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Panel on Transport
Meeting on 15 January 2016

**Background brief on the franchise for the bus network of
the Kowloon Motor Bus Co. (1933) Limited**

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the franchise for the bus network of the Kowloon Motor Bus Co. (1933) Limited ("KMB"). It also summarizes the major views and concerns expressed by the Legislative Council ("LegCo") Members on the subject in the past discussions.

Background

Service of KMB

2. According to the Administration¹, franchised buses are the largest road-based carriers and account for 31% of the total daily public transport volume in 2014. Bus services in Kowloon and the New Territories are largely provided by KMB. At the end of 2014, KMB was operating 309 bus routes in Kowloon and the New Territories and 61 cross-harbour routes (51 of which were run jointly with another operator). KMB had a licensed fleet of 3 852 buses, of which 2 988 were wheelchair-accessible low-floor vehicles. KMB recorded 955 million passenger trips in 2014 (a daily average of 2.62 million passenger trips) covering 284.73 million kilometres of roads.

¹ Source: Chapter 13 – Transport of the yearbook "Hong Kong 2014"

Bus franchises

3. According to the Administration², there are five grantees operating six bus franchises in Hong Kong. The five grantees are KMB, Citybus Limited, New World First Bus Services Limited ("NWFB"), Long Win Bus Company Limited ("LW") and New Lantao Bus Company (1973) Limited ("NLB"). Citybus Limited is operating two franchises, one for the Hong Kong Island and cross-harbour bus network ("Citybus (Franchise 1)") and the other for the Airport and North Lantau bus network ("Citybus (Franchise 2)").

4. Under section 5 of the Public Bus Services Ordinance ("the Ordinance") (Cap. 230), the Chief Executive in Council may grant to a company a franchise conferring the right to operate a public bus service. Section 6 of the Ordinance stipulates that a franchise may be granted for a period not exceeding ten years³. Under section 12 of the Ordinance, a grantee of a bus franchise is required to maintain a proper and efficient public bus service to the satisfaction of the Commissioner for Transport ("C for T") at all times during the franchise period.

5. The Administration's key consideration in granting or extending a bus franchise is whether a grantee is capable of providing a proper and efficient public bus service. According to the established practice, a grantee who is able to prove its ability to provide a proper and efficient service, and is willing to further invest in franchised bus operation may be considered for being granted a new franchise for a period of ten years. As franchised bus operation is capital and investment intensive, a longer franchise period (say, ten years) would facilitate a grantee's long-term planning and service development.

6. The current franchise of KMB commenced on 1 August 2007 and will expire at 0400 hours on 1 July 2017.

² Source: The Administration's paper on "Franchises of Citybus Limited (Franchise for Hong Kong Island and Cross-Harbour Bus Network) and New Lantao Bus Company (1973) Limited" issued in June 2014 [LC Paper No. CB(1)1621/13-14(04)]

³ If the Administration has yet to decide on the long-term arrangements for a franchise, the Chief Executive in Council may extend an existing franchise for a further period not exceeding two years as a buffer. Meanwhile, a grantee may request and the Chief Executive in Council may extend an existing franchise for a further period not exceeding five years.

Past discussions on bus franchises by Members

7. Members expressed the following major concerns while discussing matters relating to the granting/renewal of bus franchises.

Fare concessions

8. Members of the Panel on Transport ("the Panel") had all along been concerned about the bus fares and requested the bus companies to offer more fare concessions to better meet passengers' needs.

9. When the Panel discussed the granting of the existing franchises of NWFB, LW and Citybus (Franchise 2) in 2011 and 2012, members urged that the Administration should add some fare-related requirements while discussing the franchise renewal with bus companies. These fare-related requirements included fare reduction or concession schemes; more bus-bus interchange schemes; introducing inter-company bus-bus interchange schemes; fare discounts/monthly tickets for frequent users; more section fares; and fare concessions for persons with disabilities, the elderly and students.

10. The Panel discussed the granting of the existing franchises of Citybus (Franchise 1) and NLB at its meetings on 23 June 2014 and 17 July 2015. During deliberations, members suggested providing fare concessions to passengers under the proposed new franchises. They also considered that bus-bus interchange concessions should be provided to passengers and passed the following motion at the meeting on 23 June 2014 –

"That this Panel requests that while the Government grants new franchises to any bus companies, the companies concerned must provide interchange concessions at designated bus-bus interchanges in the form of a free ride offered to passengers on the second leg journey upon interchange to bus routes with same fares."

Enhancing standard of bus service

11. During the Fifth LegCo, Members raised concern over the performance of franchised bus service at the Panel meetings, special Finance Committee meetings as well as the Council meetings. They urged the Administration to take the opportunity of franchise renewal to require service improvement by bus companies, including provision of

real-time bus service information to passengers, provision of priority seats and barrier-free facilities, improvements in bus lost trips as well as bus service frequencies during peak periods.

Provision of real-time bus service information to passengers

12. According to the Administration⁴, the Transport Department ("TD") had all along encouraged franchised bus companies to make use of information technology in providing passengers with service information. The relevant clauses had been updated in the new franchises of NWFB, LW and Citybus (Franchise 2) commencing in 2013 to enhance the regulatory power of C for T over the type, form and manner through which service information was provided by bus companies to passengers. Revised franchise clauses specifically required the provision of service information by bus companies at their websites in accordance with the requirements of C for T. Furthermore, these companies had committed to provide passenger information and enquiry system via the internet and smartphone applications, and to further enhance the system as necessary in future. The Administration planned to include similar clauses and request the franchisees to make similar service commitments in the other three franchises, i.e. Citybus (Franchise 1), NLB and KMB, when they expired in 2016/2017.

13. In addition, the Administration⁵ also advised that franchised bus companies were providing information on service hours, frequencies, termini, en route stops, full and section fares, etc. of individual bus routes for passengers through their websites and smartphone applications. Furthermore, KMB and LW had started to provide passengers with real time arrival information through their websites and smartphone applications since early 2015. Real time arrival information was available for over 360 routes (or around 70% of the companies' routes) so far, and the service would be extended to the remaining routes progressively. Besides, the majority of the bus service information display panels at public transport interchanges/bus termini as well as all panels at bus-bus interchanges and bus shelters were provided by KMB and LW. Franchised bus companies would continue to install information display panels at appropriate locations.

⁴ Source: The Administration's press release on "LCQ20: Franchised bus services" issued on 18 December 2013

⁵ Source: The Administration's press release on "LCQ21: Bus service information" issued on 2 December 2015

Provision of priority seats and barrier-free facilities

14. In response to Members' concern, the Administration⁶ explained that major public transport modes, such as franchised buses, had designated priority seats for priority use by people in need, including the elderly, people with disabilities, pregnant women and commuters travelling with young children. As regards franchised buses, except for a small number of single-deck buses with only two priority seats, all franchised buses had four priority seats near the exit door.

15. Furthermore, an additional clause had been included in the three franchises, i.e. NWFB, LW and Citybus (Franchise 2), commencing in mid-2013 to empower TD to require bus companies to enhance safety facilities and design. This included purchasing new buses with barrier-free and elderly-friendly design. The Administration would incorporate a similar provision to promote barrier-free facilities in the other three bus franchises, i.e. Citybus (Franchise 1), NLB and KMB, after the current ones expired in 2016/2017.

16. According to the Administration in July 2014, different public transport modes had put in place suitable barrier-free facilities inside their compartments and at stations/platforms/piers based on the actual situation. For franchised buses, about 75% of the bus fleet comprised low-floor buses. Except for those buses running along road sections with steep gradient and sharp bend on Lantau Island, all buses newly purchased would be of a low-floor design to replace the old ones which were not low-floor. The replacement was expected to be completed within three years. Major barrier-free facilities provided by franchised buses included wheelchair parking space.

Improvement in bus lost trips

17. Members expressed grave concern over the problem of bus lost trips. According to the Administration⁷, TD had reviewed the sanction regime in respect of bus lost trips in response to the Ombudsman's recommendations of its investigation on TD's mechanism of monitoring the frequency of franchised bus services in 2014. As far as the statutory mechanism under the Ordinance was concerned, if a franchised bus company failed to comply with the Ordinance or franchise requirements

⁶ Source: The Administration's press release on "LCQ5: Priority seats and barrier-free facilities provided by public transport modes" issued on 9 July 2014

⁷ Source: The Administration's paper on "Public Transport Strategy Study – Franchised Bus Service" issued in March 2015 [LC Paper No. CB(4)655/14-15(04)]

or failed to provide a proper and efficient service, the Chief Executive in Council might impose penalty on the company concerned. The Chief Executive in Council might also revoke its operating right on individual routes or the entire franchise.

18. As for the administrative arrangements, TD would normally follow up the matter with the franchised bus companies in writing or by issuing warning letters. The circumstances warranting the issue and the number of such warning letters would be taken into consideration when a franchise was due for renewal. Past experience suggested that the above mechanism had been working well. The franchised bus companies would take letters or warning letters from TD seriously and take active follow-up actions on those letters.

Improvement in bus service frequencies during peak periods

19. In response to Members' suggestion about improving bus service frequencies of certain routes during peak periods, the Administration⁸ advised that when adjusting bus service frequencies, TD and bus companies would make reference to TD's Guidelines on Service Improvement and Reduction in Bus Route Programme ("the Guidelines") released in 2010 after consultation with LegCo. According to the Guidelines, a reference indicator for frequency improvement was that the occupancy rate of the route reached 100% during the busiest half-hour of the peak period and 85% during that one hour, or reached 60% during the busiest one hour of the off-peak period. Meanwhile, the maximum carrying capacity was a sum of the total number of seats and number of standees on the lower deck under an average passenger density level of six persons per square metre. Generally speaking, the number of seats accounted for 70% and number of places for standees accounted for 30% of the maximum carrying capacity of a double-decked bus. In other words, passengers would generally have to stand only when the patronage was above 70%.

Occupational safety and health of bus captains

20. Members were concerned about the occupational safety and health of bus captains and requested the bus companies to provide more rest time for them. According to the Administration⁹, TD met with the

⁸ Source: The Administration's press release on "LCQ1: Bus services during peak periods" issued on 22 October 2014

⁹ Source: The Administration's press release on "LCQ5: Facilities at bus termini" issued on 12 February 2014

franchised bus companies from time to time and discussed with them bus services and related matters, such as route planning, service frequency, service level, operational safety and working environment of bus captains. TD also met with the representatives of bus captain unions to understand and discuss issues of their concern. They were mainly on work arrangements, measures for improving operational safety, working environment of bus captains, etc. TD, together with franchised bus companies, had taken appropriate and feasible follow-up actions on the comments and requests raised by bus captain unions. Examples included the provision of mobile toilets or facilities such as microwave ovens and refrigerators for use by staff at a number of bus termini.

21. In addition, according to the information provided by the Administration¹⁰, the franchised bus companies would ensure bus captains to have sufficient rest time by arranging their duty schedules in accordance with the Guidelines on Bus Captain Working Hours, Rest Times and Meal Breaks promulgated by TD. Moreover, having regard to actual operational needs and passenger demand, the bus companies would flexibly deploy their bus captains and buses. Whenever such flexible deployment was required, the bus companies would endeavor to help their bus captains get prepared.

Environmental improvement measures

22. Regarding members' concern about the environmental improvement initiatives of bus companies when the Panel discussed the granting of the existing franchises of NWFB, LW and Citybus (Franchise 2) in 2011 and 2012, the Administration advised that all the above bus companies had agreed to include new/amended clauses in the franchises to, as far as reasonably practicable, acquire the most environmentally friendly buses (including zero emission buses) and adopt products that were technologically proven and commercially available to reduce emissions, having regard to the feasibility as well as affordability for the passengers and operators. The Administration further advised that to further help improve roadside air quality, the above bus companies agreed to make commitments on the deployment of low emission buses for operation at pilot low emission zones in Causeway Bay, Central and Mongkok delineated by the Environmental Protection Department, with the target of having only low emission buses in these pilot low emission

¹⁰ Source: The Administration's paper on its response to the letter from Hon Gary FAN Kwok-wai on the duty schedule system and pre-employment training arrangements for drivers of franchised bus companies issued in August 2015 [LC Paper No. CB(4)1397/14-15(01)]

zones by 2015.

23. At the Panel meeting on 20 March 2015, members also expressed concern on the emission of franchised buses. In response, the Administration explained that it had all along been encouraging the franchised bus companies to deploy more environment-friendly buses with a view to reducing the emission. For franchises commencing in 2013, the franchised bus companies were required to procure new buses which were the most environment-friendly.

Latest developments

24. The Administration plans to consult the Panel on the way of handling the expiry of the franchise for the bus network of KMB in 2017, and invite members' views on the requirements of the new franchise at its meeting to be held on 15 January 2016.

Relevant papers

25. A list of relevant papers is at **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
11 January 2016

Appendix

Franchise for the bus network of the Kowloon Motor Bus Co. (1933) Limited

List of relevant papers

Date of meeting	Panel/ Committee	Minutes/Paper	LC Paper No.
17.11.2005	Panel on Transport ("TP")	Administration's paper	CB(1)309/05-06(02) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr05-06/english/panels/tp/papers/tp1117cb1-309-2e.pdf
		Minutes of the meeting	CB(1)549/05-06 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr05-06/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp051117.pdf
25.11.2005	TP	Minutes of the meeting	CB(1)694/05-06 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr05-06/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp051125.pdf
16.12.2005	TP	Minutes of the meeting	CB(1)713/05-06 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr05-06/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp051216.pdf
--	--	Legislative Council brief	ETWB(T) CR 2/5591/99 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr05-06/english/panels/tp/papers/etwb_t_cr_2_5591_99e.pdf
1.3.2006	Council Meeting	Minutes of meeting	CB(3) 426/05-06 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr05-06/english/counmtg/minutes/cm060301.pdf

Date of meeting	Panel/ Committee	Minutes/Paper	LC Paper No.
11.7.2011	TP	Administration's paper	CB(1)2647/10-11(04) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/tp/papers/tp0711cb1-2647-4-e.pdf
		Minutes of the meeting	CB(1)220/11-12 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp20110711.pdf
7.11.2011	TP	Administration's paper	CB(1)227/11-12(03) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/panels/tp/papers/tp1107cb1-227-3-e.pdf
		Minutes of the meeting	CB(1)1363/11-12 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp20111107.pdf
5.12.2011	TP	Administration's paper	CB(1)464/11-12(04) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/panels/tp/papers/tp1205cb1-464-4-e.pdf
		Minutes of the meeting	CB(1)1482/11-12 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp20111205.pdf
9.3.2012	TP	Administration's paper	CB(1)1157/11-12(05) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/panels/tp/papers/tp0309cb1-1157-5-e.pdf
		Background brief	CB(1)1161/11-12 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/panels/tp/papers/tp0309cb1-1161-e.pdf

Date of meeting	Panel/ Committee	Minutes/Paper	LC Paper No.
		Administration's follow-up paper	CB(1)1481/11-12(01) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/panels/tp/papers/tp0309cb1-1481-1-e.pdf
		Minutes of the meeting	CB(1)2490/11-12 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp20120309.pdf
29.5.2013	Council Meeting	Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki raised a question on bus route rationalization	http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201305/29/P201305280641.htm
4.12.2013	Council Meeting	Hon WU Chi-wai raised a question on improvement to the services provided for bus passengers	http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201312/04/P201312040450.htm
18.12.2013	Council Meeting	Dr Hon CHIANG Lai-wan raised a question on franchised bus services	http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201312/18/P201312180270.htm
12.2.2014	Council Meeting	Hon WONG Kwok-hing raised a question on facilities at bus termini	http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201402/12/P201402120303.htm
14.5.2014	Council Meeting	Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-yea raised a question on public transport services	http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201405/14/P201405130964.htm
11.6.2014	Council Meeting	Hon MA Fung-kwok raised a question on lost trips of franchised buses	http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201406/11/P201406110345.htm
23.6.2014	TP	Administration's paper	CB(1)1621/13-14(04) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr13-14/english/panels/tp/papers/tp0623cb1-1621-4-e.pdf

Date of meeting	Panel/ Committee	Minutes/Paper	LC Paper No.
		Minutes of the meeting	CB(1)79/14-15 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr13-14/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp20140623.pdf
9.7.2014	Council Meeting	Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun raised a question on priority seats and barrier-free facilities provided by public transport modes	http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201407/09/P201407090695.htm
22.10.2014	Council Meeting	Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun raised a question on bus services during peak periods	http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201410/22/P201410220465.htm
9.2.2015	TP	Administration's paper	CB(1)238/14-15(06) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr14-15/english/panels/tp/papers/tp20141125cb1-238-6-e.pdf
		Minutes of the meeting	CB(4)1040/14-15 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr14-15/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp20150209.pdf
20.3.2015	TP	Administration's paper	CB(4)655/14-15(04) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr14-15/english/panels/tp/papers/tp20150320cb4-655-4-e.pdf
		Minutes of the meeting	CB(4)1293/14-15 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr14-15/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp20150320.pdf

Date of meeting	Panel/ Committee	Minutes/Paper	LC Paper No.
1.4.2015	Finance Committee (Special meeting)	Replies to initial written questions raised by Finance Committee Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2015-16 (Session No.: 12) (Questions Serial Nos. 0819, 0821, 4800, 6126 and 6139)	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr14-15/english/fc/fc/w_q/thb-t-e.pdf
17.7.2015	TP	Administration's paper	CB(4)1306/14-15(01) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr14-15/english/panels/tp/papers/tp20150717cb4-1306-1-e.pdf
		Minutes of the meeting	CB(4)228/15-16 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr14-15/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp20150717.pdf
2.12.2015	Council Meeting	Hon TANG Ka-piu raised a question on bus service information	http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201512/02/P201512020538.htm