduled for 5 January 2012

(LC Paper CB(1)464/11-12(01)	No. -	List of outstanding items for discussion
LC Paper CB(1)464/11-12(02)	No. -	List of follow-up actions)

3. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting on 5 January 2012 –

- (a) Improvement to Pok Oi Interchange;
- (b) Applications of latest surveying technologies in major road works; and
- (c) Expansion of the Red Light Camera System, Phase 4.

4. Mr Abraham SHEK Lai-him referred to a letter from Hong Kong Construction Association (HKCA), which was circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(1)254/11-12 on 3 November 2011, regarding its request to be given an opportunity to present the findings of its consultancy report on "Visionary Transport Infrastructure Study 2030" to Panel members. He proposed including the subject as an agenda item for a future meeting of the Panel and invite HKCA representatives and the consultants concerned to brief members on the report findings on transport-related issues. Members agreed.

5. Hon Albert CHAN proposed that the consultancy report should also be provided to the Administration for consideration and response. The Chairman asked the Clerk to follow up with the Administration and HKCA.

Clerk

IV Star Ferry fare increase application

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| LC Paper | No. - | Administration's paper on "Star Ferry's fare increase application for franchised ferry services" |
| CB(1)464/11-12(03) | | |
| LC Paper | No. - | Background brief on "Star Ferry's fare increase application for franchised ferry services" prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat |
| CB(1)450/11-12 | | |
| LC Paper | No. - | Submission from 反對中環碼頭巴士總站停止運作行動組) |
| CB(1)514/11-12(01) | | |

6. The Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport)2 (DS(T)2) briefed members on the salient points of the Administration's paper on the "Star" Ferry Company, Limited ("SF")'s application for increasing the fares of its franchised ferry services. Members noted that SF had submitted an application in July 2011 with two proposals (i.e.

Proposals I and II in paragraph 2(a) and (b) respectively of the Administration's paper) to increase the fares of the two franchised ferry services, namely, the "Central – Tsim Sha Tsui" and the "Wan Chai – Tsim Sha Tsui" routes.

Discussion

Justifications

7. Noting that the fares of the two ferry routes had last been increased by phases on 29 March 2009 and 1 January 2010 by weighted average rates of 8.5% and 13.3% respectively, Mr CHAN Hak-kan asked why the financial situation of SF had not been improved since then. He asked whether there was room for improvement in SF's ferry operation to save cost and generate more revenue so that a fare increase application could be avoided.

8. Mr Johnny LEUNG of SF explained that although the fares of the two ferry routes had been increased by phases in 2009 and 2010, income generated from fares in 2011 (i.e. 59% of the total income) was still lower than that in 2006 (i.e. 69% of the total income). He pointed out that upon the relocation of the piers in Central, the patronage of SF's franchised ferry services had recorded a significant drop of some 18% from 2006 onwards. The merger of the two railway corporations in 2008 had further aggravated patronage diversion, and the decline in patronage had worsened to about 26%. Nevertheless, SF had striven to control its operating costs and actively generated more non-fare box revenue to cross-subsidize its ferry operations, such as by letting out retail outlets and advertising panels in the piers. According to the statistics, the non-fare box revenue, including those generated from non-recurrent commercial activities, had recorded an increase from 31% in 2006 to 41% in 2011.

9. Mr Jeffrey LAM asked about the impact of implementing the minimum wage policy on the operating costs of SF. Mr Johnny LEUNG replied that with the implementation of the minimum wage policy, it was noted from tendering results that the contract prices for cleansing and security services for 2012 would be increased by 34% and 38% respectively. He said that there was also a need to increase the wage level of sailors by the end of 2011 slightly above the wage level of the labour market in order to address the problem of sailor recruitment difficulties. Furthermore, the vessel maintenance cost for 2012 was expected to rise by about 3.5% due to increase in the price of imported spare parts. Mr LEUNG said that as a result, even if SF's fare increase application was approved, the estimated

profit for 2012 (as projected in October 2011) would be only about \$3.8 million, which would be less than the originally projected profit of about \$5 million as estimated in July 2011. However, if the fare increase application was not approved, it was anticipated that a loss of about \$3 million, instead of \$2 million as originally projected, would be recorded next year. In response to Mr Jeffrey LAM's concern on whether SF would cease operation of the two franchised ferry services if the current fare increase application was not approved, Mr LEUNG said that it would be subject to the decision of Board of Directors of SF.

10. Mr Albert CHAN expressed concern as to whether the high operating cost of SF was due to the high remuneration of the senior management of the company. Mr Johnny LEUNG responded that the staff cost had remained at a steady level from 2006 to 2011, as SF had made efforts to control its operating cost through streamlining of manpower and controlling the expenses on overtime allowance. He further said that of the 265 staff members of SF, the number of clerical staff was less than 20 and that only two to three were management staff members. He pointed out that the staff costs mainly comprised the expenses on frontline staff's salary. He supplemented that although SF had increased the staff's salary by 4% in 2010, the increase in the share of "staff cost" of SF's overall operating cost had not been significant.

11. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that the present locations of the piers in Central were too remote and inconvenient to passengers. He enquired whether the Administration had come up with any additional measures to help SF reduce its operating costs and to generate more non-fare box revenue to cross-subsidize ferry operation. He suggested that consideration should be given to installing travellators for connection between the ferry piers and MTR stations, and providing direct subsidies by the Government to meet the anticipated loss in SF's ferry operation.

12. DS(T)2 responded that it was the established policy that public transport services should be operated by the private sector in accordance with commercial principles to ensure their cost-effectiveness and efficiency. To help reduce the operating costs of ferry services, the Government had implemented various measures, including taking over the responsibility of pier maintenance, waiving fuel duty, reimbursing pier rentals and exempting vessel licence fees for ferry services under the Elderly Concessionary Fares Scheme. In addition, the Government allowed ferry operators to sub-let premises at piers (which were not used for ferry operation) for commercial and retail activities to generate non-fare box revenue for cross-subsidizing the ferry operation so as to alleviate pressure for fare increase. DS(T)2

added that SF had sub-let almost all areas (around 90%) at its pier premises approved for commercial and retail activities to generate rental income to cross-subsidize its ferry operation.

13. Ms Miriam LAU asked about the difficulties encountered by SF in generating non-fare box revenue and whether the Administration had provided adequate assistance in this regard to SF. Mr Johnny LEUNG pointed out that the existing premises for sub-letting at Central Ferry Pier was 774 m², whereas SF wished to have additional 670 m² as temporary concession area for exhibition and commercial activities. However, no additional premises had so far been approved by the Government after SF had submitted its application in 2008.

14. DS(T)2 and Principal Transport Officer/Management (PTO/M) of the Transport Department (TD) said that the Transport and Housing Bureau and TD had supported in principle SF's application. TD had been assisting SF to liaise with the Development Bureau (DEVB), which was the approving authority. PTO/M further said that as SF's proposal involved the use of public open space, DEVB had to examine the application carefully, balancing the need of SF and the public interest. In addition, professional advice had to be sought from relevant government departments on matters such as crowd management and fire safety. Ms Miriam LAU urged the Administration to expedite the processing of SF's application as the matter had dragged on for a few years. She also pointed out that SF had faced serious operation difficulties as figures showed that it had been suffering losses in the region of some \$2 million to \$5 million from 2007 to 2009, and it anticipated to suffer losses of a few million dollars annually in the coming two years. She also noted that although profits had been recorded in 2010 and 2011, they mainly came from non-recurrent incomes.

15. Pointing out that the Chief Executive had proposed in the 2011-2012 Policy Address to enable elderly people aged 65 or above and eligible people with disabilities (PWDs) to travel on the general MTR lines, franchised buses and ferries anytime at a concessionary fare of \$2 a trip, Mr CHAN Hak-kan and Mr IP Wai-ming enquired why SF was excluded from that scheme. They considered such an arrangement unfair to SF, which had fulfilled its corporate social responsibility in offering free rides to the elderly aged 65 or above long before the announcement of the above fare concession scheme. Mr WONG Sing-chi also expressed appreciation of SF's initiative to offer free rides to the elderly. He requested the Administration to further explain SF's request "to have the remaining revenue foregone in offering elderly fare concessions reimbursed in full by

the Government" under Proposal II and the amount of reimbursement involved.

16. DS(T)2 said that at present, SF offered free rides for the elderly aged 65 or above, and the revenue foregone amounted to \$5.5 million a year. SF was reimbursed with pier rental and exempted from vessel licence fees under the Elderly Concessionary Fares Scheme. The amount of reimbursement was about \$300,000 a year. DS(T)2 said that SF now requested under Proposal II to have the remaining revenue foregone in offering elderly fare concessions reimbursed in full by the Government (i.e. \$5.2 million). DS(T)2 advised that the Administration would carefully consider the proposal to ensure prudent use of public money. She, however, requested members to note that under the fare concession scheme as announced by the Chief Executive, the Administration's plan was to urge public transport operators to continue to provide existing fare concessions to the elderly and PWDs. She pointed out that at present, some other passenger ferry routes also provided half-fare concessions to the elderly passengers. So under the fare concession scheme, these ferry operators concerned were expected to continue to offer half-fare concessions whereas the elderly passengers would only pay \$2 per trip. The difference would be met by the Government on a reimbursement basis. DS(T)2 pointed out that the use of public fund would be required if Proposal II was adopted, and therefore the Administration would carefully examine the proposal and the views of the Panel would be taken into careful consideration.

17. Mr WONG Sing-chi initially considered that Proposal II was more preferable. However, he was concerned that the proposed fare increase on holiday would affect passengers who needed to go to work by ferry on Saturdays or Sundays. He asked whether there was room for refinement of Proposal II to avoid adversely affecting these commuters. Mr Johnny LEUNG explained that the rationale of Proposal II was to avoid impacting on commuters who needed to go to work by ferry on weekdays. In fact, passengers on holiday were mainly tourists. He supplemented that the total average daily patronage of the two ferry routes remained at 58 000, and there was no big difference of patronage between weekdays and holidays. He also pointed out that under Proposal II, the fare applicable on holiday would be increased by only \$0.3, which was lower than that under Proposal I, i.e. to increase by \$0.5 to \$0.6.

18. Ms Miriam LAU also considered that Proposal II was more acceptable to the public as it would not affect commuters who went to work by ferry on weekdays. Pointing out that SF had been offering free rides for the elderly, Ms LAU stressed that, if Proposal II was adopted, the

Government should subsidize the full fares of the elderly, and should not request the elderly to pay \$2 per trip and then reimburse to SF only the remaining ticket fares.

19. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung considered that with the relocation of the piers in Central, ferry service had been made inconvenient to commuters and he reckoned that the "Star" ferry service had become, rather, a tourist attraction. He said that he had no reason to rebut the application, and the financial difficulty of SF should be taken into account in considering the fare increase application.

20. Ms Miriam LAU and the Chairman called on the Administration to enhance assistance to the ferry operators in Hong Kong in order to ensure their long-term financial viability and to maintain fare stability. Pointing out that the Government was the major shareholder of the MTR Corporation Limited, the Chairman suggested that the Administration could also consider the option of purchase of vessels by the Government for operation by contractors. He considered that should the Administration fail to map out any long-term effective measures to enhance assistance to SF, the company might soon face financial difficulty again in its ferry operation even if the present fare increase application was approved.

New fare for bicycle carriage on the "Wan Chai – Tsim Sha Tsui" route

21. Miss Tanya CHAN expressed deep concern about the introduction by SF of a new fare of \$20 for the carriage of each bicycle on the "Wan Chai – Tsim Sha Tsui" ferry service. Pointing out that at present, bicycle carriage was allowed on the lower deck of vessels in the "Wan Chai – Tsim Sha Tsui" ferry service free of charge, Miss CHAN questioned the rationale behind introducing the new fare. She urged SF to abolish the new fare to meet the needs of passengers concerned. She also pointed out that there were often not many passengers on the lower deck of vessels in "Wan Chai – Tsim Sha Tsui" ferry service. Mr Albert CHAN also suggested that SF should reconsider the desirability of introducing the new fare as it might have an adverse impact on the overall patronage. Ms Miriam LAU also shared the view that the amount of \$20 of the new fare was substantial and it might not be acceptable by the public. She considered that SF should review and propose a smaller amount.

22. Mr Johnny LEUNG explained that the "Wan Chai – Tsim Sha Tsui" route actually provided only passenger ferry services. Since the lower deck of vessels in "Wan Chai – Tsim Sha Tsui" ferry service was normally not open for passenger carriage during offpeak hours, SF had been requested

by the Administration to conduct a trial scheme to allow free carriage of bicycles on this route since 2003. He said that from 2008 until the cease of the Hung Hom ferry services, a passenger carrying a bicycle was charged \$13 for the bicycle carriage service on the vessels in the Hung Hom ferry services in addition to purchasing a passenger's ticket. Mr LEUNG said that with the cessation of the two Hung Hom ferry services, there had been an increase in the demand for bicycle carriage on the lower deck of vessels in "Wan Chai – Tsim Sha Tsui" ferry service. As a result, SF had to deploy additional manpower to operate the lower deck gangplanks. Mr LEUNG said that the new fare of \$20 was charged on a cost-recovery basis only and SF did not intend to make profit from it. He also stressed that it was a new fare item and not a fare increase. Miss Tanya CHAN, however, pointed out that the fare charged for bicycle carriage on ferries of other ferry routes was only some \$5. She considered that SF would need to provide more justifications on the new fare item and the proposed amount.

Delinking the tourist tickets with trams and reducing the fare of tourist tickets in Proposals I and II

23. Noting that SF suggested to delink the four consecutive day unlimited travel tourist tickets with trams, and to reduce the fare from \$34 to \$27 (Proposal I) or to \$25 (Proposal II), Ms Miriam LAU enquired why SF could manage to reduce the fare of travel tourist tickets given the financial difficulties faced by the company. Mr Johnny LEUNG explained that at present, a holder of a tourist ticket might have unlimited travel for four consecutive days on both SF's franchised ferry services and trams. As the Hong Kong Tramways had been separated from SF since 2010, SF suggested delinking the tourist tickets with trams. He said that the tourist ticket price could be lowered just because it would no longer include the four consecutive day unlimited travel on trams.

Revitalization of Tsim Sha Tsui Pier

24. Mr Albert CHAN considered that the Administration should make reference to overseas experience (e.g. Vancouver) and upgrade ferry pier facilities and ferry design to facilitate passengers of ferry services. He said that little improvements had been made to SF's ferry services over the years.

25. DS(T)2 replied that the Administration had proposed to develop the vicinity of Tsim Sha Tsui Star Ferry Pier into a new tourism node, which would be integrated with the proposed open piazza in front of the Tsim Sha Tsui Pier. She said that the Administration had also consulted the relevant District Councils and the relevant Task Force under the Harbourfront

Commission on the proposal in June and July 2011 respectively. In September 2011, a gazette notice was published on the further amendments to construction works of turnaround at junction of Salisbury Road and Canton Road, Tsim Sha Tsui. However, many objections to the proposed works had been received and the Administration was studying the relevant views. She said that the Administration would conduct a technical feasibility assessment on the revitalization of the Tsim Sha Tsui Pier. The Administration would consult the relevant District Councils again when a more concrete proposal for the tourism node was available.

26. In response to Mr IP Wai-ming's concern about whether the relocation of bus terminus facing the Tsim Sha Tsui Pier for development of a piazza might further aggravate the problem of decrease in patronage of SF, DS(T)2 said that the new turnaround outside the Hong Kong Cultural Centre would enable the majority of bus routes currently terminating at the Tsim Sha Tsui Star Ferry Pier terminus to continue to call at the Tsim Sha Tsui Star Ferry Pier.

V Further discussion on franchises of New World First Bus Services Limited (NWFB), Long Win Bus Company Limited (LW) and Citybus Limited (Citybus) (Franchise for Airport and North Lantau Bus Network) (Franchise 2)

(LC Paper No. CB(1)464/11-12(04)	- Administration's paper on "Franchises of NWFB, LW and Citybus (Franchise 2)"
LC Paper No. CB(1)193/11-12	- Background brief on "Franchises of NWFB, LW and Citybus (Franchise 2)" prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat)

27. Under Secretary for Transport and Housing (USTH) briefed members on the Administration's paper on franchises of NWFB, LW and Citybus (Franchise 2). Members noted the list of major views received by the Administration regarding the requirements of the new franchises for the three bus companies (summary list) at Annex of the paper.

Bus services for airport staff

28. Mr IP Wai-ming said that at the last meeting on 7 November 2011, some deputations had raised concerns over the expensive bus fare and inadequate services of airport bus routes. Suggestions had been made for the relevant bus companies to provide fare concessions and monthly tickets

for airport staff, enhance the current bus-bus interchange (BBI) schemes and frequency of airport bus routes. He asked whether the Administration would negotiate with relevant bus companies in these respects.

29. Mr WONG Sing-chi pointed out that bus routes connecting between New Territories North and the airport were inadequate and residents had to bear expensive fares of airbuses (i.e. "A" routes). He suggested that the Administration should require the relevant bus companies to establish more external bus routes (i.e. "E" routes). He also considered that the Administration should explore ways to increase the competitiveness amongst the franchised bus companies.

30. USTH responded that relevant views on services of airport routes had been included on the summary list. He undertook that the Administration would take the opportunity of the franchise renewal to negotiate with the relevant bus companies on improving the services of airport bus routes and encourage the bus companies to provide more BBI schemes on those routes.

31. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that regarding the concerns raised by airport staff about heavy transport costs, consideration should be given to requiring employers of airport staff to consider providing transportation allowance for their employees.

Enhancing information to passengers

32. Mr WONG Sing-chi enquired whether the Administration would require the relevant bus companies to install Global Positioning System (GPS) in their bus fleet and display panels at bus termini/stops to facilitate provision of instant bus information to passengers. Sharing Mr WONG's views, Mr Albert CHAN said that GPS was commonly used in the public transport means in overseas countries and considered that such technology could first be adopted at bus termini/stops in remote areas.

33. USTH responded that the suggestion of installing GPS was covered under the item "better use of information technology" on the summary list. The Administration would urge the relevant bus companies to make better use of information technology to enhance provision of information to passengers.

Bus fares and BBI schemes

34. Mr WONG Kwok-hing stressed that BBI schemes should be implemented on all routes instead of selective routes and, in particular, the schemes should be introduced in franchised bus services between Yat Tung Estate and Tung Chung MTR station.

35. USTH said that the summary list had covered areas which had attracted the most proposals on franchise requirements, including implementation of BBI schemes. The Administration would strive to negotiate with the relevant bus companies in this regard. Mr WONG Kwok-hing, however, considered that the request for implementing BBI schemes comprehensively was not clearly stated on the summary list. In response, USTH undertook to reflect the above views more clearly to the bus companies concerned in the negotiation process.

36. Mr Albert CHAN said that the current BBI schemes should be enhanced and introduced across the territory and among different bus companies. He considered that the Administration should seize the opportunity of negotiating the new ten-year franchises with the three franchised bus companies to press for fare concessions and enhancements of BBI schemes. He urged the Administration to secure additional commitments from the three bus companies during the new franchise period, e.g. introducing a compulsory requirement in the new franchises that comprehensive BBI schemes had to be provided by the bus companies concerned.

37. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung considered that the Government should make reference to the successful experience of overseas countries on provision of public transport services by the public sector. He opined that only in this way could BBI schemes be implemented effectively across different transport modes and among all routes.

38. USTH responded that the Administration would make sustained efforts in negotiating with the three bus companies on enhancing BBI schemes. In fact, inter-company BBI schemes were currently introduced by different bus companies. He reiterated that the Administration's policy was to provide public transport services by private sector in accordance with commercial principles to ensure provision of transport services in an efficient manner. As such, it would not be appropriate for the Administration to specify how the bus companies should provide the BBI schemes. Nevertheless, TD would closely monitor the levels of bus fares and service standard provided by bus companies.

39. Ms Starry LEE considered the bus services in Hong Kong generally acceptable but the fares were too high. She also considered that the Administration should specify in the new franchise that the bus companies had to offer fare concessions, section fares and monthly tickets to passengers.

40. USTH replied that the goals of the Administration in the franchise renewal exercises were to enhance the level and quality of bus services, including the provision of fare concessions, requiring them to introduce more environmental initiatives, and strengthening the monitoring of the performance of the bus companies regarding their services and financial situation. The Administration was aware of the high public expectations on offers of bus fare concessions and it would spare no efforts in negotiating with bus companies for enhancement in this respect.

Facilities for needy persons

41. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that at the last Panel meeting, some deputations had suggested that bus number announcement facility should be installed outside the bus to facilitate blind persons identifying the buses they were waiting for, but the proposal was not included on the summary list. USTH replied that such views were covered under the item "enhancing information to passengers". The Administration would strive to negotiate with the relevant bus companies in this request.

42. Mr Albert CHAN said that he had raised concerns over the years on the need to provide more buses with low-floor platform to facilitate disabled passengers boarding and alighting. He considered that the Administration should take the opportunity of the franchise renewal to negotiate for provision of such buses within a specified time frame.

Carriage of bicycles on buses

43. Miss Tanya CHAN considered that buses which were equipped with luggage racks should allow folding bicycles to be carried on board, and that cycle racks should be installed on new buses.

44. USTH responded that in the public consultation exercise, many of the people who had offered views to the Administration had suggested that cycle racks should be installed on or outside buses to facilitate bicycle carriage. He said that the Administration would have to carefully consider these views, and primary consideration had to be given to passenger safety. Nevertheless, the Administration would reflect such views to the bus

companies concerned and request them to work out feasible measures to facilitate carriage of bicycles on buses. Deputy Commissioner for Transport/Transport Services & Management of TD supplemented that New Lantao Bus Company (1973) Limited (NLB) currently allowed carriage of folding bicycles on board. NLB also advised that carriage of bicycles would be allowed flexibly if the wheels of bicycles had been disassembled.

Way forward

45. The Chairman expressed dissatisfaction with the Administration's paper as it had simply summarized the views/suggestions given by Panel members and the public without elaboration on which suggestions would be adopted by the Administration for negotiation with the relevant bus companies and the timeframe for provision of the enhanced facilities as requested by the Panel/the public. He said that the Panel had repeatedly urged the Administration to seize the opportunity of negotiating the new ten-year franchises with the three franchised bus companies to press for fare concessions and service enhancements. He criticized the Administration for endeavoring to satisfy the Panel's requests on a "best effort" basis only.

46. USTH said that the Administration would negotiate with the relevant bus companies on all the suggestions/requests listed in the Administration's paper. He supplemented that although the negotiation with bus companies on the franchise renewal had commenced, it would require some time to reach a consensus. USTH considered it inappropriate to reveal the Administration's negotiation strategy in public for the best interests of the public.

47. Ms Miriam LAU said that as expensive bus fares had long been complained by members of the public, and provision of monthly tickets, section fares and more BBI schemes had long been called for, she hoped that the Administration would strive for provision of enhancements in fare concessions during the negotiation, and require the bus companies to offer them upon renewal of franchises.

48. Sharing Ms Miriam LAU's views, the Chairman said that items such as provision of monthly tickets, section fares and more BBI schemes should be made the prerequisites of granting bus franchises to applicants. USTH assured members that the Administration would endeavour to negotiate with the relevant bus companies to enhance their service level and quality, including the provision of fare concessions. The Chairman said that this item would be discussed again by the Panel in the near future, and he would

write to the Secretary for Transport and Housing (STH) to express the dissatisfaction of Panel members on this matter.

(Post-meeting note: The Chairman wrote to STH on 7 December 2011, and this item had been scheduled for further discussion on 1 March 2012.)

VI Elderly-friendly bus design

LC Paper No. - Administration's paper on
CB(1)464/11-12(05) "Elderly-friendly bus design"

LC Paper No. FS06/11-12 - Fact sheet on "Elderly-friendly
design for public buses" prepared
by the Legislative Council
Secretariat

LC Paper No. - Submission provided by "中西區長
者友善工作小組")
CB(1)232/11-12(10)

49. Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport) 1 (PAS(T)1) briefed members on the Administration's paper on this item. She said that apart from elderly passengers, the elderly-friendly bus design would facilitate disabled persons or children using the bus services.

50. In response to Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung's concern on the timetable for provision of low-floor buses, PAS(T)1 said that the franchised bus operators had committed that all new buses to be purchased in future would be wheelchair-accessible. As at end October 2011, there were about 3 500 or 60% of the franchised buses with low floor and wide entrance. According to the current bus replacement plan, it was expected that all franchised buses would be low-floor and wheelchair-accessible by around 2015-2016. She supplemented that since low-floor buses were not suitable for operations on some roads with steep gradient and sharp bends in South Lantau, NLB would procure low-floor buses for operation on bus routes other than those which need to operate on the relevant roads in South Lantau.

51. Noting that wheelchair-bound passengers could use the ramp provided on the low-floor buses for boarding, Ms Miriam LAU expressed concern about whether the use of the ramp was convenient and whether it was suitable for use when the position for boarding was crowded with passengers who tried to get on the bus.

52. PAS(T)1 and the Assistant Commissioner for Transport/Bus and Railway said that the ramp was user-friendly. So far, its operation was smooth even on busy roads and TD had not received any complaints on its use. Such facility was also supported and welcomed by persons with disabilities (PwDs) as told by their representatives at the relevant liaison meetings held between PwDs and TD. PAS(T)1 supplemented that the ramp would facilitate wheelchair-bound passengers' boarding/alighting, and other disabled passengers could benefit from the use of the low floor for boarding. Bus captains would also provide assistance to needy persons where necessary.

53. In response to the Chairman's concern on whether specific clauses would be added to the new franchises to require the bus companies to provide adequate barrier-free facilities, PAS(T)1 said that all franchised bus operators had undertaken to adopt bus design with barrier-free and elderly-friendly features as far as reasonably practicable. The Chairman stressed that the bus companies should be required to pursue improvements to the elderly-friendly bus design under the new franchises.

VII Any other business

54. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:35 pm.