

**For Discussion
on 1 December 2009**

**Legislative Council
Panel on Security**

Replacement of Emergency Ambulances

Purpose

This paper updates Members on the progress of the replacement of emergency ambulances and the measures taken to improve the reliability of the ambulance fleet.

Background

2. At the Panel meeting on 27 October 2008, Members were briefed, vide LC Paper No. CB(2)129/08-09(15), on the Administration's plan to replace 196 emergency ambulances and the proposed measures to enhance the reliability of the ambulance fleet. This paper updates Members on the progress made since that meeting, including the future arrangement for the replacement of ambulances.

Replacement of Ambulances

Arrival of new ambulances

3. The Fire Services Department (FSD) currently operates a fleet of around 250 ambulances for its emergency ambulance service. In October 2008, the average age of these vehicles was 8.4 years. To address the problem of ageing ambulances, the Administration is in the process of replacing 196 ambulances with new vehicles. As at 20 November 2009, 92 new ambulances have already been delivered and commissioned to frontline service. Another eight new ambulances are expected to be commissioned before the end of 2009. The remaining 96 ambulances will be delivered in batches before the end of 2010, by which time over 80% of

FSD's ambulance fleet would have been replaced by new vehicles bringing the average age of the entire ambulance fleet down to below two years then.

Future arrangement for the replacement of ambulances

4. In the long term, we aim to put in place a steadier and more predictable ambulance replacement programme with a view to facilitating FSD to plan and manage its replacement orders over a reasonable timeframe. Under a steady programme, FSD proposes to replace roughly one-seventh¹ of its entire fleet on a routine basis annually. This should help maintain the average age of the ambulance fleet at a healthy level and improve the overall reliability of the fleet. If there is any unforeseen need to replace more ambulances in any particular year, FSD will put forward special requests with justifications .

5. In this regard, there will be understanding within the Administration as to the indicative funding required for supporting the steady programme on an annual basis, also projecting into a reasonable forward planning programme with the allocated resources for the steady vehicle replacement, the Director of Fire Services (DFS) will be given full discretion in determining which of the existing ambulances should be replaced with priority in a particular year, having regard to the vehicle condition upon examination by the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD), the advice of the Government Logistics Department (GLD) as well as FSD's operational needs. This will help ensure that individual ambulances most in need of replacement, even below the normal vehicle life of 7 years, will be accorded proper priority by DFS.

6. Given that FSD is in the process of replacing virtually its entire fleet as set out in paragraph 3 above, it is necessary to plan the next replacement cycle carefully and in advance to avoid the bunching of replacement orders again some six to seven years from now, and to move towards our ultimate goal of putting in place a steady and predictable replacement programme as mentioned above. In this regard, FSD will take the initiative to advance the replacement of some of its fleet ahead of their next normal replacement cycle in the coming few years so as to even out the next replacement peak.

¹ This has taken into account the fact that the normal serviceable life of an ambulance is about seven years.

7. Working towards the above direction, FSD will finalise an “indicative replacement schedule” (in terms of the number of ambulances to be replaced) for the next 15 years (covering the next two replacement cycles) in consultation with concerned bureaux and departments. We aim to have this schedule ready in late 2010, by which time the replacement of the bulk of existing vehicles would have been completed.

8. Meanwhile, starting from 2010-11, we will first introduce a new dedicated block-vote solely for the procurement of ambulances. Once the provision for 2010-11 is determined, FSD will be able to deploy the available resources with full discretion as outlined in paragraph 5 above.

9. In order to ensure that the new mechanism will remain effective in handling the ambulance replacement needs of FSD, the department will review the mechanism regularly in consultation with Security Bureau, Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, GLD, EMSD, etc.

Other Measures to Improve Reliability

10. We reported at the Panel meeting in October 2008 that the Administration had increased the frequency of preventive maintenance of ambulances from once every four months to once every three months starting from September 2008. Since then, FSD has in collaboration with EMSD, taken the following major measures to enhance the reliability of the ambulance fleet:

- (a) a bulk replacement programme was implemented between February and August 2009 to replace parts that are more susceptible to breakdowns;
- (b) a fault monitoring mechanism is established such that whenever there is premature failure of any ambulance part, EMSD will conduct an analysis of the problem and carry out thorough checking/repair of all other ambulances of the same model/years of service to prevent the occurrence of the same problem;
- (c) more technical staff are deployed by EMSD to undertake repair and maintenance of ambulances in Siu Ho Wan and Fan Garden

workshops. The service hours of the Tuen Mun and Fan Garden workshops have also been extended; and

- (d) two quick-repair workshops were set up at the Yuen Long Ambulance Depot and Shatin Ambulance Depot by EMSD in April and June 2009 respectively. By providing immediate service at a convenient location, these workshops are able to shorten the ambulance downtime in the New Territories Region considerably.

11. FSD has also issued guidelines on the ‘use and care of ambulances’ and some small tips on the checking of ambulances to all ambulance drivers to assist them in identifying possible problems with the ambulances at an early stage.

12. Since the implementation of the above measures, the breakdown rate of ambulances has improved. In the past six months (i.e. from May to October 2009), the average number of breakdowns per month was reduced by over 65% as compared with figures for the same period of the previous two years.

Advice Sought

- 13. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Security Bureau
Fire Services Department
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