

立法會

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Panel on Transport and Panel on Environmental Affairs

**Minutes of joint meeting held on
Friday, 22 January 2010, at 8:30 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

Members present : Members of the Panel on Transport

- * Hon CHEUNG Hok-ming, GBS, JP (Chairman)
- * Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo (Deputy Chairman)
- * Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, SBS, S.B.St.J., JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah, JP
- * Hon Miriam LAU Kin-ye, GBS, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
- * Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
- * Hon LEE Wing-tat
- * Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, SBS, JP
- * Hon KAM Nai-wai, MH
Hon IP Wai-ming, MH

Members of the Panel on Environmental Affairs

Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP (Chairman)
Hon CHAN Hak-kan (Deputy Chairman)
Hon WONG Yung-kan, SBS, JP
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon CHAN Kin-por, JP

(* Also members of the Panel on Environmental
Affairs)

- Members absent** : Members of the Panel on Transport
- Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP
- Members of the Panel on Environmental Affairs
- Hon James TO Kun-sun
Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
Hon Tanya CHAN
- Public officers attending** : Agenda item II
- Mr YAU Shing-mu, JP
Under Secretary for Transport and Housing
- Miss Janet WONG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport) 1
- Ms Carolina YIP
Deputy Commissioner / Transport Services & Management
Transport Department
- Miss Alice AU YEUNG
Principal Transport Officer/Bus and Railway 2
Transport Department
- Dr POON Kit
Under Secretary for the Environment
- Mr Carlson K S CHAN
Deputy Director of Environmental Protection (3)
- Mr MOK Wai-chuen
Assistant Director of Environmental Protection (Air Policy)
- Clerk in attendance** : Ms Joanne MAK
Chief Council Secretary (1)2

Staff in attendance : Ms Sarah YUEN
Senior Council Secretary (1)6

Miss Winnie CHENG
Legislative Assistant (1)5

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I Election of Chairman

Ms Audrey EU was elected Chairman of the joint meeting.

II Rationalization of bus routes to improve air quality

(LC Paper No. CB(1)916/09-10(01) — Administration's paper on rationalization of bus routes to improve air quality)

2. The Under Secretary for Transport and Housing (USTH) and the Under Secretary for the Environment (USEN) together briefed members on the Administration's paper setting out the background, planning principles and guidelines, and the proposed way forward in pursuing franchised bus service rationalization.

Prerequisites and incentives for rationalization efforts

3. Mr WONG Kwok-hing opined that rationalization of bus routes would not be acceptable unless any such proposal was supported by the relevant District Councils (DCs) and would not lead to increases in travelling expenses for residents of remote new towns due to the need to interchange between transport modes or routes to reach final destinations. He reminded the Administration that as a result of interchange between modes or routes, passengers would suffer from inconvenience and longer total journey time.

4. USTH responded that bus route adjustments were necessary particularly upon commissioning of new railway lines to minimize duplication of services in response to reduced demand for bus service. While the Administration would encourage bus companies to offer interchange discounts, rationalization of bus routes might lead to a slight increase in the travelling expenses of the passengers concerned. However, bus rationalization efforts would enhance efficiency of bus operation and in general convenience the travelling public. USTH added that the local community, in particular DCs, would always be consulted on major bus rationalization proposals, and proposals to which DCs strongly opposed would not be implemented.

5. Mr WONG Kwok-hing opined that even slight increases in travelling expenses were unacceptable because they could be significant in the eyes of the grassroots and would adversely affect their livelihood, especially as the Transport

Support Scheme (TSS) which covered the four designated remote districts was still under review and those admitted applicants who had already exhausted their entitlement to transport allowances could no longer benefit.

6. Mr WONG Kwok-hing, Mr Andrew CHENG, Mr KAM Nai-wai and Mr WONG Yung-kan all considered that incentives in the form of interchange discounts were necessary to facilitate the implementation of bus service rationalization. Mr CHENG and Mr KAM considered it necessary to offer distance-based section fares to compensate for interchange so necessitated, and indicated that the Administration could make this a contractual condition in bus franchises. The Deputy Commissioner for Transport/Transport Services & Management (DC for T/TS&M) responded that if section fares were offered as proposed and more short-haul passengers were induced to ride on long-haul buses, the frequency of these long-haul buses might need to be increased to the detriment of bus operation efficiency and the environment.

7. Mr Andrew CHENG questioned the above claim and suggested that the Administration should provide figures to substantiate that. In his view, without the offer of section fares, rationalization of bus routes would not succeed. Mr KAM Nai-wai urged the Administration to provide subsidies to franchised bus companies for the offer of greater interchange discounts.

8. USTH responded that interchange discounts ranging from \$0.1 to \$24 had been offered in the past and, as at present they were available on more than 400 bus routes. The Administration would strive to work out better concession schemes in this respect. DC for T/TS&M further explained that TD would discuss with the bus companies the interchange discounts offered to compensate for route cancellation/amalgamation, and the views of the DCs concerned would be taken into account when liaising with them on the relevant route cancellation/amalgamation proposals. Notwithstanding the long negotiation process, the Administration would endeavour to work out arrangements acceptable to all.

9. Mr CHAN Kin-por said that concerted efforts should be made by Legislative Council (LegCo) Panels concerned in pursuance of bus service rationalization. He opined that it was understandable that DCs were reluctant to accept bus rationalization proposals because their districts would be affected. The Administration should therefore provide incentives to facilitate the acceptance of rationalization proposals by the public. For example, the Administration might consider replacing any cancelled bus services with services operated by LPG public light buses.

10. Mr Albert CHAN expressed regret over the slow progress in bus service rationalization due to the Administration's failure to resolve objections from the affected districts through offering incentives such as fare discounts and journey time savings. He was particularly concerned about the lack of interchange discounts for routes operated by different bus companies, and urged the Administration to

actively resolve this issue. Mr CHAN opined that to enable rationalization efforts to bear fruit, the Administration had to first clear major obstacles such as the unavailability of interchange discounts among different bus companies, and to ensure that interchange discounts would be consistently provided across the board. If necessary, the provision of government subsidy should be considered. The Chairman shared his view and urged the Administration to negotiate for a breakthrough in this regard. DC for T/TS&M responded that interchange discounts jointly provided by different bus companies were already available on certain routes. The Administration would continue to liaise with the bus companies for further concessions.

Concerns about the implications of bus service rationalization

11. Ms LI Fung-ying opined that although bus route rationalization could bring environmental benefits and help relieve congestion, there was a need to assess and guard against its socio-economic impacts, including its impacts on the income and job opportunities of bus drivers. She considered that a full picture and estimates on the above implications should be given. Mr IP Wai-ming shared her concern about the impact on the job opportunities of bus drivers. Mr WONG Yung-kan also highlighted the importance of adopting a people-oriented approach when planning bus service rationalization, and stressed the need to note remote new town residents' need for direct point-to-point transport service. As such, to facilitate rationalization of bus service, railway lines should be extended to fill service gaps so arising.

12. USTH responded that when planning bus service rationalization, due regard would be given to the transport needs of the local community, and in some cases, bus service had been increased in response to local demand. He pointed out service reduction would mainly be introduced when there was duplication with railways, reduction of demand for bus services, where there was a need to reduce bus trips via the busy traffic corridors, and where bus service reduction would not affect the healthy competition among service providers to ensure commuters' choice.

13. As to the impacts of bus service rationalization on professional drivers, DC for T/TS&M assured members that the Administration was mindful of the impacts and, in preparation for likely bus service reduction in the past, it had made early arrangement with bus companies to plan the recruitment of new drivers to tie in with the natural wastage of existing drivers, so as to minimise possible staff redundancy when bus service was rationalized. The Administration would continue to liaise with bus companies to adopt similar mitigation measures should there be plans for further reduction in bus service in future.

Concerns about proposals on alternative public transport service/service improvement

14. Mr KAM Nai-wai opined that the rationalization of bus routes had achieved little effect over the past five years. Although the Administration had cancelled 46 bus routes, truncated 19 routes and reduced the frequency of 84 routes between 2004 and September 2009, the Administration had over the same period introduced 20 new routes and increased the frequency of 86 routes. He said that in order to effectively improve air quality, the Administration should encourage franchised bus companies to accelerate the progress of bus replacement.

15. USTH responded that the figures quoted above could only reflect partly the bus rationalization efforts. He pointed out that whilst endeavouring to enhance bus operation efficiency, there was also a need to meet bus passenger demand, in particular the demand in areas beyond the catchment area of existing railways. USTH and DC for T/TS&M further explained that the Administration was aware of the need to pursue measures in addition to bus route rationalization to reduce roadside emission. As such, apart from requiring bus companies to replace bus fleets according to an agreed timetable, the adoption of the latest commercially available and proven environment-friendly technologies for acquiring new buses had also been made a provision in all bus franchises. In fact, The Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited was already replacing their bus fleets with buses of Euro V standard although bus companies were statutorily required to replace their bus fleets with buses of Euro IV standards.

16. Mr WONG Yung-kan, Mr CHAN Hak-kan and Mr CHAN Kin-por concurred with Mr KAM Nai-wai on the need to accelerate bus replacement. Mr WONG further suggested that a timetable should be set for the replacement work. The Chairman asked whether the Government would consider subsidizing bus replacement in order to accelerate the replacement programme without affecting bus fares.

17. USTH responded that public discussion was necessary to weigh the additional public funding incurred by the Chairman's proposal against the improvement in air quality brought about by the proposal. The Chairman requested that, in order to facilitate public discussion, the Environment Bureau (ENB) should provide a paper on the environmental benefits that could be achieved if the bus replacement programme could be expedited and completed in five years.

18. Mr KAM Nai-wai proposed that instead of rationalizing bus service on a district basis, the Administration should restrict the number of buses going into the urban areas (e.g. Central) by requiring passengers going there to interchange to urban routes in the periphery.

19. To encourage local efforts in bus rationalization, Ms Miriam LAU urged the Administration to quantify the environmental benefits each bus rationalization proposal could bring, and proposed that a competition could be organized for the 18 districts in order to help promote the implementation of bus rationalization in each district. Mr CHAN Kin-por indicated support for the proposed competition. USTH agreed to actively consider the proposal. USEN also confirmed that the

Administration would be able to quantify the environmental benefits that bus rationalization could bring to a district.

20. Ms Miriam LAU further proposed that in future a flexible phased approach should be adopted in reducing bus service, such as by reducing the frequency only during off-peak periods first. DC for T/TS&M agreed with her on the need for a phased approach, and explained that the Administration had in fact always rationalized bus service by reducing frequency first, followed by route truncation as appropriate, and route cancellation would only be pursued when the above efforts had failed to improve utilization of the routes concerned. Taking the KMB Route 70 as an example, the negotiation for this bus service rationalization took years, and the local community would be prepared for the lengthy negotiation process and the phased approach in implementing the agreed service changes.

21. Though supportive of bus service rationalization to improve air quality, Mr CHAN Hak-kan considered it undesirable that all environmental initiatives seemed to require only the public to bear the cost so incurred while sparing the Administration and the bus companies. As a result, the public would inevitably resent such initiatives, and bus service rationalization could hardly make any progress. Mr CHAN opined that, instead of only reducing bus service, bus service rationalization should more preferably be achieved by designation of bus-bus interchange (BBI) stations at the exits of tunnels other than the Shing Mun Tunnel, coupled with the offer of section fares. USTH responded that the Administration was in fact working in this direction and the proposed arrangement was made where space permitted. For example, a new BBI stop had already been designated at the Lantau Link Toll Plaza to facilitate interchange between bus routes serving the North Lantau. DC for T/TS&M added that section fares were already offered on cross-harbour tunnel buses after crossing the harbour. The Administration would continue to encourage bus companies to expand the offer of section fares where possible.

22. Ms Cyd HO opined that bus service should more preferably be rationalized by maintaining or even increasing the frequency during peak periods, and reducing the frequency only during off-peak periods. In this connection, she pointed out that the bus operators had earlier revealed that they had difficulty in reducing bus deployment during off-peak periods because of the inadequacy of bus parking facilities. Apart from that, the Administration should adopt a different approach when rationalizing bus service in the urban area and in remote new towns in recognition of the different needs of the residents of the two areas, such that interchange discounts should be provided to residents in remote new towns. In response, USTH reiterated that bus service was rationalized in response to changes in passenger demand and as such, bus service had been enhanced in some areas in order to meet new passenger demand. DC for T/TS&M added that there were parking spaces in bus depots and bus termini for buses not in use during off-peak periods.

(To allow sufficient time for discussion, the Chairman extended the meeting by 15 minutes.)

The way forward

23. Mr Andrew CHENG opined that the public also supported better utilization of bus resources to help reduce the number of bus trips along busy corridors and hence traffic congestion and roadside air pollution. As such, the Administration should play an active co-ordinating role to forge a consensus in the community as well as a cross-party consensus in LegCo on bus service rationalization.

24. Highlighting the difficulties encountered in rationalizing bus routes and hence the lack of progress, Ms Miriam LAU concurred with Mr Andrew CHENG on the need to seek the co-operation among all political parties of LegCo in order to take forward any rationalization proposal. She pointed out that, as also set out in paragraph 20 of the Administration's paper, the main reasons for those DCs consulted to object rationalization proposals included such fundamental issues as "disagreement to the policy of using railways as the backbone of the transport system" and "reluctance to accept service reduction on routes which the local community has used for a long period of time despite reduction in passenger demand". In response, USTH highlighted that despite the above quoted reasons for objection from DCs, the Administration noted that the community at large supported the policy of using railways as the backbone of the transport system.

25. Commenting on Mr Andrew CHENG's proposal on concerted efforts above, Mr WONG Kwok-hing highlighted the need to take into account the views of those LegCo Members like him who did not belong to a political party. He further urged the Administration to first secure the support of DCs before consulting LegCo on any rationalization proposals. Ms Miriam LAU agreed with him on the need to secure the support of DCs first. In this connection, she suggested that relevant bureaux/departments such as the Home Affairs Department might need to be involved in the relevant consultation work. Mr Andrew CHENG proposed that there might be a need to hold joint meetings between LegCo Members and representatives of the traffic and transport subcommittees under DCs concerned.

Admin

26. The Chairman stressed that the offer of incentives seemed to be crucial to winning community support at the local level for the implementation of bus rationalization proposals. In this connection, she urged the Administration to actively explore the various suggested enhanced incentives (e.g. section fares, interchange discounts for routes operated by different bus companies, competition among the 18 districts as proposed by Ms Miriam LAU, and replacing cancelled bus services with green-minibus services) and the request for expediting the bus replacement programme. In response, DC for T/TS&M said that the Administration would continue to discuss and work out detailed proposals with the bus operators in the context of the current route development programme, and provide the details to DCs during the consultation process. The Chairman requested the Administration to actively explore incentives in terms of

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interchange discounts and section fares for the implementation of bus rationalization proposals, and to inform the Panels of the outcome in writing.

Admin

27. The Chairman further requested the Administration to provide a list of the bus rationalization proposals under contemplation, with details on their justifications, estimates of the environmental benefits so resulting, whether interchange discounts would be offered in return, and their likely impacts on bus drivers' employment, so that LegCo Members could follow up on these proposals. In response to the Chairman's request, USTH said that the Administration would consider including the requested details, as far as possible, in the bus route development programme papers to be submitted to DCs for consultation soon, and would provide a copy of the relevant DC papers to the Panels for information.

28. In response to the Chairman's proposal for the Administration to report back to the two Panels in late May 2010, USTH said that given that the annual consultations on bus route development programmes would be conducted from late January to April 2010, the Administration could plan on this basis, and would update the Panel nearer the time. Noting the Administration's response, the Chairman said that consideration would be given to holding a joint meeting again to discuss the papers to be submitted by the Administration.

Admin

29. The Chairman also suggested that the Administration should give a proposal on how to proceed with a view to forming a cross-district and cross-party consensus on the implementation of bus rationalization. She requested the Administration to provide a paper on this for members' consideration.

III Any other business

30. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 9:45 am.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
15 April 2010