

For discussion
on 5 December 2011

Legislative Council Panel on Transport Elderly-friendly Bus Design

Purpose

This paper provides Members with information on the existing and planned barrier-free facilities on franchised buses for elderly passengers.

Background

2. There are at present about 5,800 licensed franchised buses operating under six franchises by five bus operators, namely, The Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited (“KMB”), Long Win Bus Company Limited (“LW”), New World First Bus Services Limited (“NWFB”), Citybus Limited (Hong Kong Island and Cross-Harbour Routes) (“CTB (F1)”), Citybus Limited (Airport and North Lantau Bus Network) (“CTB (F2)”), and New Lantao Bus Company (1973) Limited (“NLB”).

3. Apart from meeting the construction and maintenance requirements under the law¹, the franchised bus operators conduct regular reviews on the design of their buses to enhance the level of comfort to passengers. One of the areas is to improve bus design and to provide facilities that meet the needs of the elderly and persons with disabilities (“PwD”). All franchised bus operators have also undertaken to adopt bus designs which can provide passengers (including the elderly and PwD) with a safe, comfortable and user-friendly environment when acquiring new buses.

Facilities for elderly passengers on existing buses

4. Most of the franchised buses in service are equipped with some, if not all, of the following features to provide a barrier-free travelling environment for elderly passengers :

¹ The Road Traffic (Construction and Maintenance of Vehicles) Regulations (Cap. 374A) stipulate the requirements for the design and construction of franchised buses.

(a) Low-floor and wheelchair-accessible

As at end October 2011, about 3,500 or 60% of the franchised buses are wheelchair-accessible. These buses, with low floor and wide entrance, enable easy boarding by the elderly. For passengers that need to travel on wheelchair, they can also use the ramp provided on the low-floor buses to board the buses with ease and lock their wheelchair at designated wheelchair space on board. The franchised bus operators have committed that all new buses to be purchased in future would be wheelchair-accessible². Backrest and restraint lap belt are normally installed at the wheelchair space so that the wheelchair can be fixed at the space safely. According to the current bus replacement plan, it is expected that all franchised buses will be low-floor and wheelchair-accessible by around 2015/16. The access ramp and wheelchair space of a low-floor bus are shown in **Photographs 1 and 2** in the Annex.

(b) Priority seats for passengers in need

In general, at least four priority seats are designated in the lower deck of a double-deck bus. These seats are located near the exit door to facilitate the elderly to alight the bus easily. Stickers are put up on nearby windows reminding passengers to offer their seats to the passengers in need. Details are shown in **Photograph 3** in the Annex.

(c) Easily reached stop button

On average, there are eight stop buttons installed in the lower deck of every double-deck bus. Passengers (including the elderly) can easily reach one of the buttons to call for alighting. In addition, low-level handrail with stop buttons at the priority seats for the elderly and PwD is now a standard feature on all new buses, making a total of nine to 11 stop buttons in the lower deck of new buses. Please see **Photographs 4 and 5** in the Annex for details.

(d) Continuous railing

To help reduce the chance of elderly passengers falling due to a loss of balance on board, the bus specifications of KMB, LW, CTB and NWFB have included continuous railing, guiding elderly passengers

² Since low-floor buses are not suitable for operations on some roads with steep gradient and sharp bends in South Lantau, NLB will procure low-floor buses for operation on bus routes other than those which need to operate on the relevant roads in South Lantau.

to the priority seats, as a basic feature on new buses as far as practicable since late 2010. This new design allows passengers to hold on to a handrail as they move towards the priority seats or the inner part of the bus. The design of the continuous railing is shown in **Photographs 6 and 7** in the **Annex**.

(e) Handrails at exit doors

Some franchised buses have already been equipped with handrails at the exit doors at a lower position for easy alighting. The relevant franchised bus operators have started retrofitting handrails at exit doors for the remaining buses where technically feasible and will include such requirement in the specifications for new buses. The handrails at exit door are shown in **Photograph 8** in the **Annex**.

(f) Bus stop announcement system with visual and/or audio display

At present, about 5,000 (or 85%) franchised buses, including the entire fleet of KMB, LW and CTB (F1), have been equipped with the visual and/or audio (in Cantonese, Putonghua and English) bus stop announcement system. As for CTB (F2), NWFB and NLB, they are now conducting trials on the installation of the bus stop announcement system on their fleets. The target is to complete the installation on all buses in their fleets by end 2012. An on-board bus stop announcement panel is shown in **Photographs 9 and 10** in the **Annex**.

(g) Other passenger facilities on board

Apart from the above facilities, there are some other barrier-free features to ensure a safer and more pleasant bus journey for the elderly and PwD. These are standard provisions on new buses, including:

- i. non-slippery bus floor material;
- ii. widened gangway to facilitate elderly passengers on crutches and wheelchair users;
- iii. high contrast step-edge to alert the elderly to mind their steps;
- iv. closing door buzzer and warning lamp at exits to enhance the safety of the elderly when alighting the bus; and
- v. larger electronic destination and route number display panels on the front, side and rear of the bus to facilitate the elderly to board the correct bus.

The above features are shown in **Photographs 11 to 16** in the **Annex**.

(h) Publicity on passenger safety

Passenger safety is the prime concern of the Administration and the franchised bus operators. An Announcement of Public Interest (“API”) to remind passengers of safety on board buses, including “holding onto handrails” and “no standing on stairway” was produced in 2006. Besides broadcasting on TV, radio and on board buses, the API is distributed to schools, elderly homes and community centres for viewing. The poster to promote the API is shown in **Photograph 17** in the Annex.

Improvements to Bus Design and Elderly-friendly Bus

5. The franchised bus operators constantly receive suggestions from the public and collect views through their hotlines, passenger liaison groups, the Transport Department’s Working Group on Access to Public Transport by PwD etc. in reviewing and improving the bus design with a view to making their buses more user-friendly and more elderly-friendly. When acquiring new buses and setting specifications for the acquisition of buses, the franchised bus operators will adopt bus designs with barrier-free and elderly-friendly features as far as reasonably practicable. The franchised bus operators are pursuing improvements in the following areas :

(a) Improvement to the priority seats

Improvements are being made to the design of priority seats to make them more eye-catching and visible. KMB and LW have started a renovation programme by installing newly designed, eye-catching green colour headrest on the priority seats of some of their double-deck buses since June 2011 for easy recognition by passengers. Subject to the feedback of passengers, KMB and LW will extend their renovation programme to their whole bus fleets gradually. On the other hand, CTB, NWFB and NLB are considering renovation programmes by replacing the cushions of their priority seats with different colours. The newly designed, eye-catching colour headrests in a KMB bus are shown in **Photograph 18** in the Annex.

(b) Improvement to the passenger information at bus stops/termini

Franchised bus operators are pursuing plans to enhance the provision of bus service information to passengers at bus stops and termini by installing bus service information display panels showing route and

fare information, and setting up customer service centres. For illustration, a bus service information display panel at a bus terminus is shown in **Photograph 19** in the **Annex**.

Conclusion

6. All franchised bus operators are committed to making continuous improvement in the bus design to enable passengers to travel comfortably and safely. The Administration will work together with the franchised bus operators to expedite the implementation of the planned improvements and actions, keep track of the best practices of bus safety as well as barrier-free designs and features, and adopt new elderly-friendly bus design in Hong Kong as far as practicable.

Transport and Housing Bureau
Transport Department
November 2011