

For Discussion
25 February 2011

Legislative Council Panel on Transport

**An Update on Installation of Safety Equipment
on Public Light Buses**

Purpose

This paper updates Members on the progress made in the installation of safety equipment on public light buses (“PLBs”), and further actions which the Administration will take to enhance the safety and quality of PLB operation.

Installation of Safety Equipment on PLBs

2. The Administration reported, among other issues, to the Panel in November 2009 that it would require all PLBs to retrofit speed limiters, and all newly registered PLBs to install electronic data recording device (EDRD) (commonly known as vehicle monitoring system or “blackbox”) (LC Paper No. CB (1)430/09-10(03) refers). Paragraphs 3 to 4 below provide an update on progress made. The opportunity is also taken to brief the Panel, in paragraphs 5 to 9 below, on the progress regarding the retrofitting of seat belts on PLBs.

(i) Mandating all PLBs to Install Speed Limiters

3. The Transport Department (TD) has introduced new conditions to the vehicle licence and the passenger service licence of PLBs with effect from 7 June 2010 to require installation of speed limiter setting at the maximum speed at 80 kilometers per hour on newly registered PLBs, and retrofitting of such device on all existing PLBs. As at early February 2011, TD has inspected and sealed the speed limiters installed on about 2,830 PLBs, representing about 65% of all PLBs (4,350). So far, no major difficulties in the supply, installation, inspection and sealing of speed limiters have been encountered. There are 11 models of type-approved speed limiters for PLB owners to choose from. It is anticipated that by September 2011, all PLBs will be installed with a speed limiter. The TD will continue to closely monitor the progress of retrofitting of speed limiter on PLBs. We aim to introduce the necessary legislative amendment proposals in the 2010/11 legislative session.

(ii) Mandating EDRD as a Basic Equipment of Newly Registered PLBs

4. The EDRD records speed and maneuvering data of the vehicle. Under our proposal, all newly registered PLBs will be required to install EDRD. Depending on the outcome and cost-effectiveness of this new measure on newly registered PLBs, further consideration may be given to extending the installation of EDRD to existing PLBs, subject to technical feasibility and availability of suitable models of EDRD for retrofitting onto existing PLBs. The TD has formulated the specifications of EDRD required for use on PLBs in Hong Kong in consultation with PLB manufacturers and EDRD suppliers. The technical specifications will be stipulated in the Road Traffic (Construction and Maintenance of Vehicles) Regulations, Cap 374A. Our aim is to introduce the necessary legislative amendment proposals in the 2010/11 legislative session.

Installation of Passenger Seat Belts

5. All PLBs registered on or after 1 August 2004 are required under the Road Traffic (Safety Equipment) Regulations, Cap 374F to be equipped with passenger seat belts. As at end December 2010, about 2,440 PLBs, representing about 56% of the PLB fleet, have been fitted with passenger seat belts.

6. To assist and encourage owners of PLBs registered before 1 August 2004 to retrofit seat belts on their vehicles, the TD issued, in September 2006, four sets of retrofitting design plans that meet the safety requirements of PLB for reference by the owners. In addition, the Administration has, since 2002, launched different incentive schemes to encourage owners of PLB, among other commercial vehicles, to replace their old PLBs with new and greener models of PLBs, which are fitted with passenger seat belts. The current incentive scheme, which was introduced on 1 July 2010 (for application till 30 June 2013), provides a one-off grant to PLB owner to replace his Euro II diesel PLB with one that meets the Euro IV or more stringent emission standard.

7. In its investigation report published in November 2010, the Ombudsman's Office recommended the Administration to reconsider extending the requirement for installation of passenger seat belts to PLBs registered before 1 August 2004. TD is looking into the recommendation in consultation with the PLB trade. The trade has raised strong objection to the proposal. In gist, the trade's concerns are:

- (a) when the law on seat belts was passed in November 2002, the clear understanding then was that seat belts would be required only on newly registered PLBs;
- (b) given (a) above, any retrofitting requirement now would effectively label PLBs as an unsafe transport mode;
- (c) given that Government has already introduced (or will introduce) a number of safety measures targetting at PLBs, any further measure is unfair to the trade, and will create serious financial hardship to it; and
- (d) the retrofitting cost is high (about \$80,000 to \$100,000, including the cost for floor refurbishment). The estimated cost has not yet included revenue foregone due to the vehicle down time during retrofitting works.

8. In the light of the trade's concern, TD will continue to look into the feasibility of an arrangement under which retrofitting will be required only for PLBs which are registered after a certain date (such that PLBs which are too old and due to be replaced soon will be exempted), with a reasonable grace period for compliance. TD will continue to consult the trade closely in developing the proposal.

9. On financial implications, a rough estimate is that, if the retrofitting cost is to be wholly reflected in PLB fare, there will probably be an average fare increase of \$0.10 to \$0.20 per passenger per trip.

Way Forward

10. Different safety devices serve different functions. The ease with which they may be fitted or retrofitted to a PLB also differs. Speed limiters can effectively prevent drivers from driving above the speed limit set, and in turn could reduce the incidence and severity of traffic accidents. We have therefore accorded priority to their installation on new and existing PLBs alike. As for EDRD, the data stored in the device is useful for fleet management and accident investigation. We will therefore be requiring all new PLBs to be installed with the device whilst continuing to study the feasibility of retrofitting. As to the retrofitting of passenger seat belts, since seat belts are effective in reducing the severity of accidents in the event of accidents, we will continue to pursue this issue actively in close consultation with the trade.

Other Measures

11. To further enhance the safety and quality of PLB operation, the Administration also aims to introduce the following legislative amendment proposals in the 2010/11 legislative session:

- (a) to require applicants of PLB driving licence to attend a mandatory pre-service training course that focuses on improving the driving attitude of new PLB drivers; and
- (b) to require the display of PLB driver identity plate inside the vehicle compartments while service is being provided.

Advice Sought

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

**Transport and Housing Bureau
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