

For information

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Panel on Transport and Panel on Environmental Affairs

Guidelines on Service Improvement and Reduction in Bus Route Development Programmes

Purpose

This paper provides information on the refined guidelines on service improvement and reduction in bus route development programmes.

Background

2. The Administration briefed the Legislative Council Joint Panel on Transport and Environmental Affairs (“the Joint Panel”) on 22 January and 28 May 2010 on the planning principles and guidelines in pursuing franchised bus service rationalisation, and the results of consultation with District Councils on the bus service rationalisation proposals respectively. At the meeting of the Joint Panel on 12 July 2010, the Administration briefed Members on the factors that the Administration would consider when implementing the planning guidelines on franchised bus service rationalisation. The Joint Panel requested the Administration to elaborate on some of the factors for consideration, and to incorporate the factors for consideration into the relevant guidelines.

Guidelines

3. The Administration has refined the Guidelines on Service Improvement and Reduction in Bus Route Development Programmes, incorporating views on franchised bus service rationalisation from members of the Joint Panel. A copy of the refined guidelines is attached at **Annex**.

For Information

4. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Transport Department
September 2010

**Guidelines on Service Improvement and
Reduction in Bus Route Development Programmes**

Service Improvement

(I) Frequency Improvement

If the occupancy rate of any bus route reaches 100% during any half-hour of the peak period and 85% during that one hour, or reaches 60% during the busiest one hour of the off-peak period, the Transport Department (TD) will consider the deployment of more vehicles to enhance the service level. In increasing the vehicle allocation, priority will be given to redeploying vehicles saved from other rationalisation items.

(II) New Bus Service

If the frequency improvement alone is not sufficient to meet demand and no practical alternatives are available, we will give consideration to the provision of new bus service, with priority to serve areas that are beyond the catchment area of existing railways or railway feeders. In approving any new bus service, we will also consider the impact of such new service on the traffic condition on major roads, and will as far as possible refrain from providing long haul bus routes or routes that operate via busy districts such as Mong Kok, Tsim Sha Tsui, Central, Wan Chai, Causeway Bay etc.

Service Reduction

In pursuance of our policy objective of providing a safe, efficient and reliable transport system in a sustainable environment, franchised bus routes with low utilisation would be rationalised from time to time to enhance bus operation efficiency while meeting passenger demand and matching local operating environment, reducing traffic congestion and roadside emission. These guidelines set out the situations whereby rationalisation measures such as adjustment to service frequency and timetable, route cancellation / amalgamation, route truncation, etc. would be pursued.

(III) Reduction of Bus Trips along Busy Corridors

In view of concentration of activities in the urban areas leading to serious environmental and traffic concerns, TD is committed to reducing the number of bus trips along busy corridors and bus stoppings through various measures of service cancellation / reduction and route rationalisation. If it is inevitable for new routes or enhanced bus services to operate via these busy corridors, the bus operators will have to reduce the same number of trips plying through the same corridor from other routes in order not to aggravate the traffic and environmental conditions in these busy corridors.

(IV) Frequency Reduction

If the average occupancy rate of an individual route is below 85% during the peakiest half-hour of the peak period, or below 30% during the off-peak period, TD will consider reducing bus deployment for the route.

Railway feeder routes, socially essential routes (such as bus routes serving remote areas or where the majority of the passengers are elderlies) with no alternatives available, and routes with peak headways at 15 minutes or more will be considered on individual merits.

(V) Route Cancellation / Amalgamation

If the utilisation of a low-frequency route does not improve (i.e. a bus route with average occupancy rate lower than 50% during peak hour, despite its headways having already been reduced to 15 minutes and 30 minutes during peak hours and off-peak hours respectively), TD will consider proposing cancellation of the route or amalgamation of the route with other route(s) in consultation with the bus operators.

(VI) Route Truncation

To optimise the use of resources, TD will review with relevant bus operators the feasibility of truncating routes, in particular those where majority of the passengers will have alighted en route. In formulating truncation proposals, TD will consider whether the number of affected

passengers is excessive (i.e. the occupancy rate of not more than 20% to 30% at the proposed truncated section during the peakiest hour); whether enough roadside space is available to accommodate the affected passengers for interchange; and whether terminal space for the changed route is available.

Factors to be Considered in Bus Service Rationalisation

In formulating rationalisation proposals, in particular those where drastic measures are to be adopted, TD would give due consideration to ensure that the interests of passengers would be taken care of and to minimise impact on them as far as possible. Factors that will be taken into account include:

- (a) nature of the services proposed to be cancelled: For services the utilisation rates of which have been consistently low but are socially essential (i.e. those serving remote areas or where majority of the passengers are elderly) and without reasonable alternatives, TD would consider other means to improve the service performance, such as through the use of vehicles with smaller carrying capacities, provision of alternatives such as introduction of replacement green minibus services, etc;
- (b) availability of reasonable alternatives: In proposing service cancellation, measures have to be taken to ensure that reasonable alternatives for the affected passengers are provided as far as possible. Factors such as the availability of spare capacity of alternative services in taking up the diverted passengers, the number and convenience of interchanges involved, the total journey time (including interchange and on-vehicle time) as compared with the existing services, etc, would be assessed carefully to ensure the reasonableness of the alternative services;
- (c) fare of the best available alternative service: The total journey fare as compared with the fare of the existing service would be assessed. Positive consideration to route cancellation will be given if the total journey fare is not higher than that of the service being considered for cancellation. The relevant bus operators would also be requested to consider the provision of fare concessions, such as interchange discounts, section fares, special discounts to elderly, and other incentives wherever appropriate and feasible, to provide attraction to the affected passengers to facilitate the implementation of the rationalisation proposals;

- (d) transport operational considerations: The proposed service rationalisation should not cause undue hardship to passengers or operational problems. Factors such as the number of passengers requiring interchanges, the availability of space for interchange activities, etc. would be carefully assessed. The deployment of the saved vehicles to improve services within the same district would also be spelt out where appropriate;
- (e) impact of the proposed service rationalisation on bus captains: Factors to be considered include the number of bus captains that would be affected by the proposed service rationalisation, and whether the excess bus captains could be absorbed through natural wastage or other means without causing any major staff issues; and
- (f) environmental benefits arising from the service rationalisation: Environmental benefits such as the reduction in emission, reduction of bus trips in busy corridors, etc. would be spelt out in the consultation documents for the public to take note of.