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Mr Lemuel WOO
Clerk to Panel on Transport
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong

13 April 2018

Dear Mr WOO,

Legislative Council Panel on Transport
Special Meeting on 15 February 2018
Motions on Safety of Franchised Buses

Our consolidated reply to the three motions on the safety of franchised buses passed by Members at the captioned special meeting is as follows.

Bus accident in Tai Po on 10 February

The Government is highly concerned about the serious traffic incident happened in Tai Po on 10 February. The Independent Review Committee on Hong Kong's Franchised Bus Service ("IRC"), the establishment of which was announced by the Chief Executive, formally commenced its work on 28 March. Chaired by the Honourable Mr Justice Michael Victor Lunn, Vice-President of the Court of Appeal of the High Court, the IRC will comprehensively review the operation and monitoring of franchised buses so as to ensure that public bus services of Hong Kong are safe and reliable. The Government will fully cooperate with the IRC in carrying out its work, with a view to maintaining the safety and reliability of our public bus services.

Road safety improvement measures

The Government attaches great importance to road safety and has been enhancing road safety through a three-pronged approach, i.e. legislation and enforcement, improvement in traffic facilities and management, as well as publicity and education. Moreover, the Transport Department (“TD”) conducts investigations at 100 locations where the frequency or severity of traffic accidents involving injuries is relatively high every year to deduce the contributory factors and common characteristics of the accidents, so as to introduce relevant road safety improvement measures to enhance the overall road safety of Hong Kong.

As regards the road section involved in the bus accident in Tai Po on 10 February, the TD is currently conducting a comprehensive review on the environment of the road section and the traffic management measures in place, including considering whether there is a need to revise the speed limit, and enhancing the existing warning traffic signs (including additional deceleration road marks) and road marks, etc, so as to further enhance road safety. The TD has, in collaboration with the Police, started the preparatory work for the installation of a new batch of fixed speed enforcement cameras and camera housings. The road section concerned has also been put on the list for consideration of the installation. The TD will also examine the details of the traffic accidents happened on the road section concerned in the past years and work with the Highways Department to see whether anti-skid surface dressing is required.

Working hours of bus captains of franchised buses

The Government places strong emphasis on the operational safety of franchised buses. On 23 February 2018, the TD refined the arrangements in the Guidelines on Bus Captain Working Hours, Rest Times and Meal Breaks (“Guidelines”), among which, the maximum duty hours and driving hours in a shift were shortened respectively from not exceeding 14 hours and 11 hours to not exceeding 12 hours and 10 hours. Besides, to avoid insufficient rest time for bus captains because of being assigned for work in several consecutive days, the TD also added one regulation that the total off-duty break in three successive shifts, other than special shift duties, should not be less than 22 hours. The franchised bus companies are finalising their own detailed shift arrangement for the implementation of the revised Guidelines. Upon working out the details of the shift arrangement, the franchised bus companies aim at implementing the revised Guidelines progressively from the second quarter of this year, and fully implementing the revised Guidelines in the second quarter of 2019.

It should be stressed that the Guidelines just set out the upper and lower limits of working hours and rest time respectively. The franchised bus companies can arrange the

working and driving hours of the bus captains below the upper limit according to their operational needs. The TD understands that the franchised bus companies have expressed their plans to reduce the maximum working hours of special shifts gradually from 14 hours to 13 hours according to the recruitment progress of bus captains. The TD will continue to review the actual situation from time to time and encourage franchised bus companies to make effective arrangements on the shift duties of their bus captains proactively, as well as shorten the working and driving hours of the bus captains to less than the relevant upper limit stipulated when possible.

Training for bus captains

According to the Road Traffic (Driving Licences) Regulations, all franchised bus captains (whether full-time or part-time) must hold a valid driving licence issued by the TD before they are allowed to drive franchised buses.

Regarding training for bus captains, franchised bus companies provide various types of training for newly-recruited and in-service bus captains (whether full-time or part-time) in accordance with the daily operational needs. Training for newly-recruited bus captains covers such areas as driving skills, incident handling, customer service, and training on different bus models and routes. As for in-service bus captains, they are required to receive regular driving enhancement training, and take driving improvement courses or receive supplementary driving training where necessary.

Staffing establishment of and remuneration packages for bus captains

Bus operation is a labour-intensive service industry. The franchised bus companies have been attracting new blood to join the industry through different means such as improving salaries and welfare, working environment and promotion prospects, and making every endeavor to reduce the turnover of bus captains.

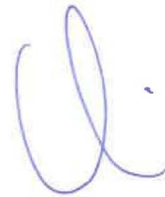
In addition to the manpower situation of bus captains, the Government is also concerned about the overall remuneration of bus captains. The Government has been calling on the franchised bus companies that, as responsible enterprises, apart from ensuring the safety of bus operation, they should also maintain effective communication with their staff regarding the remuneration arrangements. The remuneration packages of bus captains should be agreed by both franchised bus companies and bus captains. Where possible, franchised bus companies should care about the needs of their staff and address the staff requests on remuneration. As in other trades, the remuneration packages of bus captains are subject to a host of factors including the market situation and overall economic conditions, while franchised bus companies would flexibly determine the reasonable remuneration arrangements for bus captains according to their operating

conditions.

Bus safety devices

Following the bus accident in Tai Po on 10 February, the TD set up a working group which consists of representatives of franchised bus companies and major bus manufacturers to explore the feasibility of installing various safety devices on buses (including retrofitting seat belts on all seats of franchised buses) with a view to further enhancing the safety of franchised bus services.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'C' followed by a smaller 'i' and a dot.

(Nick CHOI)

for Secretary for Transport and Housing

c.c.: Commissioner for Transport (Attn: Mr Patrick WONG)