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Panel on Transport
Meeting on 20 March 2020

Panel on Transport

**Information note on the relaxation of vehicle length restriction of light bus
and other relevant technical amendments**

In April 2017, the Administration introduced the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2017 into the Legislative Council (“LegCo”). The Bill sought to amend the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374) to increase the maximum passenger seating capacity of light buses from 16 to 19 seats.¹ The Bill was passed at the LegCo meeting on 28 June 2017.

2. During the deliberations of the Bills Committee to study the Bill,² some members expressed that the maximum passenger seating capacity of light buses should be increased to 20 instead of 19 in order to increase the carrying capacity of light buses and cater for unmet demand. Some other members expressed support for the Administration’s plan to introduce new low-floor wheelchair-accessible vehicle models for trial run on three hospital routes, viz. green minibus routes operating via Queen Mary Hospital, Princes of Wales Hospital and St. Teresa’s Hospital, and urged the Administration to extend the trial to other routes serving hospitals located on the hillside. These members indicated that they would move Committee Stage Amendments (“CSAs”) on the 20-seat proposal and the installation of wheelchair-accessible seats on light buses respectively.

¹ See THB(T)CR 1/1136/2015.

² A Bills Committee was formed at the House Committee on 28 April 2017 to study the Bill. The Bills Committee held two meetings to deliberate on the details of the Bill with the Administration.

3. In respect of the 20-seat proposal, the Administration advised that when deciding on the appropriate maximum seating capacity of light buses, the main considerations were the demand for and supply of public light bus services, and the need to maintain a delicate balance amongst various public transport services. A study conducted by the Administration revealed that while increasing the seating capacity to 20 or above might reduce the number of left-behind passengers at public light bus termini during peak hours, the waiting time of passengers as well as continue to improve the operating environment of light bus operators, the corresponding magnitude of the incremental improvements would diminish noticeably beyond 19 seats. In addition, given the keen competition in the well-developed public transport services in Hong Kong, the impact of increasing the number of seats of light buses on other transport trades would need careful considerations so that different trades could continue to develop in a sustainable manner and provide diversified modal choices to the community.

4. In response to the members' intention to move CSAs, both the Legal Advisor to the Bills Committee and the Administration advised that since the long title of the Bill had specifically set out the maximum passenger seating capacity of light buses to be proposed to increase be 19, the 20-seat proposal might be out of the scope of the Bill. In addition, the proposal to add seats to accommodate wheelchairs in light buses might imply that the number of seats had to be reduced to allow more space for the accommodation of wheelchair(s). Despite that the long title of the Bill had not specified the types of seats to be added, owing to the implication on the number of seats as stated above, the proposal to add wheelchair seats might also be contrary to the purpose of the Bill as explained in the Explanatory Memorandum of the Bill and as such, the proposed CSA might also be out of the scope of the Bill.

5. The Administration further advised that if they were to take forward the suggestion to increase the maximum seating capacity of light buses to 19 with at least one or more seats as wheelchair-accessible, light bus models with a vehicle length exceeding the current statutory limit of 7 metres must be used, while the gross weight of the vehicle might be increased as well. This would require additional legislative amendments to the Road Traffic (Construction and Maintenance of Vehicles) Regulations (Cap. 374 sub. leg. A). Nevertheless, the Administration maintained an open mind on the proposals put forth by members and would collect feedback from the trade and the general public on

the above issues.

6. At the meeting of Panel on Transport (“the Panel”) on 16 November 2018, the Administration briefed the Panel on various new and on-going public transport policy initiatives proposed in the 2018 Policy Address. The Administration pointed out that when taking forward the “low-floor wheelchair-accessible light bus trial scheme”³, the Administration noted that the vehicle length of the light bus models with more environmental benefits and/or barrier-free facilities available on the market often exceeded the current statutory restriction.⁴ Having considered the above, the Administration proposed to relax the vehicle length restriction of light bus to 7.5 metres. The Administration targeted to submit the relevant legislative amendments to the LegCo in the 2019-2020 legislative session. Before the passage of the legislative amendments by the LegCo, the Commissioner for Transport would continue to consider individual applications for vehicle type approval of specific light bus models, and exercise her discretion to grant requisite exemption to those light bus models with better environmental benefits and/or barrier-free facilities.

7. The Administration will consult the Panel on the legislative proposal to relax the vehicle length restriction of light bus and other technical amendments at the Panel meeting scheduled for 20 March 2020.

8. A list of relevant papers on the subject is in **Appendix I**.

³ The Administration had continued to take forward different measures to improve public light bus services, which included implementing the “low-floor wheelchair-accessible light bus trial scheme” on two hospital routes (including routes operating via Queen Mary Hospital and Princes of Wales Hospital respectively) by phases since the first quarter of 2018.

⁴ At present, the statutory vehicle length restriction of light bus is 7 metres. By virtue of the power empowered by regulation 4 of the Road Traffic (Construction and Maintenance of Vehicles) Regulations (Cap. 374A), the Commissioner for Transport may, depending on individual circumstances, exercise her discretion to grant exemption on the vehicle length restriction on a light bus model. When introducing the low-floor light buses, the Commissioner for Transport has already exercised her discretion in this regard.

Appendix I

Relaxation of vehicle length restriction of light bus and other relevant technical amendments

A list of relevant papers

Date	Meeting	Reference
19 May 2017	Bills Committee on Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2017	LegCo Brief THB(T)CR 1/1136/2015 https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr16-17/english/bills/brief/b201704071_brf.pdf Minutes of meeting CB(4)1472/16-17 https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr16-17/english/bc/bc106/minutes/bc10620170519.pdf
2 June 2017		The Administration's supplementary information CB(4)1090/16-17(03) https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr16-17/english/bc/bc106/papers/bc10620170602cb4-1090-3-e.pdf Minutes of meeting CB(4)1473/16-17 https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr16-17/english/bc/bc106/minutes/bc10620170602.pdf
16 November 2018	Panel on Transport	The Administration's paper CB(4)179/18-19(07) https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr18-19/english/panels/tp/papers/tp20181116cb4-179-7-e.pdf

		Minutes of meeting CB(4)1172/18-19 https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr18-19/english/panels/tp/minutes/tp20181116.pdf
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