

香港特別行政區政府

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

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18 February 2014

Ms. Sophie LAU
Clerk to Panel on Transport
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Ms. LAU,

Request for Shelving Pre-service Courses for Public Light Bus Drivers

The Panel on Transport sent a letter to this Bureau on 28 January 2014, relaying the objection of the Hong Kong Scheduled (GMB) Licensee Association to the introduction of pre-service courses for public light bus (“PLB”) drivers. Our reply is set out below.

Background on the introduction of pre-service courses for PLB drivers

Following two fatal traffic accidents involving PLBs in June and July of 2009, the Transport Department (“TD”) put forward several measures to enhance the safety of PLB operation in August 2009 and consulted the PLB trade representatives at their regular meetings. Such measures include making legislative amendments to require an applicant for a PLB driving licence to complete a pre-service course before the issuance of the licence. The Government submitted to the Legislative Council in July 2011 a proposal to amend the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap 374) to implement the pre-service courses and other measures on enhancing the operational safety of PLBs. The Amendment Ordinance, i.e. the Road Traffic (Amendment) Ordinance 2012, was passed by the Legislative Council on 29 March 2012. The Government did not specify the implementation date to introduce the pre-service courses for PLB drivers at that time as the requirement for

mandatory attendance and completion of such courses by PLB driving licence applicants can only take effect after the selection and designation of pre-service training schools as well as formulation of the corresponding code of practice, which would take some time to finish.

Purposes of pre-service courses

The pre-service courses are introduced to enhance the awareness of safe driving of new PLB drivers and improve their service attitude, with a view to providing safer and better public transport service. The eligibility for driving PLBs of incumbent drivers and existing holders of PLB driving licenses (about 182,000) will not be affected by the introduction of the pre-service courses. They are not required to attend the courses. We believe that, in the long run, the introduction of pre-service courses will have a positive impact on the continuous enhancement of the safety of PLB service.

The contents of pre-service course cover basic knowledge and legislation on PLB operation, occupational health, construction of PLB, knowledge on driving and road safety, handling of traffic accidents and emergencies, quality customer service and handling of complaints. All these topics are relevant to the daily work of new PLB drivers and things they ought to know. Through the pre-service courses, applicants for PLB driving licences can have more comprehensive and deeper understanding on these topics. This will not only help them in their future work as PLB drivers but also relieve the operational workload (e.g. handling of passengers' complaints) and financial burden (e.g. damages incurred by traffic accidents and vehicle insurance fees) of PLB operators. We believe that the courses can help reduce traffic accidents and the number of complaints involving PLBs.

Views of the trade on pre-service courses and Government responses

On grounds of road safety and the reasons mentioned above, we will continue to take forward the introduction of pre-service courses as this is one of the measures for enhancing the safety of PLB operation under the Road Traffic (Amendment) Ordinance 2012. It is incumbent upon the Government to implement the relevant requirement.

TD has maintained contacts with the red minibus and green minibus ("GMB") trades regarding the proposed introduction of pre-service courses, briefed them of the work progress and listened to their views. Trade representatives acknowledge that the courses can improve the driving attitude and quality of service of PLB drivers. However, they are worried that the introduction of the courses might reduce the number of applicants for PLB

driving licences, given the existing recruitment difficulties and ageing problem of incumbent drivers. They have also commented that since the requirement for mandatory completion of the pre-service courses is only applicable to PLB driving licence applicants instead of other commercial vehicle drivers, the PLB trade is unfairly treated and their image might be undermined.

Currently, there are 4,350 PLBs with about 182,000 holders of valid PLB driving licences. TD has responded to the views of the trade on various occasions and stressed that the introduction of pre-service courses would not label PLBs as an unsafe transport mode. Moreover, pre-service courses for PLB drivers have been included under Skills Upgrading Scheme Plus by the Employees Retraining Board. Trainees may apply for full or partial course fee waiver, depending on their income. To help the GMB trade ease their problem of manpower shortage, TD has assisted the trade to participate in recruitment activities organised by the Labour Department and provided the trade with information on employing ethnic minorities so as to widen their channels for recruiting new drivers. Given that GMB operators have offered higher salaries to retain incumbent drivers and attract new recruits, and that operational expenses other than salaries are on the rise, TD will, upon receipt of applications for fare increase from GMB operators, pay due regard to the actual operation of the GMB routes concerned and consider granting approval for upward fare adjustment so as to ensure healthy development of the GMB trade.

Yours sincerely,

(Kwong Ka-yin)
for Secretary for Transport and Housing

c.c. Transport Department