

立法會

Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)1043/99-00
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB1/PL/TP/1

Legislative Council Panel on Transport

Minutes of Meeting held on Friday, 28 January 2000, at 10:45 am in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon Mrs Miriam LAU Kin-ye, JP (Chairman)
Hon LAU Kong-wah (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Edward HO Sing-tin, SBS, JP
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon LEE Wing-tat
Hon LEE Kai-ming, SBS, JP
Hon CHAN Wing-chan
Hon CHAN Kam-lam
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon FUNG Chi-kin
Dr Hon TANG Siu-tong, JP
- Non-Panel member attending** : Hon NG Leung-sing
- Members absent** : Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, JP

**Public officers
attending**

: Item IV

Transport Bureau

Mr Nicholas NG Wing-fui
Secretary for Transport

Miss Margaret FONG
Deputy Secretary for Transport

Mr Brian LO
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport

Transport Department

Mr Robert FOOTMAN
Commissioner for Transport

Mr Thomas THUMB
Assistant Commissioner for Transport
(Transport Planning)

Hong Kong Police Force

Mr I J STENTON
Chief Superintendent, Traffic

Transport Research Laboratory

Mr Paul FORMAN
Head of Investigations and Risks Management

Item V

Transport Bureau

Ms Linda LAI
Deputy Secretary for Transport

Mr Patrick HO
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport

Transport Department

Mr Robert FOOTMAN
Commissioner for Transport

Mrs Judy LI
Assistant Commissioner for Transport
(Ferry & Paratransit)

Item VI

Transport Bureau

Ms Linda LAI
Deputy Secretary for Transport

Mr Patrick HO
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport

Transport Department

Mr Robert FOOTMAN
Commissioner for Transport

Mr Ernest LEE
Assistant Commissioner for Transport (NT)

Clerk in attendance : Mr Andy LAU
Chief Assistant Secretary (1)2

Staff in attendance : Ms Sarah YUEN
Senior Assistant Secretary (1)4

Action

I Confirmation of minutes and matters arising

LC Paper No. CB(1)666/99-00 - Minutes of the joint meeting of the Planning, Lands and Works Panel and Transport Panel held on 12 November 1999

LC Paper No. CB(1)869/99-00 - Minutes of meeting held on 26 November 1999

LC Paper No. CB(1)885/99-00 - Minutes of meeting held on 17 December 1999

The minutes of the meetings held on 12 November, 26 November and 17 December 1999 were confirmed.

2. The Chairman advised that should members wish to follow up on the item "Cross-country motorcycling activities" which was discussed at the Panel meeting on 17 December 1999, they could do so through the Home Affairs Panel.

II Information papers issued since last meeting

LC Paper No. CB(1)879/99-00 - Information paper provided by the Administration entitled "Passenger Opinion Survey on Taxi Services"

3. Members noted the above information paper issued since the last meeting.

III Items for discussion at the next meeting scheduled for 25 February 2000

LC Paper No. CB(1)886/99-00(01) - List of outstanding items

LC Paper No. CB(1)886/99-00(02) - List of follow-up actions

4. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next meeting:

- (a) Pedestrian schemes;
- (b) Driver Improvement Scheme; and
- (c) West Rail Project update.

Clerk

5. Members noted that the Director of Marine was still investigating the ferry accident happened on 6 January 2000. They also noted that a similar question had been raised by Mr LAU Kong-wah at the Council meeting on 26 January 2000. Pending the investigation report, members agreed to defer consideration of the item. At the request of the Chairman, the Commissioner for Transport (C for T) undertook to request the concerned department to forward a copy of the investigation report to the Panel for information when available.

6. Members agreed that the Administration should be requested to advise whether they were ready to brief the Panel on the findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment Study of the Ma On Shan Rail.

7. Members agreed to delete the item on "Traffic impact of the proposed development of a cruise pier at North Point" from the Panel's list of outstanding items for discussion having regard that the project had already been shelved.

8. Members noted the Panel's list of follow-up actions.

9. The Chairman reminded members that each year, funds would be earmarked for overseas duty visits by committees and she invited members to

propose plans for the Panel to conduct such visits during the remaining months of the current LegCo session (i.e., up to 30 June 2000). Members did not make any proposal at the meeting.

IV Measures to combat speeding

LC Paper No. CB(1)596/99-00(03) - Information paper provided by the Administration on the same item for the meeting on 17 December 1999

LC Paper No. CB(1)886/99-00(03) - Information paper provided by the Administration

LC Paper No. CB(1)921/99-00 PowerPoint presentation material tabled at the meeting

10. The Chairman drew members' attention that on 17 December 1999, the Administration presented to the Panel a proposal to increase the fixed penalty and Driving-Offence Points for serious speeding offences as measures to combat speeding. At the meeting, members expressed reservations over the appropriateness of the structure of the existing speed limit categorisation and asked the Administration to provide further information on the subject. In this regard, the Administration had provided an information paper which was circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(1) 886/99-00(03).

11. With the aid of PowerPoint presentation, the Assistant Commissioner for Transport (Transport Planning) (AC for T(TP)) briefed members on how speed limits on roads in Hong Kong were set.

Hong Kong's speed limit structure

12. The Deputy Chairman referred to page 3 of Annex A to the Administration's paper on this item, which was a comparison of the speed limits adopted for motorways in Europe, and opined that by comparison Hong Kong's speed limit structure was too complicated. His view was echoed by Messrs Edward HO and Andrew CHENG. In reply, Mr Paul FORMAN of the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) denied this to be the case and explained that Hong Kong only appeared to have more categories of speed limits on motorways because in Hong Kong roads of different topographic characteristics with different speed limits were collectively termed motorways whereas European countries mostly made a clear distinction between different road types with each having its own specific speed limit. The Secretary for Transport (S for T) supplemented that Hong Kong's speed limit structure in fact comprised only three main categories and as such was simpler than those of many countries. These three categories were 50 km/h for urban or new town built-up areas, 70 km/h for

areas outside urban or new town built-up areas, which had been raised to 80 km/h on certain new roads as design improved, and 100 km/h for high standard expressways with the only exception of North Lantau Highway which was set at 110 km/h. He however acknowledged the need for greater efforts to familiarise the public with the basis and objectives of the above three-tier structure. The Deputy Chairman was unconvinced and maintained that taking into account the number of speed limits mentioned above, Hong Kong's speed limit structure was in fact five-tier.

13. Messrs Edward HO and Andrew CHENG proposed that some of the speed limit categories should be merged to streamline the structure, for example, to merge 70 and 80 km/h into one category and 100 and 110 km/h into another. Commenting on the proposal, AC for T(TP) said that there was difficulty in doing so. For example, if the speed limit of Lion Rock Tunnel Road, which was built 20 years ago, was raised from 70 to 80 km/h, there might be safety implication having regard to the geometric design of the road which was designed to operate at 70 km/h. Mr Andrew CHENG however opined that to prevent confusion, there was a need for a simpler speed limit structure of only 80 and 100 km/h with the exception of North Lantau Highway which could still be set at 110 km/h.

14. In this connection, Mr Edward HO enquired about the design speed for North Lantau Highway. In reply, AC for T(TP) confirmed that it was only 100 km/h. However, as the traffic volume was small and the geometric design of the highway were relatively straight and wide, a higher speed limit of 110 km/h had been adopted. The Deputy Chairman questioned the practice of setting speed limit higher than the design speed and considered such a practice might give rise to confusion.

Procedures and criteria of speed limit review

15. Some members enquired the time required for conducting a speed limit review and the procedures and criteria so adopted. AC for T(TP) said that in reviewing speed limits, the Administration would have to take into account the five factors highlighted in paragraph 13 of the paper. Of these factors, while the design speeds of road sections might have documentary records, the measurement of the prevailing speed adopted by the majority of drivers of light vehicles during off-peak periods would necessitate the conduct of field measurement. To ensure the reliability of data, great care would need to be exercised to prevent drivers from noticing that speed measurement was under way. All relevant data so collected would then be considered by an in-house working group. As the speed limit review process involved so many steps and constituted only part of the duties undertaken by the department, it would normally take three months to complete.

16. Mr Edward HO found it difficult to believe that the design speeds for

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Hong Kong's new highways were only set at 100 km/h. In response, AC for T(TP) explained that the adoption of a higher speed limit would require a more stringent standard for geometric design of roads in terms of curvature (radii), super-elevation, sight-line requirement, spacing of junctions and weaving length etc. As such, additional costs would be incurred, having regard to the space requirement and other construction considerations. In balancing the various factors, a lower design speed had been adopted. At Mr HO's request, S for T agreed to provide documentary proof of the design speeds for North Lantau Highway and West Kowloon Highway.

17. In reply to a member, AC for T(TP) pointed out that while the review of minor roads would be conducted by the relevant branch offices of TD, the review of major roads would be conducted centrally. Mr Albert HO suggested that the Administration should consult the District Councils in the course of reviewing the speed limits of roads.

18. In reply to the Deputy Chairman on whether TRL had conducted any field tests to ascertain that the speed limits adopted in Hong Kong could suit real life situations, Mr Paul FORMAN of TRL confirmed that TRL's study only focused on whether the methodology adopted by the Transport Department (TD) in reviewing speed limits and Hong Kong's speed limit structure were appropriate. Members noted that TRL's study had found Hong Kong's present structure flexible enough to take into account the ages and designs of different roads. TRL also considered the methodology adopted in Hong Kong rational and scientific.

19. Members highlighted a number of factors which they considered important for the purpose of reviewing the speed limits of roads. Mr CHAN Kam-lam opined that the speed limits of roads should be set at reasonable levels for easy compliance by drivers. He also opined that the Administration should refrain from unnecessary speed limit reduction as drivers would normally reduce their speed having regard to the actual road conditions. Mr Edward HO shared Mr CHAN's views, and pointed out that many speeding cases were in fact due to the setting of unrealistic speed limits. Mr NG Leung-sing, on the other hand, said that the Administration should also take into consideration the length of a road in setting the speed limits. He also remarked that the design of vehicles might also affect the driving behaviour of motorists. For example, if one was driving a Japanese car, which was usually lighter and hence less stable, the tendency to speed would be less.

20. Mr Andrew WONG pointed out that in setting speed limits, there was a need to identify an appropriate level which could minimise fuel consumption. In response, AC for T(TP) explained that where fuel consumption was concerned, the frequency of speed change was a more important factor to consider than the speed level itself. However, taking the complicated road conditions in Hong Kong into consideration, it would be difficult to adopt a cruising speed for energy saving purpose. Notwithstanding, Mr WONG requested the Administration to

ascertain whether the previous speed limit adopted by the United States' interstate highways at 88 km/h was for the purpose of reducing fuel consumption.

Comments on the present speed limits

General comments

21. The Deputy Chairman, Mr CHAN Kam-lam and Mr Edward HO considered the speed limits on certain roads too stringent and were concerned that they might pose traps for motorists, especially roads that had a speed limit of 50 km/h. In reply, Mr Paul FORMAN of TRL explained that in view of the traffic situations and the geometric design of roads in Hong Kong, a lower speed limit was best fitted for Hong Kong. C for T supplemented that as there was proven relationship between the severity of accidents and speeding, there was a need to exercise care in raising speed limits to ensure that it would not impair road safety. In accordance with the Study on the Speed Limits in Hong Kong conducted by TRL (TRL's study), 50 km/h was commonly adopted by many countries as the general speed limit.

22. Mr LEE Wing-tat, on the other hand, expressed support for the present speed limits in general having regard that the limited length of highways in Hong Kong would make any savings in journey time arising from further relaxation of speed limits minimal.

23. The Chairman and Mr Andrew CHENG were concerned about the frequent changes in speed limits on carriageways and called for the adoption of a consistent speed limit throughout the whole stretch of a road to reduce traps for motorists. S for T explained that since the different sections of a road might have different topographic conditions and merging activities, there was a need to adopt different speed limits accordingly to suit the change of road environment. For example, the flyover section of Princess Margaret Road would need to have a speed limit lower than those of other sections. He however assured members that where possible, one single speed limit would be adopted for the entire road. Mr Andrew CHENG remained unconvinced and said that an uniform speed limit throughout should be adopted as a general rule for the sake of simplicity and clarity.

Specific cases

24. Referring to the speeding offences as shown in Annex B to the Administration's paper, the Deputy Chairman questioned why most speeding cases on Tolo Highway fell within the category of speeding in excess by more than 15 km/h but less than or equal to 30 km/h. He doubted if the speed limit were set too low and whether there was a need to review the speed limit there. In reply, AC for T(TP) explained that this might be attributable to the fact that many drivers failed to realise the speed limit of Tolo Highway was only 80 km/h whereas the Tolo/Fanling Highway was 100 km/h. He however explained that

the speed limit of the concerned section of Tolo Highway could not be raised to 100 km/h because of geometric constraints. He further explained that taking into account the prevailing speed adopted by the majority of drivers of light vehicles during off-peak periods, the speed limit of that section of the road should be set at 80 km/h, not to mention the fact that the accident rate of Tolo Highway was already 0.5%, which was higher than the general average accident rate of 0.34%. C for T assured members that the Administration would gladly consider any suggestions put forward by members on speed limits of particular roads.

Relationship between accidents and speeding

25. In an attempt to ascertain the relationship between traffic accidents and speed limit, the Deputy Chairman requested further information on whether the recent relaxation of speed limit on five sections of roads in October 1999 had led to higher occurrence of traffic accidents. Noting that a preliminary assessment had indicated that in the past few months, two road sections had recorded an increase in traffic accidents after speed limit relaxation, Mr Andrew CHENG also requested details on the specific road sections involved and the rates of increase. In response, AC for T(TP) reported that the first road section was the eastbound carriageway of Fanling Highway between San Tin Interchange and Sheung Shui Interchange, its speed limit was raised on 28 March 1999. A comparison of the period between April to December 1998 and the same period in 1999 had shown a 50% increase in the number of accidents from four to six. As for the other section, the eastbound carriageway of Lung Cheung Road between Fung Mo Street and Hammer Hill Road, its speed limit was raised on 2 May 1999. A comparison of the period from May to December between 1998 and 1999 had indicated a drastic increase in the number of accidents from four to 14, of which 10 occurred in the first four months since the relaxation. Thereafter the figure had tapered off and from September to December 1999 the monthly figure was only one. Members noted that in the latter case it was premature to make any meaningful interpretation of the "after relaxation" situation as the traffic pattern had yet to stabilise and the traffic accident data available was for a limited period only. As a standard rule, the observation period should be set at a period one year after implementation.

26. Members noted from paragraph 26 of the paper that an American study (1990) showed that following a revision of the speed limit of the interstate highways from 88 km/h to 104 km/h, there was an increase of 3-6 km/h in the mean rural interstate speed which had resulted in an increase of 19-34% in fatalities in traffic accidents. This suggested that for every 1.6 km/h change in the mean traffic speed, there would be an associated change of 8 or 9% in the number of fatalities. Mr Albert HO questioned the deduction drawn from the American study as the relationship between the magnitude of speeding and rate of fatalities should not be on a linear basis. Citing that this might help explain why the penalties for serious speeding should be more severe, he asked the Administration to clarify the above deduction. In response, S for T clarified that

the Administration had not made the above deduction themselves but it had been directly copied from the report of the said American study. Mr Paul FORMAN of TRL however explained that an accident was basically a transfer of energy and energy was related to speed by squaring it. As such, every small increase in speed would square the amount of energy so effected and hence increase both the number and seriousness of the resultant accidents.

27. At the Chairman's request for documentary proof or specific figures that could explain the relationship between speeding and the number of accidents and fatalities, Mr Paul FORMAN of TRL advised that world-wide researches had concluded that a mile per hour speed increase would lead to 5% increase in accidents. However, casualties went up at a much higher rate because the amount of energy that would dissipate from the resultant accident would be much greater.

28. In this regard, Mr NG Leung-sing opined that the Administration should be careful in making direct reference to the results of overseas studies because roads in overseas countries were different in that they were normally longer and straighter. He also doubted if the above deduction had been copied incorrectly. His views were shared by Mr Andrew WONG.

Measures to combat speeding

29. Mr NG Leung-sing pointed out that there should be a detailed statistical analysis of the data on speeding offences, traffic accidents and traffic accidents resulting in fatalities. This could help identify the characteristics of drivers who were more prone to traffic accidents with a view to identifying the best measures to minimise such incidents. In response, the Chief Superintendent, Traffic, Hong Kong Police Force said the Police did not have such data. However, according to their experience, professional drivers usually knew where the camera sites were and would speed when they thought there were no camera sites. By comparison Sunday drivers were far more willing to comply with speed limits.

30. Mr LEE Wing-tat was concerned about how the problem of excessive speeding could be contained and opined that the penalties for speeding in excess of speed limits by 30 to 45 km/h should be more severe than the proposed levels so as to reflect the seriousness of the offences which might affect the safety of other road users. He further stressed that the Administration should substantiate their proposed penalties with more statistical analysis of accident records in the local context. The Chairman directed that when the legislative proposal to increase penalties for serious speeding offences was put forward to the Legislative Council for consideration, it should be accompanied by more data on the above aspect.

31. The Deputy Chairman, on the other hand, opined that the information presently provided by the Administration had failed to convince him that the present speed limits were reasonable and that stringent penalties should be

imposed for serious speeding which caused greater damage. He requested the Administration to review the speed limits of roads before increasing the penalties for speeding offences. Mr CHAN Kam-lam also pointed out that no additional penalties should be imposed against speeding under 15 km/h.

Other concerns

32. In reply to Mr CHAN Kam-lam on plans to review speed limits, the Administration reported that the speed limits of roads were regularly reviewed to ensure that a right balance could be struck between traffic flow and road safety. In fact, a comprehensive speed limit review of major roads had already been completed and a full review would be conducted again one year later to assess the impacts of the relaxation of speed limits. Meanwhile, the Administration was reviewing the speed limits of medium speed roads, and toll plazas and their adjoining road sections.

33. Where signing arrangements were concerned, Mr Edward HO opined that the present design of speed limit signs should be improved. For example, by using one sign instead of a pair. He and the Chairman urged the Administration to take into account the design adopted by the United States and simplify the signs to provide clear advance warning to motorists of change in speed.

Conclusion

34. S for T thanked members for their views and pointed out that while it was difficult to achieve a consensus on the level of penalties, the Administration had already accepted views expressed by members at the Panel meeting on 17 December 1999, so that heavier penalties had been imposed against excessive speeding to reduce the damage caused by such incidents while the existing penalty structure for the less significant speeding offences remained unchanged. He undertook to try and provide more information to substantiate the legislative proposal to increase speeding penalties when it was put forward to the Legislative Council.

V Transition of Licensed Ferry Services to the Outlying Islands

LC Paper No. CB(1)780/99-00 - Information paper provided by the Administration

35. The Deputy Chairman enquired if the new operator of licensed ferry services to the outlying islands, New World First Ferry Services Limited (First Ferry), had made any commitments in relation to future fare increase. In response, the Assistant Commissioner for Transport (Ferry & Paratransit) (AC for T(F&P)) advised that according to the terms and conditions of the licences,

First Ferry was entitled to raise its fares by 5% in April 2000. The Deputy Chairman further enquired if TD could disapprove First Ferry's fare increase applications if its service failed to satisfy its passengers. Mr LEE Wing-tat also pointed out that fare increase should be based on service improvements and consultation. AC for T(F&P) replied that according to its licences, First Ferry's entitlement to the fare increase was not subject to any such preconditions. She, however, confirmed that the Administration had not received any fare increase application from First Ferry.

36. As to whether First Ferry had plan to replace the ferries taken over from the Hongkong and Yaumati Ferry Company Limited (HYF) so as to improve the reliability of ferry service, AC for T(F&P) assured members that First Ferry was also very concerned about the conditions and maintenance of ferries. The company had strengthened preventive maintenance and would consider alternative vessels if necessary. She, however, cautioned that as the contemplated move might have fare implications, passengers' views would need to be considered before making the decision.

37. In this connection, Mr LAU Chin-shek opined that it was the responsibility of First Ferry to deploy ferries of good quality to provide service. As such, the company should not transfer the related costs to passengers by means of fare increases. He also enquired about the channels through which passengers would be consulted on such possible fare increases. In reply, AC for T(F&P) pointed out that First Ferry was considering various measures to improve services and not all service improvements would necessarily lead to fare increases. She further assured members that First Ferry would consult the local representatives, including the Islands District Council on their service improvement plans and any associated fare implications.

38. Mr LEE Wing-tat drew the Administration's attention to the results of a survey he conducted before the changeover of HYF's licensed ferry services to First Ferry, which showed that in general residents were expecting service improvements upon the changeover in terms of frequency and ferry deployment. He said that he had already passed the results to First Ferry for reference and called upon TD to liaise with it for improvement of its service in response to the above expectations. In reply, AC for T(F&P) pointed out that First Ferry had plans to improve its service by implementing a replacement/refurbishment programme for vessels to improve passenger comfort. Meanwhile, TD was also conducting an opinion survey to gauge passengers' views on ferry service and fare. The results would be passed on to First Ferry to facilitate their planning of service improvement plans.

39. At Mr LEE Wing-tat's request to urge First Ferry to respond to complaints about the sanitary conditions of the ferries, AC for T(F&P) said that First Ferry had indeed made an effort to improve the sanitary conditions of the ferries. In this regard, the Chairman remarked that as long as passengers were allowed to eat

and drink on board, the above problem might persist. She, however, urged the Administration to explore possible solutions.

VI Review on green minibus operation in Kowloon, Sai Kung and areas along the KCRC East Rail Corridor

LC Paper No. CB(1)886/99-00(04) - Information paper provided by the Administration

40. The Deputy Chairman enquired about the implications of recent reductions in diesel duty on the cost of green minibus (GMB) operations, and whether most of the GMB routes would become financially unviable should diesel duty go up again. In reply, the Assistant Commissioner for Transport (NT) (AC for T(NT)) pointed out that diesel duty was only one of the many factors which would affect the costs of GMB operation. In considering the viability of GMB operation, there was also a need to take into account the revenue of GMB service. In this regard, the Administration observed a positive increase over the years due to increase of patronage. He assured members that the Administration was constantly reviewing the operation of GMB including its viability.

41. Mr CHAN Kam-lam opined that the seating capacity of GMBs should be increased to cater for passenger demand. The proposal would not only help lower the operating cost of GMB but also improve our environment due to lesser vehicles on roads. In reply, AC for T(NT) reported that in 1997, the Transport Advisory Committee had conducted a comprehensive review of the policy and operational environment of the public light bus trade, including the carrying capacity of vehicles. The trade was consulted throughout the review. The Review concluded that there was no need to increase the seating capacity of light buses. There had not been any significant changes in social factors since the above review which warranted a change now. Indeed, the increase of seating capacity might not help improve GMB operation. On the contrary, it might lead to longer waiting time which would not be welcomed by passengers. He further pointed out that in the presence of existing policy to encourage the conversion of red minibus (RMBs) into GMBs, more attractive GMB routes had been introduced and the total number of GMBs had increased steadily. Such a move would also have the effect of improving traffic flow and air quality on busy urban thoroughfares in which the activities of RMBs tended to concentrate. Mr CHAN Kam-lam considered that as GMBs were providing scheduled services with fares, routings and timetables regulated by TD, the increase in the seating capacity might not affect their service and operation as claimed by the Administration.

42. The Chairman referred to para 6 of the Administration's paper on this item and pointed out that the increase in the number of passengers reported therein might just be the result of a corresponding increase in the number of vehicles over the same period. As such, it was not representative to state that the

profitability of GMB operation was increasing. AC for T(NT) reported that due to the introduction of new routes and service improvement, about 500 vehicles were converted to GMBs between 1994 and 1998. He further pointed out that GMB operation could find new opportunities for expansion by extending its feeder service to railway stations. The Chairman acknowledged that the pace of the conversion of RMBs into GMBs had improved over the past few years.

43. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman urged the Administration to continue monitoring the operation of GMBs to ensure their financial viability and operational efficiency.

VII Any other business

44. There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

Legislative Council Secretariat
23 February 2000