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Secretary General
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Legislative Council Complex
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(Attn: Ms Sophie LAU)
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3 March 2014

Dear Ms LAU,

Thank you for your letter of 16 January, enclosing with it the letter of 13 January from the Hon WU Chi-wai to the Chairman of the Panel on Transport of the Legislative Council (“LegCo”) about the operation of public light buses (“PLBs”). Further to our earlier acknowledgement, please find below a detailed reply.

Under the current public transport policy, railway is the backbone of our public transport system complemented by other public transport modes. Among them, PLBs play an active role by, amongst others, providing feeder service to public transport interchanges. There is a cap on the total number of PLBs to avoid excessive competition and duplication of services.

Our response to the issues raised in the letter is as follows –

(1) Number of GMB routes cancelled or altered

From 2012 to 2013, the Transport Department (“TD”) received cancellation applications for a total of 16 green minibus (“GMB”) routes. Approval has been given to cancel eight of them as alternative service is

available. Meanwhile, the routeing or service arrangement for the remaining eight routes is enhanced. During the same period, TD also approved the alteration of routeing for another 34 GMB routes.

(2) PLB seating capacity

In order to assess whether the service level of various PLB routes can meet passenger demand, TD conducts comprehensive survey on PLB service regularly. Survey result shows that PLB service is able to meet passenger demand in general. We note that the PLB trade would like to increase PLB seating capacity to help meet passenger demand during peak hours and increase income. However, increasing the seating capacity would lead to an increase in the total capacity of PLBs. As the total patronage is unlikely to grow significantly, any increase in the total capacity of PLBs might trigger unhealthy competition among the various public transport modes and affect their operational sustainability and financial viability. From the viewpoint of the overall supply and demand of public transport service as well as the sustainable development of the trade, any proposed change in PLB seating capacity has to be considered carefully. In fact, to help meet passenger demand of individual GMB routes during peak hours, TD will try its best to assist operators in making flexible arrangements where feasible. This would increase the capacity of certain GMB routes during peak hours. The trade may approach TD for it.

(3) Modus operandi of GMBs

GMBs have to provide service according to the schedule of service approved by TD. The routeing, service frequency, fare and number of vehicles to be deployed are specified. Apart from the GMB stops and drop-off/pick-up locations specified in the schedule of service, GMBs may pick up or drop off passengers at locations along their routeing which are not designated as restricted zones as long as the Road Traffic Ordinance is not contravened.

(4) Converting franchised bus routes into GMB routes

When planning for bus service changes, TD will take into account the existing public transport service, including the operation of PLBs, so as to enhance the overall efficiency of the road-based public transport network. In view of the GMB trade's opinions, we will actively consider the feasibility of

converting certain franchised bus routes with lower patronage into GMB routes.

(5) Extension of the Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities (“the Scheme”) to GMBs

To encourage the elderly and persons with disabilities to participate more in community activities and build a caring and inclusive society, TD has assisted the Labour and Welfare Bureau (“LWB”) to launch the Scheme in phases on MTR lines, franchised buses and ferries since last year. About 1.02 million elderly people aged 65 or above and 130 000 eligible persons with disabilities in Hong Kong are able to travel on most routes of the above public transport services at a concessionary fare of \$2 per trip. As announced by the Chief Executive in his Policy Address in January, the Scheme will be extended to GMBs in phases from the first quarter of 2015 onwards. The Scheme is implemented through operators’ voluntary participation. So far, about 90% of GMB operators have indicated their willingness to participate.

According to LWB, when deciding the coverage of the Scheme, consideration was given to the past deliberations of the Subcommittee to Study the Transport Needs and Provision of Concessionary Public Transport Fares for Persons with Disabilities (“the Subcommittee”) formed under LegCo in 2005. The Subcommittee opined that recipients under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme aged between 12 and 64 with 100% disabilities and recipients of Disability Allowance in the same age group would be the most in need of assistance and encouragement for social integration. LWB further pointed out that the purpose of the Registration Cards for People with Disabilities (“RC”) is to enable cardholders to produce RC, when necessary, as a proof of their disability status to facilitate the provision of prompt and appropriate assistance to them. RC is not associated with the provision of any welfare benefits. The objective and target service users of RC are different from those of the Scheme.

(6) The Fourth Comprehensive Transport Study

Upon the completion of the study for the Review and Update of the Railway Development Strategy 2000 later this year and having regard to the progress of the planning and implementation of major transport infrastructure

projects, the Government will prepare for the study on the overall long-term development and arrangement of public transport to formulate future strategies for public transport.

PLB service plays an important role in our public transport system. TD has all along been assisting the GMB trade to improve their operating environment through various measures such as rationalisation of GMB routes and adjustments to service timetables to meet passenger demand and enhance operational efficiency. TD also encourages the trade to explore sources of non-fare box revenue (such as advertisements on vehicle bodies or inside vehicle compartments) to increase their income. The Government will closely monitor the operating situation of the trade to facilitate its healthy development.

Yours sincerely,



(Jason CHAN)

for Secretary for Transport and Housing

c.c.

Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Attn: Mr Ricky CHENG)

Commissioner for Transport (Attn: Mr Albert SU)