LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON TRANSPORT

Measures to Enhance the Safety of Public Light Bus Operations

Introduction

This paper updates Members on the development and progress of the measures to enhance passenger safety on public light buses (PLBs).

Background

2. In the light of the relatively high accident and rear seat passenger casualty rates of PLBs among all vehicle types, there is a need to further enhance passenger safety on PLBs.

3. In January 2001, we consulted Members on the findings of the Administration's review of measures to enhance safety of passengers on PLBs. These measures can be classified into two categories, namely installation of passenger protection equipment and measures to help reduce the accident rates of PLBs. We have since started to implement the measures and an update of the progress is set out in paragraphs 4 to 17 below.

Passenger Protection Equipment

4. At present, the compulsory fitting and wearing of seat belts applies to all seats of private cars and taxis, but only to the front seats and driver's seats of light buses, goods vehicles and buses. Having examined the accident and rear seat passenger casualty rates of PLBs, we have decided to extend the fitting and wearing of seat belts to the rear seats of PLBs and to introduce high back seats to protect PLB passengers in case of accidents. The necessary legislative amendments were approved by the Legislative Council in November 2002. To allow sufficient lead-time for the vehicle manufacturers to develop new models with passenger seat belts and high back seats, these new requirements will take effect from August 2004.

5. As a related measure, the Administration has also decided to revise the maximum gross weight limit of light buses from 4 to 5.5 tonnes to facilitate the accommodation of the new safety equipment. A bill has been introduced into this Council on 22 October 2003 for this purpose.

Measures to Help Reduce Accident Rates of PLBs

6. Apart from the above legislative amendments, the Transport Department (TD) has been exploring measures to help reduce the accident rates of PLBs. The following are measures that have been examined.

Maximum speed limit on PLBs

7. Currently, there is a maximum speed limit of 70 km/h for all medium goods vehicles, heavy goods vehicles and buses, as well as motorcycles and motor tricycles driven by holders of probationary driving licences, even though there may be higher speed limits on roads. There have been suggestions that a maximum speed limit for PLBs should also be imposed to deter speeding of PLBs. In this connection, we have conducted a detailed analysis on the relationship between speeding and traffic accidents involving PLBs. **Annex A** shows that in the past five years, only 12 or 1.2% of traffic accidents involving PLBs each year were speed-related. Most of these speed-related traffic accidents occurred on roads with a speed limit of 50 km/h. On average, only one accident each year occurred on roads with speed limits of 70 km/h or above.

8. It follows from the above analysis that imposing a maximum speed limit of 70 km/h could not help reduce the accident rates of PLBs. We therefore do not intend to pursue this measure for the time being. If, in future, there is new evidence suggesting that there is substantial increase in the number of speed-related traffic accidents involving PLBs, we may re-visit this proposal again.

9. However, in the light of public concern about the driving behaviour of PLB drivers, we consider that measures such as the installation of speed display devices on PLBs and promotion of safe driving among PLB drivers should be useful in reducing PLB-related traffic accidents.

Speed display devices (SDDs)

10. As the name suggests, a SDD is a device which displays the current speed of a vehicle. SDDs are primarily used to facilitate monitoring by PLB passengers and caution PLB drivers against speeding. For green minibuses (GMBs), if the GMB operators receive complaints from the passengers, they may take action against the offending drivers accordingly. TD started to experiment the use of SDDs in 2001. Due to the positive feedback from both passengers and the trade, TD began to install SDDs on all 243 GMBs on

overnight services. The installation programme commenced in August 2002 and was completed in April 2003. In addition, operators of daytime GMB routes via expressways are also encouraged to install SDDs on their vehicles. So far, 95 such GMBs have completed the installation and 41 of the remaining 117 GMBs have committed to install the device in the coming months. It is expected that, by mid 2004, all daytime GMBs operating on expressways would have completed installation of SDDs.

11. As the device has facilitated passengers' awareness of the GMB's speed, the number of complaints on GMB speeding increased substantially. In the 12 months preceding the commencement of the SDD installation programme, there were only 42 complaints. In the 12 months after the commencement of the programme, this went up to 62. In a passenger opinion survey conducted by TD in mid-October 2003, 71% of the passengers on overnight routes found the SDD useful in enhancing safe driving among GMB drivers. In addition, 83% of the passengers supported extending the SDD requirement to all daytime GMB routes operating via expressways. In a survey of operators of overnight GMB routes, over 90% of the operators considered the SDD useful in monitoring the speed of their GMBs and preventing their drivers from speeding.

12. The above has confirmed that SDDs are useful to prevent speeding. Accordingly, for new GMB routes operating on expressways and roads with speed limits of 70 km/h or above, TD will require the vehicles to be fitted with SDDs. For other GMB routes operating on local roads where the speed limits are under 50 km/h, TD will continue to encourage installation of such devices. TD will closely monitor the complaint figures and will continue to assess the effectiveness of SDDs.

Vehicle Monitoring System (VMS)

13. The VMS records operation data of the PLB in question, such as average speed per minute, daily highest speed, distance travelled, total number of driving hours, numbers of foot brake application and door opening, whether illumination/indication lights are switched on, etc. An audible warning device is also in place to warn the driver when the speed of the vehicle exceeds the preset limit.

14. To facilitate monitoring of GMB operation and accident investigation, TD is planning to conduct a trial on the use of VMS on four GMBs serving on routes with different operational characteristics. The trial will start in December 2003 and will last 6 months. TD will assess in detail

the effectiveness of the device at the end of the trial.

Promotion of safe driving

15. To promote safe driving, TD launched the Driver Improvement Scheme in September 2002 to improve the driving behaviour and attitude of motorists. TD has also appointed three organisations in August 2003 as authorised agents for organising and providing the Public Light Bus Driver Training Course. In addition, the Vocational Training Council is also developing tailor-made improvement modules for PLB drivers. The training programme will be introduced in early 2004.

16. The above courses offer choices to PLB drivers who wish to improve their driving skills. They include themes like driving safety, proper driving behaviour, customer services, PLB-related legislation and insurance issues etc. GMB operators applying to operate new GMB routes will be given higher marks in the operator selection exercise if they undertake to provide training courses approved by TD for their drivers before the launch of the new routes. For existing operators, they are encouraged to allow their drivers to attend approved training courses as a service improvement measure. So far, more than 50 GMB drivers have attended the Public Light Bus Driver Training Course.

Police Enforcement against Speeding of PLBs

17. Prosecution against speeding is one of the major enforcement targets of the Police. In addition to territory-wide enforcement actions, the Police would closely monitor the accident trend and take enforcement actions at speeding blackspots to deter such behaviour. The enforcement targets are drivers of all vehicles including PLBs. **Annex B** sets out the number of prosecution cases against drivers of PLBs and other vehicle types for committing speeding offences in 2002 and 2003.

Advice Sought

18. Members are invited to note the progress of the safety improvement measures set out in this paper.

Environment, Transport and Works Bureau
3 December 2003

Annex A

Number of Traffic Accidents Involving
Public Light Buses (Red + Green) Travelling at Excessive Speed in 1998 - 2002

Speed Limit in km/h / Vehicle Type	Year				
	1998	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**	**2002**
50 or below					
RMB	*6*	*3*	*10*	*4*	*11*
GMB	*3*	*4*	*2*	*7*	*6*
70					
RMB	*0*	*0*	*0*	*1*	*1*
GMB	*0*	*0*	*0*	*1*	*1*
80					
RMB	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*
GMB	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*
90					
RMB	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*
GMB	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*
100 or above					
RMB	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*
GMB	*0*	*1*	*0*	*0*	*0*
Total					
RMB	*6*	*3*	*10*	*5*	*12*
GMB	*3*	*5*	*2*	*8*	*7*

Annex B

Enforcement against Speeding Offences in 2002

Vehicle Type	In Excess of Speed Limit by				Total
	15 kph or Less	16 kph to 30 kph	31 kph to 45 kph	More Than 45 kph	
Private car	60908	65597	7251	942	134698
Taxi	10916	10849	747	38	22550
Public light bus	1054	724	36	1	1815
Franchised public bus	96	33	0	0	129
Other public bus	1010	644	17	0	1671
Other vehicles*	20989	15858	1098	83	38028
Total	94973	93705	9149	1064	198891

Enforcement against Speeding Offences in 2003 (Jan – Sep)

Vehicle Type	In Excess of Speed Limit by				Total
	15 kph or Less	16 kph to 30 kph	31 kph to 45 kph	More Than 45 kph	
Private car	27531	58649	6058	593	92831
Taxi	5261	8775	583	27	14646
Public light bus	575	676	27	1	1279
Franchised public bus	48	23	0	0	71
Other public bus	605	521	24	1	1151
Other vehicles*	10315	13198	796	81	24390
Total	44335	81842	7488	703	134368

* *Other Vehicles include private light bus, private bus, light goods vehicle, medium goods vehicle, heavy goods vehicle, special purpose vehicle, motorcycle and Government vehicle.*