

政府總部
運輸及房屋局
運輸科
香港添馬添美道2號
政府總部東翼



CB(4)714/17-18(02)
**Transport and
Housing Bureau**
Government Secretariat
Transport Branch
East Wing, Central Government Offices,
2 Tim Mei Avenue,
Tamar, Hong Kong

本局檔號 OUR REF.:
來函檔號 YOUR REF.: CB4/PL/TP

電話Tel. No.: 3509 7211
傳真Fax No.: 3912 4818

8 March 2018

Mr Frankie Yick
Chairman of Panel on Transport
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong
[Fax no.: 2840 0269]

Dear Mr Yick,

Panel on Transport Public Transport Strategy Study

Thank you for your letter of 29 January 2018 conveying the observation and opinions expressed by Panel member and deputations on Public Transport Strategy Study ("PTSS"). Our responses are set out below.

Objective of PTSS and Comprehensive Transport Studies

The Government has conducted three comprehensive transport studies ("CTS") to map out the strategic plans for transport planning and overall development, as well as formulate development plans for infrastructures. The CTS-3, completed in 1999, has laid down a number of broad directions, including (1) better use of railway as the backbone of our passenger transport system; (2) provision of better public transport services and facilities; (3) wider use of advanced technologies in transport management; and (4) implementation of more environmentally-friendly transport measures. These broad directions remain applicable today.

In the light of the broad directions laid down through the CTS-3, the Government completed the PTSS, which lasted for two and a half years, in June 2017. The PTSS examined the roles and positioning of public transport

services other than the heavy rail. The objectives are to maintain the delicate balance among various public transport services other than heavy rail and enhance their complementarity in tandem with the further development heavy rail network, with a view to ensuring that the public transport services are convenient and multi-modal to benefit the public, while public transport operators can enjoy long-term sustainability.

Apart from the PTSS, the Government has all along conducted studies on various transport areas. For instance, on transport infrastructure front, the Government announced the Railway Development Strategy 2014 which sets out the blueprint for railway network up to 2031. To tie in with the Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030 study, the Government will soon take forward the Strategic Studies on Railways and Major Roads beyond 2030 which will cover the required transport infrastructure in areas including Lantau, Northwest New Territories and New Territories North. Regarding road congestion, the Government is taking forward the study on the rationalisation of the traffic distribution among the three road harbour crossings and the three land tunnels between Kowloon and Sha Tin, commencing a consultancy study on parking for commercial vehicles, implementing a series of short and medium to long terms measures to increase the provision of parking spaces having regard to the situation in various districts, and conducting a feasibility study for the Electronic Road Pricing Pilot Scheme in Central and its adjacent areas, with a view to making early preparation for implementation the pilot scheme in certain parts of Hong Kong to improve traffic flow with the aid of technology. In the light of the above, the Government does not consider it necessary to conduct a CTS-4 at this stage.

Barrier-free facilities

In response to the views of the members and deputations on barrier-free facilities and transportation needs for ageing population, the Government has all along been promoting the concept of “Transport for All” and, where practicable, engaging the public transport operators in enhancing their facilities to facilitate the use of public transport services by the elderly and persons with disabilities (“PwDs”).

Regarding railway, at present, all MTR stations are equipped with at least one barrier-free access to facilitate physically-challenged persons to enter or leave stations. The MTRCL will continue to enhance, revitalize and maintain its railway assets and infrastructure, including its barrier-free facilities.

With regard to public light bus (“PLB”) services, the Transport Department (“TD”) has all along strived to and will continue to encourage the PLB trade to upgrade their on-board facilities to enhance the accessibility for the elderly and PwDs. On one hand, TD has introduced the mandatory requirement for all newly registered green minibuses (“GMBs”) and red minibuses (“RMBs”) to install a half step at the middle door, extra handrails and/or call bells with indication lights since 15 August and 16 August 2017 respectively to tie in with the gradual replacement of PLBs with increased seating capacity. Having regard to the comments from general public on the design of the half step at the middle door, TD has been receptive and responsive by enhancing the design with the vehicle manufacturer. The new design was introduced in November 2017 to meet the passengers’ needs.

On the other hand, the low-floor wheelchair-accessible PLB trial scheme was formally launched on 26 January 2018 and the first low-floor wheelchair accessible PLB has been put into service for GMB Route No. 54M (Kennedy Town Station – Queen Mary Hospital). The trial scheme will soon be extended by phases to two other hospital routes (operating via Prince of Wales Hospital and St. Teresa’s Hospital respectively). The Government will review the operational effectiveness of the trial scheme in tandem with the regular survey on the market occupancy rate of light buses to be launched by end 2018. If the trial scheme is proven effective, the Government will discuss with the trade on further promoting low-floor PLBs.

Furthermore, operators will be awarded marks in the Operators’ Selection Exercise for new route packages for their commitment to provide barrier-free facilities, such as braille registration number plate, non-slippery floor and designating priority seats, in their vehicles.

As regards taxis, the Government has all along been encouraging the taxi trade to use wheelchair-accessible models to further improve personalized and point-to-point transport services for PwDs. The number of wheelchair-accessible taxis has increased from about 20 in early 2015 to over 80 now. TD has been closely monitoring the progress of granting the type approval of the new wheelchair-accessible taxi model for its early introduction. We understand that the domestic agent concerned has planned to organise briefings for the taxi trade by March 2018. We will keep an eye on the use of wheelchair-accessible vehicles by the taxi trade, and as necessary consider ways to encourage their wider use. In addition, the newly revamped Committee on Taxi Service Quality will also discuss various initiatives, including promoting accessibility among the taxi trade. Regarding the new franchised taxis, we also propose that the franchised taxis operators’ fleet will be required to comprise at least 50% of wheelchair-accessible taxis. If a bidder of franchised taxis proposes a percentage of wheelchair-accessible

vehicles higher than the requirement, such application will be accorded with a higher score under the assessment.

Transport planning in New Territories North

The Government is aware of the overall transport development and passenger needs of the New Territories North. TD has all along been taking district developments and demographic changes into account when planning the public transport services. With the implementation of new development areas in the New Territories, TD will formulate new public transportation proposals, including introducing franchised bus and public light bus services or adjusting existing public transport services in tandem with the pace of population growth. TD will also closely monitor and review the service level of various public transport services and make timely adjustments where necessary for meeting the public transport service demand.

Moreover, the Transport and Housing Bureau (“THB”) and TD, in collaborate with Development Bureau and Civil Engineering and Development Department which are responsible for the Hung Shui Kiu New Development Area and Yuen Long South Potential Development Area, is conducting an in-depth study on the transport mode to be adopted for the environmentally friendly transport system within the two new development areas in the Northwest New Territories. The study is expected to be completed in two years.

Green transport

The Government has been pushing forward “Green Transport”. The Government has been fully subsidising the franchised bus companies to retrofit their Euro II and III buses with selective catalytic reduction devices with a view to reducing their emissions. The franchised bus companies have completed all the retrofit works in December 2017. A total of about 1 030 eligible buses were retrofitted through this programme. Moreover, the Government has fully subsidised franchised bus companies to procure 36 single-deck electric buses (including 28 battery-electric buses and eight supercapacitor buses) for trial. 24 battery-electric buses and two supercapacitor buses have commenced the two-year trial. Most of the remaining electric buses are expected to be put into service progressively in 2018. If the trial results are satisfactory, the Government will encourage franchised bus companies to use electric buses on a larger scale, taking into account the affordability of the franchised bus companies and passengers. Meanwhile, as announced by the Chief Executive in the 2017 Policy Address,

the Government will explore the launch of pilot schemes for local ferries to adopt green technologies to reduce their emissions.

Smart mobility

“Smart Mobility” is one of the important components for Hong Kong’s development into a smart city. Our goal is to make use of technology to develop an intelligent transport system, assist in traffic management and alleviate traffic congestion and related environmental problems, so as to bring overall benefits to the community.

The Government will progressively implement the measures under the “Smart Mobility” area in the Smart City Blueprint for Hong Kong, such as integrating various existing e-transport applications of TD into an all-in-one mobile application, installing a new generation of on-street parking meters, studying “in-vehicle units” to enable motorists to receive real-time traffic information and pay tunnel fees without stopping the vehicles, and facilitating trials of autonomous vehicles in appropriate areas, etc.

Reducing roadside emission

Regarding the views on roadside emission, the Government has implemented various measures to improve roadside air quality and ensure the health of the public. Such measures include including phasing out pre-Euro IV diesel commercial vehicles, stepping up control over emission of LPG and petrol vehicles and installing emission reduction devices for older franchised buses. Since the introduction of the relevant measures, the concentration of major roadside air pollutants over the past five years has dropped about 30%. Moreover, the Government has also implemented a range of road transport management measures (including bus route rationalisation as well as the abovementioned measures for alleviating road traffic congestion) to improve roadside conditions.

New long-haul and mid-sized bus services

Among the public transport modes other than heavy rail, franchised bus services have high capacity and can be deployed flexibly within a relatively short period to meet changes in demand. Hence, they will continue to be the mass carrier serving areas without direct railway access as well as providing feeder service connecting the railway network and inter-district service. PLBs play a supplementary role, which provides supplementary feeder service and

serve areas with relatively lower passenger demand or the use of high-capacity transport modes is not suitable. As for non-franchised buses (“NFB”) services, they play a supplementary role in the public transport system through relieving the demand for franchised bus and GMB services during peak hours, and through providing services for districts where the operation of franchised buses and GMBs are not cost-effective. NFBs also provide tailor-made services for specific groups, such as students and tourists.

The new long-haul services aim at providing passengers with alternative choice of franchised bus services in response to the community needs. Unlike NFBs serving dedicated user groups, the new long-haul franchised bus services are intended for providing services to the general public. At present, franchised bus operators already provide express direct services with very few stops that operate via expressways during the morning peak periods. The new long-haul services are to provide another choice to meet passenger needs, such as providing more spacious seating and comprehensive passenger amenities with no standees.

As regards the mid-sized single-deck bus services, the objective of providing these services is to provide shuttle service to/from transport nodes in areas with relatively lower population density currently but with growth potential. Although mid-sized buses are single-deck buses with shorter vehicle length and smaller carrying capacity, they are equipped with barrier-free facilities and their carrying capacity of about 50 passengers is still larger than that of public light buses. There will also be the flexibility in deploying larger buses (for example, double-decker) when there is patronage growth on these routes operated by mid-sized single-deck buses.

Franchised taxis

On the premise that any carriage of passengers for reward must be lawful, we agree that the new demand in the community for personalised and point-to-point public transport services of higher quality and fare as well as with online hailing features should be well addressed. To this end, the Government has conducted a comprehensive review on the personalised and point-to-point transport services (including taxis and hire car services) under the Public Transport Strategy Study over the past two years and recommended the introduction of franchised taxis to meet the new demand. The Government has all along been communicating with taxi trade as well as other stakeholders through various channels throughout the study. The present proposal can strike a balance between various considerations.

In the light of the general support from the community as well as the result of the consultation with the Legislative Council Panel on Transport, the Government will introduce franchised taxis service with online hailing features to meet the new demand in the community for personalised and point-to-point public transport services. The Government is preparing the legislative work for introducing franchised taxis with a target to introduce the Bill into Legislative Council in the latter half of 2018.

Yours sincerely,
[Signed]
(Peggy NG)
for Secretary for Transport and Housing