道路安全研究小組
Community for Road Safety

Comments on the Scope of the Public Transport Strategy Study (PTSS) for Legco's Panel for Transport

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We read with great interest Government's Legco paper on the forthcoming PTSS. While this study is considered timely and necessary, we wish to point out that the proposed scope does not cover a number of important topics.

Safety Performance and Risks of Public Transport

Over the years, measures have been introduced to increase the safety performance of public transport. Nevertheless, many pressing safety issues are yet to be addressed. Based on published accident statistics, roughly one quarter of buses, public light buses and taxis are involved in injury accidents every year and the rate has increased by 30% for taxis and buses in the last ten years. The safety of public transport concerns not only passengers inside the vehicle, but also waiting passengers and third parties including pedestrians. The reputation of aggressive driving behaviour among a certain proportion of taxi and minibus or bus drivers is not unfounded. We estimate that in comparison with private cars, taxis and particularly public light buses have a much higher rate of injuring pedestrians for the same distance of travel, despite these being driven by professional drivers. In addition, every year there are many hundreds of casualties involving bus passengers losing balance and many would have gone unreported. Elderly passengers are particularly vulnerable when taking buses, yet their population is growing rapidly. Certain passenger seats entail significantly higher risk for severe casualties, notably upper front rows of double decker buses due to lack of crumple zones and rear seats of minibuses in case of rear-front collisions. Compliance rate of seat belt wearing is low for buses and minibuses and not all these vehicles using high speed roads are equipped with seat belts. Many major roads in Hong Kong alongside steep hillside or cliffs are not equipped with safety barriers, resulting in a very high risk of catastrophic accident if a bus runs off the road and rolls over.

Opportunities and Strategy for Better Safety

With the advent of new measures or practices, the PTSS should examine all opportunities afresh to improve safety and quality of service. Some examples are:

- Black box and GPS driver monitoring system – systematic monitoring of driving parameters such as speed, acceleration, braking etc to reduce the risk of all types of accidents. Such system would be operated in conjunction with new protocols e.g. speed restriction on high risk road sections and urban streets, gentler acceleration/deceleration values etc.
- ISO39001 "Road Traffic Safety Management"- a new member of ISO launched in 2012 to target at transport fleets of public transport operators and the logistic industries. This would follow the steps of other ISO quality assurance systems in the future to help deliver far more responsible transport operation from the road safety perspective.
- Blind spot monitoring system – sensors, CCTV cameras, improved mirrors and intelligent technologies to better manage the safety of turning and reversing.
- Easy to read digital speedometer and intelligent reminder system – to enable better

awareness among public transport drivers.

- Energy absorbing bollards- an example of emerging products to protect both waiting bus passengers and occupants of errant vehicles at bus stops alongside high speed traffic.

Role of Walking and Cycling

Public transport should not be considered as the ultimate solution for passenger transport demands. In fact, most public transport users will continue their trip on foot and possibly on a bicycle. Attempts to over-rely on motorized public transport will invariably generate undesirable side-effects such as air pollution, accidents and congestion. Pleasant and safe walking environment will encourage pedestrians to walk longer, thereby enabling more efficient public transport while walking is a healthy exercise. In spite of ongoing greening and provision of pedestrian infrastructures, Hong Kong is much lagging behind modern Europe in terms of lower urban speed limits and area-wide traffic calming which are crucial for an attractive and safe pedestrian environment. While a better pedestrian environment could well be reviewed separately, the PTSS should at least address the interface between public transport and walking or cycling.

Quality Public Transport Facilities

Bus and minibus stands are at best basic and at worst unacceptable in terms of aesthetics and the information they provide. While good quality bus shelters have been introduced by bus operators, these also serve a primary purpose for advertising. As a result, these are not necessarily designed with safety in mind along major routes as waiting passengers are exposed to high speed traffic. On the other hand, individual operators having their own shacks with a diversity of “furniture” occupying valuable space at public transport termini. The ability of public transport operators to convey timely and quality passenger information during incidents is also called into question. Without Government’s intervention, operators will continue to invest little into passenger facilities and services.

Recommendations to Legco

We consider that the above topics are core issues for our future public transport system. Their omission will undermine the completeness of the PTSS. We therefore recommend Legco’s Panel for Transport to urge Government to incorporate into the PTSS study Brief these missing topics, namely:

1. Safety performance and future safety strategy for public transport

2. Integration of public transport with walking and cycling

3. Strategy for quality public transport facilities