

**For discussion
on 20 March 2020**

Legislative Council Panel on Transport

**Relaxation of Vehicle Length Restriction of Light Bus and
Other Relevant Technical Amendments**

PURPOSE

In light of the Government's policy objectives to promote green and barrier-free transport, this paper invites Members' views on the proposed legal amendments to relax the vehicle length and weight restriction of light buses and other relevant technical amendments.

BACKGROUND AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Relaxation of Vehicle Length Restriction of Light Buses

2. At present, the overall length of a light bus¹, which is stipulated under the First Schedule to the Road Traffic (Construction and Maintenance of Vehicles) Regulations (Cap. 374A) shall not exceed 7 metres. By virtue of the power empowered by regulation 4 of Cap. 374A, the Commissioner for Transport may, depending on individual circumstances, exercise her

¹ According to section 2 of the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374), "light bus" means "a motor vehicle constructed or adapted for use solely for the carriage of a driver and not more than 19 passengers and their personal effects, but does not include an invalid carriage, motor cycle, motor tricycle, private care or taxi".

discretion to grant exemption on the vehicle overall length restriction on a light bus with public interest in mind. The vehicle length of light bus models with more environmental benefits and/or barrier-free facilities available in the market often exceed the current legal requirements.

3. To promote the concept of “Transport for All”, the Government launched the “low-floor wheelchair-accessible light bus trial scheme” (the “Scheme”) in January 2018, where two low-floor wheelchair accessible light buses were introduced by phases to two hospital routes (including routes operating via Queen Mary Hospital and Prince of Wales Hospital respectively) starting from the first and second quarter of the same year. The third low-floor public light bus is now undergoing modification works so as to comply with the relevant legal requirements before it can be put into service. The Transport Department is reviewing the effectiveness and efficiency of the low-floor wheelchair-accessible light buses and the review is expected to be completed in the first half of this year. If the Scheme is proven feasible and desirable, the Government would discuss with the trade on further promoting low-floor light buses.

4. To take forward the aforementioned Scheme to introduce more low-floor wheelchair-accessible light buses, the Commissioner for Transport has been granting exemptions to vehicles from complying with the vehicle construction requirements, including the statutory vehicle overall length restriction, on a case-by-case basis under Cap. 374A. Other than public light buses, exemptions have also been granted to private light buses with vehicle length of more than 7 meters. Examples include vehicles providing services to meet special transport needs of people with disabilities.

5. To further promote the Government's policy objective on green and barrier-free transport, having critically reviewed the current legal requirements and the light bus models available in the market, the Government proposes to relax the vehicle overall length restriction of light bus from 7 meters to 7.5 meters to allow light buses with more environmental benefits and/or barrier-free facilities to be introduced into Hong Kong, while continuing to encourage healthy competition by increasing the supply of vehicle models which comply with the local legal requirements in the market with public interest in mind. Before the passage of the legislative amendments, the Commissioner for Transport will continue to consider individual applications for vehicle type approval of specific light bus models, and exercise her discretion to grant requisite exemption to those models with better environmental benefits (e.g. achieving the prevailing best emission standard of Euro VI or above) and/or barrier-free facilities (e.g. low-floor and/or wheelchair-accessible).

6. In general, the majority of public roads in Hong Kong are able to accommodate light buses of 7.5 metres. The Transport Department has examined the public transport interchanges, public light bus termini and road sections where green minibuses operate, and have commenced feasible modification works at the relevant sites to ensure public light buses of longer length will be able to park and manoeuvre. However, as modification works may not be conductible at some of the individual sites due to circumstantial restrictions, road safety or traffic management issues, the Transport Department would provide traffic directions at those sites, and assess and make further arrangements to the alighting / drop-off points of individual routes to accommodate operational needs.

Relaxation of Maximum Gross Vehicle Weight Restriction of Light Buses

7. The current maximum gross vehicle weight of a light bus is 5.5 tonnes as stipulated in the Second Schedule to Cap. 374A. Due to the increase in length of light buses available in the market, their relative weight would also have increased. In addition, to further improve roadside air quality, the Government has been encouraging the use of electric light buses, which are usually heavier than the conventional light buses due to the weight of the batteries, exceeding the maximum gross vehicle weight restriction. At present, the Commissioner for Transport would exercise her discretion in light of public interest to exempt vehicles from complying with the maximum gross vehicle weight restriction.

8. In view of the above, the Government proposes to relax the maximum gross vehicle weight restriction of light buses from 5.5 tonnes to 8.5 tonnes, so that the local legal requirements would be able to accommodate light buses of longer length as well as electric light buses. Generally, vehicles of up to 8.5 tonnes are able to manoeuvre on the majority of public roads in Hong Kong.

9. Apart from the above proposed amendments to the overall length and maximum gross vehicle weight restriction of light buses, the Government also takes the opportunity to review and update the relevant regulations in respect of the destination indicator and fare card of public light buses.

Destination Indicator

10. According to regulations 50(1) and (2) of the Road Traffic (Public Service Vehicles) Regulations (Cap. 374D), a destination indicator has to

be displayed at the front of public light buses, where the destination shown has to be clearly indicated in English letters and Chinese characters while the background colour of such indicator is classified according to the area where the public light bus is operating².

11. Along with time and the development of new towns, the provision of public light bus services has become flexible where cross-district service is also popular. Further, other than destination indicators by means of a roller blind, the use of electronic destination indicators has become increasingly common in view of the technological development. In September 2012, the Transport Department issued the guidelines on the use of electronic destination indicators to green minibus operators and red minibus associations.

12. To align with the flexible operational mode of the public light bus trade, the Government proposes to relax the background colour requirement of destination indicators by means of a roller blind by allowing the public light bus operators to choose from one of the background colours allowed under the current law (i.e. white words on dark blue, green, yellow or red background), and stipulate the colour requirement of destination indicators by any other means (including electronic destination indicators) (i.e. yellow or amber words on a dark and non-reflective background). The Government would update the above new requirements in respect of destination indicators through legislative amendment. A relevant gazette

² Referring to Schedule 6 to Cap. 374D, the background colour of the destination indicator of public light buses shall be dark blue (for any route on Hong Kong Island), green (for any route which terminates in Kowloon), yellow (for any route which terminates in the New Territories) or red (for any route which operates through the Cross-Harbour Tunnel).

notice that lays down the requirements in relation to the design and construction of electronic destination indicators or destination indicators by means of a roller blind, including their construction material, operational design, area and font size, would be issued by the Commissioner for Transport according to regulation 50(2)(a) of Cap. 374D.

Fare Card

13. According to regulation 50(4) of Cap. 374D, fares on a card displayed on a public light bus shall be in red English letters and Chinese characters on a white background.

14. Given public light bus operators commonly indicate the fare by Arabic numerals, the Government considers the language and colour requirement of a fare card set out in the current law outdated. In this regard, the Government proposes to amend the current language requirement of a fare card, where fares must be clearly shown in Arabic numerals with a dollar sign “\$”³, while the colour requirement shall be removed. As for other requirements on the design and construction of the fare cards, for example the font size of the fare displayed on the fare card, the Commissioner for Transport will issue a gazette notice in this regard according to regulation 50(4)(a) of Cap. 374D.

³ With the legal amendment taking effect, the fare must be shown in Arabic numerals with the dollar sign “\$” on the fare card, for example “\$8”. Public light bus operators or drivers may further provide the fare information in Chinese or English if needed.

TRADE CONSULTATION

15. With regard to the above legislative amendments on relaxing the overall length and maximum gross vehicle weight restriction of light buses, and the amendments to the requirement on the destination indicator and fare card of public light buses, the public light bus trades were consulted and they generally welcomed the above proposals.

ADVICE SOUGHT

16. Members are invited to comment on the above proposals in order to facilitate the Government's further preparation work for the relevant legislative amendments.

Transport and Housing Bureau

Transport Department

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