

立法會
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**LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs and
LegCo Panel on Transport**

**Minutes of joint meeting
held on Friday, 5 November 1999, at 10:45 am
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

Members present : Members of Panel on Environmental Affairs

Hon Christine LOH (Chairman)
Hon HUI Cheung-ching (Deputy Chairman)
*Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP
Prof Hon NG Ching-fai
Hon Margaret NG
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
*Hon CHAN Wing-chan
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, JP
*Hon LAU Kong-wah (Deputy Chairman of Transport Panel)
*Hon Mrs Miriam LAU Kin-ye, JP (Chairman of Transport Panel)
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon CHOY So-yuk
*Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo

Members of the LegCo Panel on Transport

Hon Edward HO Sing-tin, SBS, JP
Hon LEE Wing-tat
Hon LEE Kai-ming, SBS, JP
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, JP
Hon CHAN Kam-lam
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP

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Non-Panel

Member attending : Hon Bernard CHAN

Members absent : Members of Panel on Environmental Affairs

Hon Martin LEE Chu-ming, SC, JP

Hon Ronald ARCULLI, JP

Dr Hon LEONG Che-hung, JP

Hon WONG Yung-kan

Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP

Members of the LegCo Panel on Transport

Hon Albert HO Chun-yan

Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP

Hon FUNG Chi-kin

Dr Hon TANG Siu-tong, JP

(* Also members of the LegCo Panel on Transport)

Public officers attending : Mr Kim SALKELD
Deputy Secretary for Planning,
Environment and Lands (Environment)

Mr Howard CHAN
Principal Assistant Secretary for Planning,
Environment and Lands (Environment)

Mr Rob LAW
Director of Environmental Protection

Mr TSE Chin-wan
Assistant Director (Air)
Environmental Protection Department

Miss Margaret FONG
Deputy Secretary for Transport

Mr Brian LO
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport

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Mr Thomas THUMB
Assistant Commissioner/Technical Services
Transport Department

Mr WONG Sek-cheung
Senior Engineer/Gas Systems
Electrical & Mechanical Services Department

Mr I J STENTON
Chief Superintendent of Police, Traffic
Hong Kong Police Force

Clerk in attendance : Mrs Mary TANG, Chief Assistant Secretary (1)6

Staff in attendance : Ms Rosalind MA, Senior Assistant Secretary (1)9

I. Election of Chairman

Miss Christine LOH was elected Chairman for the joint meeting.

II. Air quality improvement plans relating to transport outlined in the 1999 Policy Address

(LC Paper No. CB(1) 244/99-00(01))

2. With the aid of an overhead projector, the Deputy Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands (Environment) (DS/PEL) highlighted the salient points of the information paper. He said that while the Administration's plan to control vehicle emission would cover all types of vehicles, measures to control emissions from diesel vehicles would be accorded a higher priority as these vehicles were the dominant source of air pollution. The Administration had set out plans in this regard and the strategy of the plan was as follows:

- (a) to introduce practical and clean alternatives to diesel vehicles;
- (b) to adopt the most stringent vehicle and fuel standards once these were available;

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- (c) to adopt practical technology to mitigate emissions from the existing vehicle fleet; and
- (d) to ensure proper maintenance of in-use vehicles through a combination of voluntary and regulatory measures.

3. Further to the information given in the paper, he informed members that the Administration was discussing with the vehicle manufacturers on the provision of vehicle maintenance manuals to the maintenance trade and the vehicle owners. There would be an increase in the level of fines on smoky emission from \$450 to \$1,000 so that the level of fines would be equivalent to that of other traffic offences which put other people's safety at risk. He said that there would be a six-month grace period after the enactment of legislative amendment to enable the maintenance trade and the vehicle owners to adjust to the necessary changes. Moreover, the Administration was exploring measures to standardize the acceptable smoke emission levels adopted by the Environmental Protection Department and the Transport Department.

Availability of maintenance manuals

4. Miss CHOY So-yuk expressed concern over the existing practice of the vehicle manufacturers in withholding the maintenance manuals from vehicle owners and members of the maintenance trade. She was worried that this would lead to unfair competition between the manufacturers' maintenance workshops and other vehicle repair workshops as the latter had no access to the necessary information for maintenance of the vehicles. The Chairman shared her concern and pointed out that in other countries, maintenance manuals were available for purchase by any interested person. She pointed out that the withholding of the maintenance manuals might have given rise to a certain kind of monopoly in the maintenance trade.

5. The Principal Assistant Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands (Environment) (PAS/PEL(E)) responded that the Administration was aware of the difficulties of the maintenance trade and had been requesting the vehicle manufacturers to make available the maintenance manuals. The local dealers of vehicle manufacturers indicated that their principals were unwilling to release the manuals as these were considered to be proprietary information. He assured members that the Administration would make continuous effort to assist the trade in upgrading their service standard. Briefings on the requirements of the smoke emission test and demonstration on the use of the chassis dynamometer, as well as training programmes on vehicle maintenance by the Vocational Training Council were regularly held.

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6. DS/PEL supplemented that the Administration, while appreciating the benefits of maintenance manual, considered it more important to put in place a system in which vehicle owners would bring their vehicles for regular check ups and necessary repairs for reduction of smoke emission. PAS/PEL(E) informed members that the Administration was planning to set up a working group to explore means to assist the trade in improving their maintenance standard. The working group would look into various improvement measures for example the training of mechanics, the releasing of maintenance information, and the possible introduction of a licensing system for mechanics.

7. Mrs Selina CHOW said that simply by releasing the maintenance manuals would not help in the upgrading of service standard if the trade members did not have the necessary equipment and training for the repair. While appreciating Mrs CHOW's concern, Mr LEE Wing-tat opined that vehicle owners should be given the choice of purchasing the maintenance manuals and to find the suitable mechanics for the maintenance service. In view of members' concern, the Chairman proposed to send a letter to the Financial Secretary, in his capacity as Chairman of the Competition Policy Advisory Group, seeking advice on whether the withholding of maintenance manuals had constituted a case of unfair competition. Miss Margaret NG and Mr CHENG Kar-foo supported the proposal. On the other hand, Mrs Sophie LEUNG and Mrs Miriam LAU, while supporting the release of the maintenance manuals, felt that it would be more appropriate for the Panel to request the Administration to further look into the issue and report to the Panel. The proposal was put to a vote. Six members voted for the proposal and two voted against it. Mrs Miriam LAU abstained.

(Post meeting note : A letter was sent to the Financial Secretary on 15 November 1999, LC Paper No. CB(1)429/99-00 referred and a reply was received and circulated under LC Paper No. CB(1)574/99-00.)

Supply of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) taxis and provision of LPG refilling stations

8. Mr CHAN Wing-chan enquired about the possible monopoly of a few major vehicle manufacturers in the supply of LPG taxis and measures for controlling the price of these taxis. PAS/PEL(E) said that presently the numbers of LPG taxis on the road were limited by the availability of LPG filling stations. With the provision of more LPG filling stations, which was expected to reach 26 in number by the end of 2000, there would be a substantially higher growth in the number of LPG taxis over the next few years. The existing price of LPG taxis was lower than that of diesel taxis and there should be a further drop in prices when more LPG taxis were imported.

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9. In response to Mr CHAN Wing-chan's concern over the sites chosen for the refilling stations and the possible traffic congestion that these operations might give rise to, PAS/PEL(E) assured members that the sites were chosen after careful consideration. Factors like proximity to residential sites and even distribution over the territory had been considered. Relevant Provisional District Boards were consulted and the traffic impact of the selected sites were preliminary assessed by the Transport Department. The sites chosen should be convenient to the taxi drivers, and at the same time, would be least disruptive to the traffic.

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10. Upon members' request, the Administration undertook to provide information on the availability of LPG vehicle workshops for members' reference.

Provision of training and necessary equipment for the maintenance trade

11. Mrs Miriam LAU opined that it was very difficult for the maintenance trade to provide servicing for diesel vehicles if chassis dynamometers were not provided for the testing of vehicle engines. She added that the trade had requested the Administration to provide chassis dynamometers for them but their requests had not been heeded to. She urged the Administration to provide adequate assistance to the trade to upgrade their service standard before introducing an increase in fines for smoky vehicles. The Assistant Director (Air)/Environmental Protection Department (AD(A)/EPD) responded that the Administration had arranged with Dah Chong Hong (Motor Service Centre) Limited and Crown Motors Limited to allow the trade to use their chassis dynamometers at a charge during Sundays and public holidays. Moreover, the Crown Motors Limited had undertaken to organise joint seminars and training courses with the Administration on the use of chassis dynamometers when their equipment was in place.

12. The Director of Environmental Protection (DEP) assured that the Administration would do what it could to assist the trade in upgrading their maintenance standard. He advised that the passing rate of the smoke emission test had been increasing dramatically, showing that the maintenance trade was coping well with the requirements of the Smoky Vehicle Control Programme. He said that the trade should be well prepared to maintain vehicles up to the standard required when the actual increase in fines took effect after the grace period.

13. Mrs Miriam LAU commented that given the limited number of chassis dynamometers available, the trade might not be able to complete necessary repair works for all vehicles before the increase in fines came into effect. Mrs Selina CHOW shared her concern and requested the Administration to work out in detail the number of chassis dynamometers required for the maintenance of all the diesel vehicles. She opined that it would be unfair to the vehicle owners if they were not provided with adequate facilities to maintain their vehicles.

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14. DEP explained that the fines would be imposed on those vehicle owners whose vehicles failed the smoke emission test. He said that most properly tuned vehicles should pass the test without difficulties and the use of the chassis dynamometer would not be necessary in this case. He added that for proper vehicle maintenance, access to chassis dynamometer would be an asset but not a necessity. PAS/PEL(E) said that the proposed increase in fines was intended to make vehicle owners aware of the need to regularly maintain their vehicles to ensure that the level of emissions was kept at an acceptable level.

15. Mr LEE Wing-tat queried the reason behind the Administration's reluctance in purchasing additional chassis dynamometers for use by the trade. He commented that since the Administration had proposed to provide an one-off grant to assist taxis owners in their switch to LPG taxis, the Administration should be able to afford the cost of providing a few sets of chassis dynamometers. PAS/PEL(E) responded that the Vocational Training Council (VTC) would purchase one chassis dynamometer for training purposes by the end of 1999. The Transport Department would also buy one in the 2000/2001 financial year for its annual vehicle inspection programme. He said that members' request for purchasing a few more chassis dynamometers would be further considered. Mr LEE Wing-tat urged the Administration to make a quick decision so that assistance to the trade could be provided as soon as possible.

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16. In reply to Mrs Miriam LAU's question on whether the trade members possessed the necessary knowledge for repair of diesel vehicles, PAS/PEL(E) said that trade members had expressed that they have certain difficulties in the repair. In order to provide assistance to them, the Administration had set up a working group to explore the possible assistance which could be given. DEP stressed that the Administration would try its best to provide assistance to improve maintenance standard, and impose stricter requirements on smoke emission to protect the environment from further air pollution.

17. Miss Emily LAU expressed similar concern over the maintenance standard and the Administration's effort in providing assistance to the trade. Referring to paragraph 4 (g) of the information paper, she enquired about the low registration rate of trained mechanics, as out of the 148 mechanics trained by the VTC, only 88 were registered. She also requested the Administration to consider extending this training to diesel vehicle mechanics. The Senior Engineer/Gas Systems/Electrical & Mechanical Services Department explained that the registration of trained mechanics was in progress and the number of registered mechanics would be on the increase. He informed members that the VTC offered training for 180 LPG vehicle mechanics annually and it planned to increase the annual training capacity. PAS/PEL(E) added that the VTC would conduct training courses on smoke emission control using the chassis dynamometer in early 2000. He would provide more information on the

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training courses when available.

18. To address members' concern over the maintenance standard of diesel vehicles, the Chairman proposed that representatives of the trade should be invited to the Panel meeting to present their views. Mrs Miriam LAU requested the Administration to provide an information paper on the schedule for improvement of maintenance standard and the training programmes on vehicle maintenance conducted by the VTC.

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Use of high quality diesel

19. Ir Dr Raymond HO asked the Administration to consider the possibility of importing higher quality diesel with lower sulphur content which would reduce the level of particulates and nitrogen oxides from diesel vehicle emissions. AD (A)/EPD replied that the quality of diesel in Hong Kong was the best in Asia and was of the same quality and specification as required by the European Union and North America. He advised that the Administration was planning to introduce a suitable diesel with higher quality and trial schemes were carried out with franchised bus companies on the performance of low sulphur content diesel in buses.

20. Ir Dr Raymond HO suggested that instead of relying on the results of the trial schemes by the bus companies, the Administration should conduct research on the quality of diesel independently. In addition, he requested the Administration to provide information on the types of diesel used by overseas countries so as to make a comparison with that used in Hong Kong. The Chairman shared his views on the effects of better quality diesel for alleviation of air pollution problem in Hong Kong. She said that supply of higher quality diesel could achieve immediate improvement in air quality and thus should be accorded a higher priority. She considered that higher quality diesel should not be limited to usage by buses but should be supplied to other diesel vehicle users. Miss Emily LAU concurred and added that higher quality diesel should be introduced as soon as possible. She commented that given the fact that diesel vehicles shared nearly 70% of the total distance travelled on roads, the provision of higher quality diesel would be a matter of urgency.

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21. AD(A)EPD explained that the Administration had been exploring the means for supplying better diesel. However, it was necessary to take into consideration a number of factors which included storage, quantity and steadiness of supply, and the cost of the diesel. He said that the cost of some high quality diesel could be up to 40% to 60% higher than the price of the existing diesel, which would hardly be acceptable to vehicle owners. He added that although the vehicle emission problem could be improved upon the importation of higher quality diesel, the preparatory arrangements for introducing the fuel e.g. provision of suitable storage facilities, took time. He said that the Administration would introduce higher quality diesel without

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delay once a feasible means was identified. The trial scheme conducted by the bus companies had provided useful information on the performance of low sulphur diesel.

22. With the aid of an overhead projector, DS/PEL presented a graph showing the reduction of particulates in vehicle emission after the introduction of the various measures proposed by the Administration. He explained that while better quality fuel could help to reduce particulates, better vehicle engines provided more benefits in this respect. He said that as mentioned in the Policy Address, the Administration was planning to reduce the reliance on road surface transportation by developing more railway systems which were more environmental friendly. DEP added that the Administration would continue to explore means for introducing better quality diesel which would bring about additional improvement on top of that shown in the graph.

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23. The Chairman requested the Administration to provide an emission picture on the whole vehicle stock in Hong Kong as reflected in the age and model of vehicles for members' reference. Miss Emily LAU also asked for information on the advantages, cost implications and difficulties associated with the import of high quality diesel to Hong Kong.

Other measures to solve the vehicle emission problem

24. Miss Emily LAU sought information on the effectiveness of catalytic converters in the reduction of smoke and particulates emission from diesel vehicles. AD(A)/EPD responded that the franchised bus companies had been performing a trial on the effect of catalytic converters and it was found that the emission of smoke and particulates from individual vehicles could be reduced by as much as 50%. As a result, the franchised bus companies had agreed to retrofit in the next two years some 2000 pre-Euro buses with diesel catalytic converters. He informed members that the Administration was planning a trial of retrofitting other pre-Euro commercial vehicles with diesel catalytic converters next year.

25. AD(A)/EPD also informed members that the Administration was running a trial together with the Hong Kong Polytechnic University on the use of a low cost diesel particulate trap (suitable for vehicles up to 4 tonnes) which could reduce smoke and particulates by about 20%. The outcome of the trial had been encouraging and only minor problems were detected. Subject to the final outcome of the two trials, the Administration would discuss with the trade on a plan to provide free installation of diesel catalytic converters or particulate traps (depending on the vehicle weight) to all these vehicles and to make this a requirement for all pre-Euro commercial vehicles. He also informed members that free installation of catalytic converters would be extended to mini-buses before they were switched to LPG or other cleaner vehicle models.

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26. Mrs Miriam LAU enquired about the time required for completion of the trial on catalytic converters as she understood that the franchised bus companies had spent three years in identifying the suitable catalytic converter among the six being tested. AD(A)/EPD replied that based on the results of trial done by the bus companies, the Administration would focus on testing the selected types and brands for introduction to other diesel vehicles. Therefore, the process would be faster and less complicated. It was expected that the trial could be completed in one year's time. In response to Mrs LAU's further enquiry on the discrepancy in the acceptable level of smoke emission adopted by the Transport Department and the EPD, AD(A)/EPD said that the two Departments were working on standardizing the acceptable level of smoke emission in consultation with the trade. Upon the Chairman's request, PAS/PEL(E) undertook to report on the progress in this regard at the next meeting.

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27. Mrs Selina CHOW asked whether the Administration had explored other alternative products available in the market for reduction of smoke and particulates emission apart from the particulate traps and the catalytic converters. AD(A)/EPD replied that there were a number of similar products available in the market but the effectiveness of these products had yet to be tested. However, it would be impossible for the Administration to conduct trial on all available products as this required much time and effort. With the help of a large franchised bus company, the Administration had conducted test on different types of products for the reduction of smoke and particulates emission and the catalytic converters and particulate traps were found to be most effective. AD(A)/EPD agreed to follow-up on Mrs Selina CHOW's request for publicity of the test results and the Chairman's suggestion of making available the related information on the internet.

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28. Mr HUI Cheung-ching expressed concern over the existing practice of many diesel vehicle drivers who refilled their vehicles in the Mainland which provided cheaper but lower quality diesel. As a result, the smoke emission of diesel vehicles could not be reduced to an acceptable level despite the various control measures proposed by the Administration, which included the introduction of higher quality diesel in Hong Kong. He asked whether the Administration had any measures to tackle this problem. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong shared his concern and added that as reported in the press recently, 60% of the diesel vehicle drivers had been refilling their vehicles in the Mainland. The sulphur content of the diesel in the Mainland was ten times that of the diesel used in Hong Kong. He doubted the effectiveness of the control measures to reduce smoke emission in view of the poor quality diesel used by the diesel vehicle drivers.

29. DS/PEL responded that the Administration was planning to set up a Working Group with the Guangdong authorities to deal with the problem of diesel quality. He advised that the catalytic converters could reduce smoke emission even with lower quality diesel. However, the service life of the converters would be shortened as a

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result.

30. Members expressed general concern over the progress of the reduction in smoke and particulates emission. Some members considered that the improvement in air quality was brought about too slowly and it would be undesirable for the Hong Kong residents to tolerate the poor air quality for a few more years. They urged the Administration to introduce control measures to all types of diesel vehicles in parallel instead of focusing on converting diesel taxis to LPG taxis.

31. The Chairman proposed to convene another joint Panel meeting to discuss ways to improve vehicle maintenance and testing. It was agreed that the joint meeting would be held on Thursday, 16 December 1999, at 2:30 pm. Representatives from the Vocational Training Council and the trade would be invited to attend.

III. Any other business

32. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:50 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat

4 January 2000