

Bills Committee on Road Traffic Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2000

Introduction

This paper sets out the Administration's response to the information requested by Members of the Bills Committee concerning the speed limit structure and the penalties imposed for different speeding offences with reference to the speed limits of roads.

Background

2. At the Bills Committee held on 29 May 2000, Members requested the Administration to consider the following –

- (a) revising the maximum speed at which a vehicle may be driven on any road from 50 km/h to 60 km/h under section 40(1) of the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap.374);
- (b) imposing different penalties for different speeding offences with reference to the speed limits of roads and the significance of the offences;
- (c) streamlining the speed limit structure to three categories (i.e. 50/70/100 or 60/80/100) and imposing different Driving-Offence Points for different speeding offences with reference to the speed limits of roads under different structure and the significance of the offences; and
- (d) reviewing and speeding up the provision of regulatory and warning signs to indicate change of speed limit.

Speed Limit for Urban Area

3. At present, the general maximum speed limit for roads in urban areas in Hong Kong is set at 50 km/h. This is in line with international practice. An overwhelming majority of European, North American and Asian countries also adopt 50 km/h as the general speed limit for roads in their urban areas.

4. Hong Kong is a very crowded city with high density of vehicles and pedestrians in the urban built-up area. There are many vehicle ingress and egress, bus stops, and signalized junctions with pedestrian crossings along these roads. Weaving and merging traffic movements between junctions are heavy. The design speed of these roads on aspects such as visibility, stopping sight distance, signing, etc. is also based on 50 km/h. An across the board revision of the speed limit for roads in the urban area from 50 km/h to 60 km/h in the Hong Kong environment will have road safety implications.

5. For certain road sections in the urban area where there is no signalized junction and the traffic is relatively lighter, the Administration would consider relaxing their speed limit on a case by case basis, where site conditions permit and road safety would not be compromised.

Different Penalties for Different Speeding Offences

6. In setting the speed limit of a certain road section, the Administration would take into account factors like design speed, accident records, the geometry and environment of the road section concerned, etc. Excessive speeding on roads with a lower speed limit in the urban area may pose a greater potential hazard than excessive speeding on expressways as there are more pedestrians and vehicles using those road sections.

7. The suggestion of imposing different penalties for different speeding offences with reference to the speed limits of roads, (i.e. a lighter penalty for speeding on roads with a lower speed limit and a heavier penalty for speeding on roads with a higher speed limit) may send a wrong signal to road users that speeding on roads with a lower speed limit is less serious or dangerous. This will go against our objective of enhancing road safety.

Streamlining of Speed Limit Structure

8. In Hong Kong, we basically adopt a three-tier system of 50/80/100 speed limit structure, with the speed limit of some of our older urban expressways and rural dual-carriageways, such as Tuen Mun Road set at 70 km/h. As we have explained in paragraph 4, we could not support a 60/80/100 speed limit structure as the adoption of 60 km/h for all road sections in the urban area would have road safety implications. As most of our new rural dual-carriageways and urban expressways are built to a standard which allows a speed limit of 80 km/h, adopting a 50/70/100 speed limit structure means that roads with limit of 80 km/h would have to be lowered to 70 km/h. This will have implications on the traffic throughput resulting in possible congestion and under utilisation of the capacity of such roads. This will not be in the interest of road users.

Provision of Regulatory and Warning Signs

9. At present, it is our standard practice to provide a pair of warning signs for advising motorists of the reduction in speed limit of the road section ahead if it involves a change of 20 km/h or more. The Administration would inspect all the relevant road sections and complete the installation of such signs in these road sections before the end of the year.

10. In addition, the Administration would identify road sections where we could place yellow bar road markings or other appropriate signs to give advance warning to drivers of the reduction in speed limit.