



Research Office  
Legislative Council Secretariat

## Fact Sheet

# School bus service in Singapore

FS04/14-15

## 1. Introduction

1.1 In Hong Kong, it is increasingly common for children to cross districts to attend school. This has in turn boosted the demand for school bus service in recent years. There are concerns that the current supply of school bus service is not able to meet the growing demand. As part of the Public Transport Strategy Study, school bus service will be discussed at the meeting of the Panel on Transport on 17 April 2015.

1.2 This fact sheet studies the supply of school bus service in Singapore, which shares similar socio-economic conditions with Hong Kong. In addition, the Singaporean government has put in place various measures to improve the provision, transparency and safety of school bus service. These include (a) exempting/rebating certain fees to owners of bus vehicles that provide student service, (b) setting up an online notice board on a pilot basis to publicize information of school bus operators appointed by schools, (c) mandating installation and wearing of seat belts on small school buses, and (d) introducing traffic measures on roads fronting schools for the safety of children.

## 2. School bus service operators

2.1 The use and ownership of private buses in Singapore is regulated by the Land Transport Authority, a statutory board of the Ministry of Transport. In Singapore, buses are classified either as public buses or private buses. The latter are further classified as Private Bus, School Bus, Private Hire Bus and Excursion Bus. All except Private Buses<sup>1</sup> can operate school bus service, provided that they hold a Public Service Vehicle Licence issued by the

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<sup>1</sup> In Singapore, Private Buses are for the own use of an organization at no profit. According to the Land Transport Authority, most of the Private Buses in Singapore are used to ferry employees of the bus owner.

Land Transport Authority. They are also subject to the payment of Road Tax, a fee levied annually or half yearly on all registered vehicles based on their engine capacity.

### School Buses

2.2 According to the *Road Traffic Act*, School Buses are public service vehicles used for conveying children to and from schools. They are hired under a contract, express or implied, at a fixed or agreed rate of sum. However, School Buses may be used to convey adult workers to and from their place of work, provided that they hold an Adult Workers' Contract permit issued by the Land Transport Authority for doing so. Unlike other private bus operators, School Bus operators are exempted from the requirement to bid a Certificate of Entitlement ("CoE").<sup>2</sup> Such arrangement is to help School Bus operators keep their operating costs low.<sup>3</sup> As at end-2014, there were about 1 845 School Buses operating in Singapore.<sup>4</sup>

### Private Hire Buses and Excursion Buses

2.3 To foster competition in the school bus service sector, the Land Transport Authority allows operator of Private Hire Buses and Excursion Buses to operate student service as well. The *Road Traffic Act* defines Private Hire Buses as those buses which do not ply for hire on any road but are hired under a contract, express or implied, for the use of each such vehicle as a whole. Private Hire Buses are used for chartered purpose, such as conveying school children and school staff to and from schools or ferrying adult workers between their home and work. For Excursion Buses, they are defined as those buses which are used on unscheduled services and in which passengers are charged separate and distinct fares. They can be used to carry tourists or ferry adult workers and school children to and from their home and work place/school.

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<sup>2</sup> In Singapore, anyone who wishes to register a new vehicle must first obtain a CoE in the appropriate vehicle category. A CoE represents a right to the certificate holder to register, own and use a vehicle in Singapore for a period of 10 years. The CoE bidding exercise is held twice every month for allocation of the quota available. The exercise serves to limit the number of new vehicles while letting the market determine the price of owning a vehicle.

<sup>3</sup> According to the latest result of the bidding exercise held in April 2015, the CoE premium amounted to S\$64, 001 (HK\$360,300) in the category of goods vehicles and buses.

<sup>4</sup> At present, no more new School Bus licences are issued by the Singaporean government. They must be purchased from the resale market.

2.4 A Private Hire Bus or Excursion Bus is entitled to a 50% rebate on Road Tax, if it has been used for student service continuously for a minimum period of six months and has satisfied other related requirements. The Road Tax rebate aims to help Private Hire Buses and Excursion Buses charge competitive fares when operating student service. As at end-2014, there were about 2 150 Private Hire Buses and 5 550 Excursion Buses operating in Singapore.<sup>5</sup>

### **3. Student transport arrangements**

3.1 In Singapore, school bus operators can make individual arrangements with students' parents or are appointed by the schools concerned for the provision of school bus service. The Ministry of Education in Singapore has set out a set of criteria guiding schools in the selection of school bus operators. Apart from the safety requirements, selection should also be based on the criteria of whether the school bus operators are qualified in terms of the number of buses provided, proposed route plan, and pick-up and drop-off time. The competitiveness of fares proposed by tenderers is also another key factor for evaluation.

3.2 The Ministry of Education has also introduced a pilot scheme – the Information Notice Board for School Bus Services ("IBSB") – to provide an online platform for schools to publicize their school bus service. Parents can access IBSB through the Ministry's website for information about school bus operators such as their names, email addresses and bus fares charged. According to the Ministry, there are eight schools participating in IBSB and more are expected to participate.

### **4. Safety requirements for operating school bus service**

4.1 Singapore makes seat belt installation mandatory for all small buses with a seating capacity of not more than 15 passengers and a maximum laden weight (i.e. the weight of vehicles when carrying passengers) of not exceeding 3 500 kg.<sup>6</sup> Small buses, including small School Buses, Private Hire Buses and

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<sup>5</sup> The Research Office has written to the Land Transport Authority for information on school bus service. According to its reply, Private Hire Bus and Excursion Bus operators are not required to apply for an additional licence/approval to operate student service. However, it has not provided the number of Private Hire Buses and Excursion Buses operating student service in Singapore.

<sup>6</sup> The seat belt requirements do not apply to large buses which are better able to absorb the impact of a collision given their design, size and weight.

Excursion Buses, must install retractable three-point seat belts.<sup>7</sup> As a result of the mandatory seat belt installation, the previous seating arrangement that allowed three children below the age of 12 to occupy a double-seater bench meant for adults has become not applicable. In addition, children who are below the height of 1.35 m are required to use booster seats together with seat belts.<sup>8</sup>

4.2 In addition, passengers riding on small buses must wear a seat belt. For small buses which provide student service, drivers and bus attendants on board have the duty to ensure that children wear the appropriate seat belts. Failure to do so may subject them to a fine of S\$120 (HK\$680). Drivers will also be given three demerit points.

4.3 Apart from the seat belt requirements, bus vehicles which provide student service are also required to meet other safety requirements, such as keeping the school bus speed at no more than 60 km/hour, and installing a reflective triangular "Children Crossing" sign with red blinking lights at the rear of the bus. The lights will be activated to warn motorists when the entrance or exit door of the bus is opened.

## 5. Safety measures in school zones

5.1 According to the Ministry of Transport, students who use school bus service or other private vehicles should alight and board within the school compounds for their safety. Yet, some school compounds are not big enough or have other operational needs. School children may need to use the roads fronting schools. For the safety of children, the Land Transport Authority has put in place various warning signs to alert motorists. These include the introduction of a school zone scheme under which areas around primary and special schools are identified by the "School Zone" signs (**Figure 1**).<sup>9</sup> Within a school zone, there are specific safety measures, such as parking restrictions and "SLOW" road markings to alert motorists.

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<sup>7</sup> In 2008, the Singaporean government announced the requirement mandating small buses registered on or after 1 April 2009 to install the seat belts on forward-facing seats. For those registered before 1 April 2009, a grace period of up to end-2013 was given for retrofitting the required seat belts or replacing a new bus. To help ease the cost burden of bus operators arising from the seat belt requirements, the Singaporean government had provided financial assistance to the affected bus operators.

<sup>8</sup> A booster seat is a seat cushion that is used to elevate a child so that the vehicle seat belt is positioned properly over the child.

<sup>9</sup> The school zone scheme will be extended to secondary school frontages by end-2015.

**Figure 1 – "School Zone" signs**



Placing at the start  
of a school zone

Placing at the end of a  
school zone

Source: Land Transport Authority.

### Pilot scheme in selected school zones

5.2 To further improve the road safety in the school areas, the Land Transport Authority implemented a pilot scheme at 10 primary schools in 2014. Under the pilot scheme, a "40" speed limit sign and a "When Lights Flash" sign are installed along with the "School Zone" sign (**Figure 2**). During school peak hours, the amber lights will flash and motorists should reduce their driving speed to 40 km/hour. As the scheme has been working well, it will be implemented in 200 more school zones in the next three years.

**Figure 2 – Pilot scheme**



Source: Land Transport Authority.

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