

For information
on 12 July 2010

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Panel on Transport and Panel on Environmental Affairs Guidelines on Franchised Bus Service Rationalisation

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the factors the Administration will consider when implementing the planning guidelines on franchised bus service rationalisation.

Background

2. The Administration briefed the Legislative Council Joint Panel on Transport and Environmental Affairs (“the Joint Panel”) on 22 January 2010 on the background, planning principles and guidelines in pursuing franchised bus service rationalisation. At the meeting of the Joint Panel on 28 May 2010, the Administration reported on the results of Transport Department (TD)’s consultation with District Councils on the bus service rationalisation proposals in the Franchised Bus Route Development Programme (RDP) for 2010-11. The Joint Panel requested the Administration to review the planning guidelines for the pursuance of franchised bus service rationalisation by incorporating transport considerations and environmental benefits, impact on bus captain employment, and the characteristics of the traveling passengers.

Public Transport Policy

3. In pursuance of our policy to provide a safe, efficient and reliable transport system in a sustainable environment, public transport services are coordinated to better match demand and to minimise wasteful competition and duplication of services. Priority is given to railways which are environmentally friendly, efficient and reliable mass carriers. Franchised buses continue to play an important role in the transport system, and its role in serving as feeders to railways and providing services to areas without any convenient rail transport will be enhanced. In addition to the railways and franchised buses, public transport services

are also provided by minibuses, taxis, trams and ferries to serve specific areas of need.

4. The Administration's roles are to ensure that franchised bus operators maintain proper and efficient bus services for the community, and to regulate bus fares under well-established mechanisms to ensure that fare levels are reasonable while services can maintain their viability.

Planning Guidelines on Bus Service Rationalisation

5. Taking into account the current transport policy objectives, TD has reviewed the factors to be considered in implementing the "Guidelines on Service Improvement and Reduction in Bus Route Development programmes" (the "Guidelines"), a copy of which is at Annex for reference. While the Guidelines for service rationalisation will continue to be adopted in pursuance of our transport policy objectives, considerations will be given to balancing the impact of the proposals on the affected passengers with that of the benefits accrued for the community.

A. Frequency Reduction

6. Service reduction would be implemented on routes with relatively low occupancy rates to optimise resource utilisation, maintain service efficiency and viability. Nevertheless, frequency reduction in respect of railway feeder routes, socially essential routes, and routes with peak headways at 15 minutes or more would be considered on individual merits, taking into account the availability of alternatives, the passenger traveling pattern, population characteristics, etc.

B. Route Cancellation / Amalgamation / Truncation

7. If the utilisation of a low-frequency route does not improve, consideration would be given to the cancellation of the route, amalgamation of the route with other route(s), or truncation of the service to optimise the use of resources and enhance operating efficiency. In making such proposals, the following factors will be taken into account :

- (i) nature of the services proposed to be cancelled : for franchised bus services the utilisation rates of which have been consistently low but are socially essential 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 green minibus services, etc;

- (ii) availability of reasonable alternatives : availability of spare capacity of alternative services in taking up the diverted passengers, the number and convenience of interchanges involved, the total journey time as compared with the existing services, etc, would be considered to ensure the provision of reasonable alternative services for the affected passengers;
- (iii) fare of the best available alternative services : the total journey fare as compared with the fare of the existing service would be considered. The relevant bus operators would be requested to consider provision of interchange discounts wherever appropriate and feasible for the benefits of the interchanging passengers affected by the proposed service cancellation / amalgamation;
- (iv) transport operational considerations : factors such as the number of passengers requiring interchanges, the availability of space for interchange activities, etc. would be carefully assessed. The proposed service rationalisation should not cause undue operational problems. The deployment of the vehicles released for service improvement would also be spelt out where appropriate;
- (v) 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, whether the excess bus captains could be absorbed through natural wastage or other means that would not be causing any staff problems, etc; and
- (vi) 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 clearly spelt out in the consultation documents for the public to take note.

8. In pursuing the service rationalisation proposals, TD would assess carefully the impact of the proposals on different stakeholders, to ameliorate the services to passengers wherever appropriate and feasible, while bearing in mind the need for maintaining a sustainable and efficient public transport system.

For Information

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

Transport Department
July 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, 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

(III) 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 those routes. However, railway feeder routes, socially essential routes, and routes with peak headways at 15 minutes or more will be considered on individual merits.

(IV) 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%, 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), after evaluating the impact on passengers and taking account of alternatives available, including the service levels and fares of the alternatives.

(V) Route Truncation

To optimise the use of resources, TD will review with relevant bus operators the feasibility of truncating routes, in particular those where the majority of 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.

(VI) Reduction of Bus Trips along Busy Corridors

To improve the environment, enhance the efficiency of bus operation and relieve traffic congestion, 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 the new routes or enhanced bus services to operate via the busy corridors, the bus operators will have to reduce the same number of trips plying through the same corridor from other routes.