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(Attn: Ms Sophie LAU)
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12 September 2018

[English translation for reference only]

Dear Ms LAU,

Panel on Transport
Motions Passed at the Meeting on 18 May

Thank you for your letter of 28 May to the Secretary for Transport and Housing on the captioned subject. Our reply is set out below.

Number of standees on a franchised bus

Regulation 74 of the Road Traffic (Construction and Maintenance of Vehicles) Regulations (Cap. 374A) stipulates the total number of standing passengers that may be carried on a bus. When carrying out the type approval process for different models of franchised buses, the Transport Department (TD) has to make sure that the design and construction (including calculating the maximum capacity) can comply with the requirements set out in the relevant regulations. The existing standard concerning the number of standing passengers that may be carried on a bus under the law is comparable to those adopted by the United Kingdom and the European Union in their respective laws.

When the TD and bus companies review the service frequency of bus routes, they will not only make reference to the conditions on deployment of more vehicles and/or increase in frequency (i.e. if the occupancy rate of any bus route reaches 100% during the busiest half-hour of the peak period and 85% during that one hour) as set out in the Guidelines on Service Improvement and Reduction in Bus Route Development Programmes, but will also consider other factors flexibly (e.g. the provision of more comfortable travelling environment for passengers on long-haul routes and comments from the District Councils (DCs)) and deploy more vehicles to enhance the service level. If there is persistently a longer queue and a longer waiting time for an individual route, the TD will, having regard to the actual situation, request the bus company concerned to increase service frequency as appropriate.

In the light of the request from Members, the TD will review the requirements on the number of standing passengers on buses under the existing law, and consider the actual situation, including the travelling environment of different routes and the demand for bus services, so as to see whether there is room for amendments.

Changes to franchised bus services

Having regard to such factors as the community development in districts, the existing and projected passenger demand, service levels of public transport services, traffic situations of the busy road sections, and the environmental impact of bus services, the Government formulates the Bus Route Planning Programme (RPP) annually and follows the Guidelines on Service Improvement and Reduction in Bus Route Development Programmes to rationalise bus services. Bus service rationalisation involves addition/cancellation/amalgamation of routes, re-routing, and addition/reduction of frequency or number of vehicles. Over the years, the TD has been submitting the annual RPPs to the DCs for consultation and uploading such RPPs to its webpage for public reference, so as to enable the public to know the RPPs and express their opinions. The TD will take into account the views gauged during the consultation period as well as other related factors before deciding whether the various proposals under the RPPs should be implemented.

In addition to the annual RPPs, bus companies may also at any time submit proposals on service adjustments. The TD will examine these proposals in accordance with the aforesaid factors/criteria. If the proposals are considered feasible but may have a relatively larger impact on the residents, the relevant District Councillors and local representatives will be consulted through the

District Offices about the proposals. The TD will consider the views gauged and other related factors to decide whether to approve the implementation of the proposals by the bus companies.

In recent months, a franchised bus company submitted an application to the TD for adjusting the frequencies of 40 routes, mostly involving trips during the non-peak period and the number of affected trips is small. The main reason is that the patronage of those routes during the non-peak period is relatively low. When assessing the application, the TD will make reference to the criteria on frequency adjustment set out in the Guidelines on Service Improvement and Reduction in Bus Route Development Programmes, the passenger demand during the said period and other alternative services available. As in the past, if the proposal will have quite a large impact on the residents, the TD will consult the relevant DCs.

The Government attaches great importance to the views of the DCs and members of the public on bus services. It will continue to maintain good communication with the DCs regarding the changes to the franchised bus services, with a view to making better use of resources to meet the passenger demand and enhance the efficiency of the bus network, while reducing the unnecessary impact on road traffic and the environment.

“Guidelines on Working Hours of Green Minibus Drivers”

The Government has been concerned about the rest time arrangements for green minibus (GMB) drivers, with a view to ensuring ample rest time for drivers and enhancing service safety. In 2000, the TD formulated the “Guidelines on Working Hours of Green Minibus Drivers”, providing guidance on the maximum number of duty hours and driving hours for drivers. Subsequently, in 2016, the TD conducted a review with the trade to revise the guidelines. The new set of guidelines¹, which has been put into effect since 15 August 2017, sets out clearly the rest time and meal break of drivers during duty hours, and newly introduces the minimum rest time between two consecutive working days.

¹ Guidelines on Working Hours of Green Minibus Drivers (with effect from 15 August 2017):

- (1) For every 9 hours of duty, GMB drivers should have a rest time (including meal break) of at least 45 minutes, of which not less than 10 minutes should be within the first 4 hours of duty;
- (2) Maximum duty of GMB drivers (including all rest times) should not exceed 14 hours per day;
- (3) Driving duty of GMB drivers (i.e. maximum duty less all rest times) should not exceed 11 hours per day;
- (4) GMB drivers working for a duty of not less than 9 hours in a working day should be provided with a meal break; and
- (5) The break between two consecutive working days should not be less than 10 hours.

The TD holds regular trade meetings with the GMB operators to urge them to review and draw up working schedules for their drivers according to the relevant guidelines. The TD has also provided the guidelines to the red minibus trade, which mainly comprises self-employed persons, for their reference. To have a full picture of the implementation of the new guidelines, the TD will collect data on the working hours of drivers from the operators and drivers when it launches the regular survey on the market occupancy rate of minibuses in the fourth quarter of 2018. Moreover, the TD will issue questionnaires to operators regularly to request for information on the working schedules of drivers. We noted the views of Hon Jeremy TAM Man-ho on the revision of the guidelines. The TD will, having regard to the findings of the above survey and questionnaires, review with the trade the feasibility and need of further revising the guidelines.

Installation of closed circuit televisions inside taxi compartments

Taxis provide personalised and point-to-point transport service. The taxi compartment, where only a driver and passenger(s) are present, can be regarded as a semi-private space. If there is dispute between the passenger(s) and the driver over the service issue, it is often difficult to further follow up on the case in the absence of a third-party witness to provide evidence.

In general, application to the TD for installing closed circuit televisions (CCTVs) inside taxi compartments is not required as long as the installation does not affect the vehicle structure and driving safety. However, the Government has noted that the installation of CCTVs inside taxi compartments will involve the problem of privacy protection. Some members of the public have concerns about installing CCTVs inside taxi compartments and are worried that the privacy of personal data cannot be fully protected. Since the CCTVs installed inside taxi compartments may capture extensive images of individuals or information relating to individuals, the use of CCTVs should be properly controlled to avoid intrusion into the privacy of individuals.

We noted the views of Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun. To enhance the existing handling arrangements for taxi service complaints for raising the taxi service quality, the TD is currently drawing up a set of guidelines on the installation of CCTVs inside taxi compartments for the trade's reference. During the drafting process, the TD will consult the relevant government departments and organisations, including the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data, the Department of Justice, the Committee on

Taxi Service Quality and the taxi trade, with a view to safeguarding the interest of both drivers and passengers.

New in-harbour licensed ferry services

At present, there are facilities including public piers or landing steps for passengers's boarding and disembarkation on the two sides of Victoria Harbour, including West Kowloon, Hung Hom and Kai Tak. In the Development Blueprint for Hong Kong's Tourism Industry issued in 2017, the Government stated that to enhance the tourism characteristics of Victoria Harbour and harbourfront promenades, it would explore the provision of "water taxi" service serving locations with major tourist attractions alongside the Victoria Harbour, such as Central, West Kowloon, Kai Tak and Tsim Sha Tsui East. The TD is currently inviting interested parties to submit expressions of interest for the operation of two licenced ferry services, namely the "Central – Hung Hom" route and the circular route travelling along Kai Tak, Hung Hom, Tsim Sha Tsui East, Central and West Kowloon, with a view to further understanding the market interest in operating in-harbour ferry routes. The TD also welcomes operators to submit applications for the operation of other in-harbour licenced ferry services.

Air quality in public transport interchanges

In designing and constructing covered public transport interchanges (PTIs), the Government will give due consideration to various factors, such as the parking layout, the anticipated traffic volume and the surrounding environment. Suitable ventilation systems will also be installed to meet the relevant requirements on air quality. Nevertheless, the air quality of a PTI may be affected by the changes to the actual operational environment after its opening, such as the development in the neighbouring area, the construction/road works nearby and the increase in the usage of the PTI. In this connection, the TD has commissioned the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) to carry out air quality measurements in the covered PTIs managed by the TD approximately every two years, so as to monitor whether the air quality can comply with the Practice Note on "Control of Air Pollution in Semi-confined Public Transport Interchanges" (Practice Note) formulated by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD). The frequency of measurements will be increased as the actual situation requires. Moreover, the EMSD will check the ventilation systems on a quarterly basis to ensure that all of them are mechanically sound. When necessary, the TD will work with the relevant government departments to consider and implement suitable

improvement measures, including extending the operating hours of the ventilation systems, increasing the air volume, replacing the component parts of the ventilation systems, strengthening the management of switching off idling engines at the PTIs, and requesting the bus companies to deploy more environmentally-friendly models of buses (including Euro IV and V) to operate the routes involved. The Government will continue to closely monitor the air quality and the operation of ventilation systems in the PTIs, in order to enhance the air quality within the PTIs.

As for the review of the Practice Note, the EPD will work with the relevant government departments. Factors including the actual operation and needs of the PTIs, as well as the local and overseas short-term air quality standards of similar air pollutants will also be taken into consideration in the review.

Comprehensive transport study

Since 1976, the Government has conducted three comprehensive transport studies (CTSs) to map out the strategic plans for transport planning and overall development, as well as formulate development plans for infrastructures so as to cater for the socio-economic development of Hong Kong. The Third CTS, completed in 1999, laid down a number of broad directions, including (1) better integration of transport and land use planning; (2) better use of railway as the backbone of our passenger transport system; (3) provision of better public transport services and facilities; (4) wider use of advanced technologies in transport management; and (5) formulation of more environmentally-friendly transport measures. These broad directions remain applicable today.

Upon completion of the Third CTS, the TD has been updating and enhancing the CTS Model continuously to reflect the latest Hong Kong population and employment data, economic situation, land use, transport infrastructure planning, and traffic data, so as to ensure the provision of robust and reliable traffic forecasts for planning purposes. The enhanced CTS Model will produce traffic forecasts up to 2041.

The Government has been developing transport policies through various strategic studies. For instance, it formulated the “Railway Development Strategy 2014” which maps out a blueprint for railway development up to 2031, and implemented measures according to the findings of the Public Transport Strategy Study to help reinforce the roles and positioning of various public

transport services, other than the heavy rail, in the public transport system. Besides, the Government is planning to commission the “Strategic Studies on Railways and Major Roads beyond 2030”, which will examine the transport infrastructure required to satisfy future traffic demand beyond 2030, immediately after funding is secured. Given that the above studies cover the major public transport policies and transport infrastructure planning, and that there are other ongoing topical studies (such as the feasibility study on the Electronic Road Pricing pilot scheme in Central and its adjacent areas and the study on enhancing walkability in Hong Kong), there is no imminent need to conduct the Fourth CTS at the moment.

We understand that there is a demand requesting the Government to collect vehicle journey information on a large scale and on a regular basis, and conduct analyses on the distribution of traffic demand and travelling patterns of commuters. In fact, the TD conducts the Travel Characteristics Survey (TCS) across the territory around every ten years. The main objectives of the TCS are to collect up-to-date information on commuters’ travelling patterns and transport services used and to develop a database, so as to update and enhance the government department’s transport models for future planning of transport facilities and services. In the past, the TCS was carried out in the same year as the Population Census, so that the TCS could be adjusted and supplemented using the comprehensive and detailed statistical data obtained through the Census. The last TCS was commenced in 2011 to tie in with the Population Census carried out by the Census and Statistics Department in that year. The TCS was completed in 2012. For the next TCS, we will continue to consider conducting it in the same year as the Population Census.

Way forward for online hailed cars

The Government is open-minded in respect of the application of different types of technologies, including the use of Internet or mobile applications for calling hire cars (i.e. “online hailed” cars). Yet, while using the new technology or platform, the relevant law and regulations must be complied with in order to protect the interest and safety of passengers, and to ensure the effective use of roads as well as the efficient, reliable and long-term healthy development of the public transport services which are currently used by over 90 per cent of the citizens.

Under section 52(3) of the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374), any person or organisation intending to arrange for a private car for the carriage of passengers for hire or reward must hold a valid hire car permit (HCP) in respect

of the vehicle concerned. The hire service must also comply with the statutory requirements of relevant ordinances and conditions of issue of the HCP. If a vehicle does not possess a HCP, it is illegal for the vehicle owner to use the private car concerned for the carriage of passengers for hire or reward, regardless of the means to arrange for the hire car service, including the use of mobile applications as the platform.

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. In the light of the results of consultation with the Panel on Transport and the generally supportive views from the community, the Government will introduce franchised taxis to meet the new demand in the community. The Government is actively preparing a bill for the introduction of franchised taxis with a target to introduce the bill into Legislative Council in the 2018-19 legislative year.

Improving pedestrian environment

In October 2017, the Chief Executive announced in her 2017 Policy Address that the Government will continue to take forward “Walk in HK” under four themes, namely “Make it smart”, “Make it connected”, “Make it enjoyable” and “Make it safe” by launching a host of measures to encourage citizens to walk more so as to reduce the use of mechanised transport for short-distance commuting. Our objective is to enhance the overall walkability of our city to facilitate citizens to commute, connect and enjoy, making walking an integral element of Hong Kong's sustainable development.

Under “Walk in HK”, the TD is progressively implementing specific measures, including –

- (1) In October 2017, the TD launched a new function in the Hong Kong e-Transport mobile application to enable citizens to plan and search the best walking route in major shopping areas in Causeway Bay. Moreover, the TD plans to extend the walking route information in the Hong Kong e-Transport to cover Yau Tsim Mong area by 2018. It is planning to extend the coverage to other areas in the coming two to three years. The TD will also provide a barrier-free walking route search function in mid-2018 to those in need for barrier-free walking routes.

- (2) In September 2017, the TD commenced a “Pedestrian Connectivity in Hong Kong Island North from Wan Chai to Sheung Wan – Feasibility Study”. In April 2018, the TD consulted Wan Chai District Council and Central and Western District Council on the preliminary proposals and alignment options for enhancing the connectivity from Wan Chai to Sheung Wan. The DCs expressed support to the proposals.
- (3) In December 2017, the TD commenced “Consultancy Study on Enhancing Walkability in Hong Kong” and “Review of Assessment Mechanism for Hillside Escalator Links and Elevator Systems and Preliminary Feasibility Studies”. The TD will commence public consultations on the above studies in 2018-19.
- (4) In December 2017, pedestrian green time at 18 staggered crossings was extended such that the pedestrian green signals of two staggered crossings which were incongruent in terms of the pedestrian green time will light up simultaneously for pedestrians to complete the crossings in one go. The TD will extend the pedestrian green time at another 20 staggered crossings within 2018.
- (5) In March 2018, the TD conducted trials at nine junctions so that when an elderly or a disabled person cross the roads, he/she can tap a personalised Octopus card on a reader installed on a pedestrian traffic signal pole to lengthen the pedestrian green signals time of the crossings concerned.

Promoting bicycle commuting

The Government endeavours to promote low-carbon, green commuting, and provide a bicycle-friendly environment in new towns and new development areas, as well as improve the the existing cycle tracks and bicycle parking facilities in new towns in phases.

Owing to road safety considerations, the Government has all along been adopting a prudent approach and does not encourage the public to use bicycles as a mode of commuting on busy roads in the urban areas.

The TD has engaged a consultancy to study ways to improve the cycling facilities in the existing nine new towns². The study has been substantially completed. The consultants identified and proposed improvement to around 900 locations. The improvement measures concerned include providing more public bicycle parking spaces; providing additional safety facilities at some sharp bends, steep ramps and pedestrian crossings (e.g. installing collapsible plastic bollards for segregating two-way cycle tracks) to protect the safety of cyclists and pedestrians. It is expected that a total of around 7 000 additional bicycle parking spaces will be provided when all improvement works at the above 900 locations are all completed.

The first phase of improvement works, involving around 100 locations, commenced in phases in 2016 and is expected to be completed by 2018. A total of around 1 000 additional bicycle parking spaces will be provided.

As for the second phase of improvement works which involves around 540 locations, the TD commenced local consultations through District Offices at the end of 2017. After listening to the views of relevant stakeholders and DCs, the TD plans to commence the related works, involving around 3 500 bicycle parking spaces, in 2019.

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

² The nine new towns are Shatin/Ma On Shan, Tai Po, Sheung Shui/Fanling, Yuen Long, Tin Shui Wai, Tuen Mun, Tsuen Wan, Tung Chung and Tseung Kwan O.