

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(4)1335/20-21
*(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)*

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Panel on Transport

Minutes of meeting
held on Friday, 18 June 2021, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room 1 of the Legislative Council Complex

Members present : Hon Frankie YICK Chi-ming, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon CHAN Han-pan, BBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, GBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, GBS, JP
Hon CHAN Hak-kan, BBS, JP
Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun, SBS, JP
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon Paul TSE Wai-chun, JP
Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun, BBS, JP
Hon YIU Si-wing, BBS
Hon LEUNG Che-cheung, SBS, MH, JP
Hon POON Siu-ping, BBS, MH
Ir Dr Hon LO Wai-kwok, SBS, MH, JP
Dr Hon Junius HO Kwan-yiu, JP
Hon Holden CHOW Ho-ding
Hon SHIU Ka-fai, JP
Hon Wilson OR Chong-shing, MH
Hon LUK Chung-hung, JP
Hon LAU Kwok-fan, MH
Hon Kenneth LAU Ip-keung, BBS, MH, JP
Dr Hon CHENG Chung-tai
Hon Tony TSE Wai-chuen, BBS, JP

Member absent : Hon WONG Kwok-kin, SBS, JP

Public officers attending : **Agenda item III**

Dr Raymond SO, BBS, JP
Under Secretary for Transport and Housing
Transport and Housing Bureau

Miss Rosanna LAW, JP
Commissioner for Transport

Ms Amy WONG, JP
Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing
(Transport) 2
Transport and Housing Bureau

Ms Jerry JI
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport and
Housing (Transport) 1
Transport and Housing Bureau

Mr Honson YUEN
Assistant Commissioner / Bus and Railway
Transport Department

Miss Amy TSE
Principal Transport Officer/Bus & Railway 1
Transport Department

Agenda item IV

Ms Amy WONG, JP
Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing
(Transport) 2
Transport and Housing Bureau

Ms Jerry JI
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport and
Housing (Transport) 1
Transport and Housing Bureau

Mr Patrick WONG
Assistant Commissioner / Management and
Paratransit
Transport Department

Ms Winnie WONG
Principal Transport Officer / Urban
Transport Department

Mr Ricky HO
Chief Engineer / Smart Mobility
Transport Department

Clerk in attendance: Ms Sophie LAU
Chief Council Secretary (4)2

Staff in attendance : Ms Angela CHU
Senior Council Secretary (4)2

Ms Jacqueline LAW
Council Secretary (4)2

Miss Mandy LAM
Legislative Assistant (4)2

I. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

- LC Paper No. CB(4)1067/20-21(01) - Administration's response to the item "Replacement of Traffic Control and Surveillance System ("TCSS") at Lion Rock Tunnel " raised at the meeting on 19 March 2021

Action

- LC Paper No. CB(4)914/20-21(01) - Administration's response to the item "Route 11 (section between Yuen Long and North Lantau) – Investigation" raised at the meeting on 19 March 2021
- LC Paper No. CB(4)1086/20-21(01) - Administration's response to the item "Progress of Implementation and Review Outcome of the Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme" raised at the meeting on 21 May 2021

Members noted the above papers issued since the last meeting.

2. The Chairman referred to the letter from the Deputy Chairman expressing his concern about the use of "traffic lights with split phase" at Shatin Tai Chung Kiu Road and the safety of traffic lights. The letter was issued to members on 17 June 2021 vide LC Paper No. CB(4)1129/20-21. The Chairman sought members' view on whether to put the item under the Panel's "list of outstanding items for discussion" for discussion at a future meeting. Members agreed.

Clerk

II. Date of next meeting and items for discussion

- LC Paper No. CB(4)1087/20-21(01) - List of outstanding items for discussion
- LC Paper No. CB(4)1087/20-21(02) - List of follow-up actions

3. The Chairman said that pursuant to the President's direction in respect of the Council meetings to be held from 21 July to 20 October 2021 and in consultation with the Administration regarding the meeting arrangement of the Panel during the above period, it was planned that the Panel would meet on 20 August and 24 September 2021 respectively from 10:45 am to 12:45 pm. The Administration proposed to discuss the following items at the meeting to be held on 20 August 2021:

- (a) Road maintenance and streetscape enhancement; and
- (b) Update on car parking initiatives.

Members raised no objection to the above proposed items.

III. Franchises of Citybus Limited (Franchise for Airport and North Lantau Bus Network), Long Win Bus Company Limited and New World First Bus Services Limited

LC Paper No. CB(4)1087/20-21(03) - Paper provided by the Administration

LC Paper No. CB(4)1087/20-21(04) - Paper prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat (Updated background brief)

Briefing by the Administration

4. At the invitation of the Chairman, Under Secretary for Transport and Housing ("USTH") briefed members on the current status of the franchises of Citybus Limited (Franchise for Airport and North Lantau Bus Network) ("Citybus Franchise 2"), Long Win Bus Company Limited ("LW") and New World First Bus Services Limited ("NWFB") ("the three franchisees"). Details of the briefing were set out in the Administration's paper. USTH said that the current franchises of Citybus (Franchise 2) and LW commenced on 1 May 2013 and would expire on 1 May 2023, while that of NWFB commenced on 1 July 2013 and would expire on 1 July 2023. Based on the Administration's assessment, the three franchisees had been providing a proper and efficient bus services and were willing to continue to invest for further enhancement of the franchised bus ("FB") services. Meanwhile, the three franchisees had indicated interest to apply for new ten-year franchises for continual operation of their existing bus networks. The Panel noted that the Administration planned to commence discussion with the three franchisees for new ten-year franchises, which would take effect immediately upon expiry of the current ones in 2023.

5. Panel members noted that in the grant of new franchises, the Administration would endeavor to further enhance the quality of FB service as well as bus safety. The Administration would consult the Transport

Advisory Committee and invite views from the public on the requirements of the new franchises.

Discussion

Safety measures adopted by the three franchisees

6. Mr POON Siu-ping enquired about the progress of retrofitting passenger seat belts on FB and ways to encourage passengers to wear seat belts. He also asked whether TD would update the "Guidelines on Bus Captain Working Hours, Rest Times and Meal Breaks" to further reduce the working hours of special shift to below 13 hours per shift.

7. The Commissioner for Transport ("C for T") replied that the Administration had been following up closely on the implementation of the recommendations put forth in the Report submitted by the Independent Review Committee on Hong Kong Franchised Bus Service ("IRC") on the safety and reliability of public bus service in Hong Kong. On the progress of retrofitting passenger seat belts, C for T said that by 2022, about 3 000 new and existing buses would be equipped or retrofitted with passenger seat belts. The Administration would study ways to encourage passengers to wear seat belts, including the installation of suitable devices to remind passengers. Besides, the Administration had been actively pursuing the IRC's recommendation of the appointment of a Safety Director and a dedicated safety team within the Transport Department ("TD") to promote and enhance FB safety. Upon the approval of the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council on the creation of the three directorate posts for a period of five years, the dedicated FB safety team would continue to progressively take forward relevant safety measures, including formulating various requirements and guidelines on bus captains' rest time and meal breaks as well as bus captain fatigue management. Ongoing discussions would be held with bus captains' unions on devising a suitable shift schedule taking into account income and rest time of bus captains.

8. In reply to Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok's enquiry on whether there were improvements on the safety performance of FB after implementing safety measures such as retrofitting passenger seat belts and installing in-vehicle safety devices, C for T said that since the implementation of various measures put forth in the IRC Report, the number of accidents involved FB had dropped. Quoting NWFB as an example, the number of accidents of NWFB had dropped from 319 in 2018 to 249 in 2019 and further to 213 in 2020 and most of the accidents were minor in nature.

The Admin

9. On the Chairman's request, C for T agreed to provide information on safety measures adopted by the three franchisees and their respective accident figures, breakdown by number, types and severity of casualties in the past three years.

10. Quoting a recent fatal accident happened at Tai Chung Kiu Road of Shatin involving a public light bus driver not wearing his seat belt properly, Mr Michael TIEN enquired whether the Administration would mandate the wearing of seat belts on all public transport services through legislation so as to reduce the severity of casualties involved in accidents. C for T advised that whether to mandate the wearing of seat belts on public transport services would require various considerations, including enforcement issues. That said, the Administration would actively explore ways to promote the wearing of seat belts by drivers and passengers.

11. Mr CHAN Hak-kan pointed out that Tai Chung Kiu Road of Shatin had been a traffic black spot for years. Members had been calling for the Administration to implement traffic improvement measures at relevant road junctures. Given that two serious traffic accidents had happened recently at Tai Chung Kiu Road, he enquired about concrete measures to enhance safety, including the abolishment of "traffic light with split phase" at busy junctures to avoid causing confusion to motorists.

12. C for T advised that TD had been reviewing road and traffic light design at Tai Chung Kiu Road with a view to enhancing road safety of relevant road sections. Measures including clear delineation of double white lines to separate traffic lanes with different traffic movements and directions would be carried out at appropriate road junctions. TD would also prudently review the use of "traffic light with split phase" and explore ways to make traffic light signals clearer to motorists.

Financial performance and long-term sustainability of FB services

13. Referring to Annex B of the Administration's paper, the Deputy Chairman, Mr Kenneth LAU and Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok expressed deep concern about the financial performance of Citybus (Franchise 2) and NWFB in recent years. In particular, NWFB had been operating at a loss for three consecutive years since 2017-2018. As fare revenue was the only major source of income of operating FB services, they were worried that Citybus (Franchise 2) and NWFB might seek fare increase frequently to cover their losses. They enquired about measures to help improve the operating environment of the two

operators.

14. C for T explained that Citybus (Franchise 2) operated routes plying to and from the Airport and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge ("HZMB"). Performance of these routes had been doing very well due to the buoyant tourism in Hong Kong in previous years. The after-tax profit of Citybus (Franchise 2) dropped significantly in 2019-2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the impact was envisaged to be temporary. It was anticipated that their financial performance would improve when travel restrictions were gradually lifted.

15. As regards NWFB, C for T advised that it had been operating routes mainly on Hong Kong Island. Since the full commissioning of the MTR West Island Line and South Island Line (East) in 2014 and 2016 respectively, NWFB had been suffering from a notable drop in patronage. Moreover, population growth on the Hong Kong Island had been stagnant in recent years, rendering little room for NWFB to develop new routes. Against the above backdrop, TD had been working closely with NWFB and Citybus Limited (Franchise for Hong Kong Island and Cross-Harbour Bus Network) ("Citybus Franchise 1") on ways to increase their operating revenue and reduce costs. Cost-saving measures such as bus route rationalization would be taken forward as far as practicable. In addition, measures that could enhance operating efficiency, such as allowing buses to park at designated government sites near the operating areas of relevant routes, would be implemented if situation warranted. When introducing new bus routes such as those serving new development areas, TD would consider allowing more eligible applicants to apply for the operating right of the new routes, so as to offer more opportunities to those operators suffering from less favourable operating environment.

16. The Deputy Chairman reminded the Administration that in granting a new franchise for operating new routes, the operators' proven track record and performance should be the prime considerations. It would defeat operators' motivation to provide good service if the lesser performer were allocated profitable routes. C for T took note of the comments made.

17. Mr Michael TIEN opined that the Administration should consider the necessity of introducing a fare adjustment mechanism ("FAM") for FB services. Unlike MTR Corporation Limited ("MTRCL") where a large proportion of their profits came from property development rights at relevant railway sites, which could in turn provide a buffer for MTRCL to reduce the magnitude of fare increase through the profit sharing mechanism under the FAM formula. As FB operators relied solely on fare revenue as their source

of income, the Administration should consider ways to stabilize the fare of FB service. Noting that the Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited ("KMB") had raised their fare recently, Mr TIEN asked whether the bus fare of KMB could be kept frozen for two to three years if KMB could make a profit.

18. Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport) 2 ("DS/T2") replied that in considering fare increase applications of FB operators, the Administration would take into account a host of factors, including financial viability of FB operators, forecasted revenue and costs, quality of service provision and public acceptability and affordability, among others. C for T added that the dedicated fund set up by each FB operator to keep the toll exempted from using government tolled tunnels would help to stabilize fare. In case of an approved fare increase, relevant FB operators would be required to offset the increase by first using the balance in the said fund. As a result, the magnitude of fare increase shouldered by passengers would be lowered.

19. The Deputy Chairman urged the Administration to explore ways of expanding the size of the fund to benefit more passengers.

20. Upon the expiry of the Build-Operate-Transfer franchise of the West Harbour Crossing ("WHC") in 2023, Dr CHENG Chung-tai asked if the Administration would consider waiving the toll of WHC for FB after the taking over of WHC and at the same time requested FB operators to reduce fare of cross-harbour routes.

21. C for T advised that whether to waive toll of WHC after taking over of WHC in 2023 would require a wider consideration in terms of traffic redistribution and traffic flow management. The Administration was actively considering traffic management measures such as congestion charging and electronic road pricing, and issues relating to traffic management for tolled tunnels. The setting of toll level would naturally be one of the measures to be considered.

22. Quoting recent rumours about possible merger between FB operators in response to the increasingly difficult operating environment, Mr LUK Chung-hung expressed concern that merger actions might affect employees' right of the relevant FB companies. Given the difficult operating situation, he enquired whether the Administration had considered other options, such as taking over public bus service and commissioning FB operators to operate the routes on behalf of the Government. He also asked about the progress of introducing double-deck electric buses in Hong Kong.

23. C for T responded that the Administration had all along been attaching great importance to employees' benefits. Upon the appointment of the Safety Director and establishment of the FB safety team, TD would focus on standardizing and accrediting training courses for bus captains to enhance their job knowledge and to better equip them to become valuable assets of FB companies. As regards the provision of public bus service, the Administration considered it more efficient and cost-effective for the provision of bus service by FB operators according to commercial principles, and welcomed the participation of different companies to maintain healthy competition. On the introduction of double-deck electric buses, given the hilly topology in Hong Kong, FB operators would need to review the operating feasibility of using double-deck electric buses having regard to the weight of the battery, operational safety and the economic benefits to do so.

24. Referring to the financial information of Citybus (Franchise 2) and NWFB provided in Annex B of the Administration's paper, Mr SHIU Ka-fai noted that the ratio of total cost to average daily patronage of NWFB doubled that of Citybus (Franchise 2) over the years. As the average daily patronage of NWFB was nearly four-fold than that of Citybus (Franchise 2), he sought the reasons for the high cost ratio of NWFB and why the company could not attain economies of scale to trim down its cost.

25. C for T explained that Citybus (Franchise 2) mainly operated long-haul routes plying to and from the Airport and HZMB, which was easier to attain cost efficiency because of fewer bus stops and smoother traffic along the routes. On the other hand, NWFB mainly operated short-haul routes on the Hong Kong Island where it was more densely populated with more bus stops. Hence it was more difficult for NWFB to achieve cost efficiency. Nevertheless, TD would discuss closely with NWFB on ways to reduce operating cost to improve its financial position.

Negotiation on new franchise terms

26. Mr POON Siu-ping asked whether there were contingency plans, like looking for new entrants if franchise negotiation with the three franchisees was unsuccessful. Mr Kenneth LAU also asked about the contingency plan if the franchisees closed down their business due to operating difficulties. C for T advised that the Public Bus Services Ordinance (Cap. 230) had provided for situations as mentioned by members. The three franchisees had already indicated their intention to apply for new ten-year franchises. In addition, based on the Administration's assessment, the three franchisees had been providing a proper and efficient bus service, and were willing to continue to

invest for enhancement of bus service. The Administration would therefore plan to commence the discussion with the three franchisees for the new ten-year franchises. As of present, the Administration had not received any indication of interest by other parties to apply for the new franchises.

27. Mr Tony TSE invited the Administration to comment on the merits and demerits of the three franchisees respectively for them to improve their services in future. Also, he noted that the three franchises would expire at about the same time in 2023. He asked whether such arrangement would be conducive for the franchise negotiation to be held between the Administration and the three franchisees or not.

28. C for T said that as the franchise negotiation would commence soon, she would not make specific comment on the performances of the franchisees at this point. Generally speaking, the Administration was satisfied with the services offered by the three franchisees. However, there was still room for improvement in respect of bus lost trip rate, installation of safety devices, service performance of bus captains and so forth.

29. Regarding the expiry of the franchises, C for T explained that three out of the six franchises granted for the provision of public bus services, i.e. Citybus (Franchise 2), LW and NWFB would expire in 2023. The remaining three franchises granted respectively to KMB, New Lantao Bus Company (1973) Limited and Citybus (Franchise 1) ("the remaining franchisees") would expire in 2026 and 2027. C for T advised that the expiry date of the franchises would not affect the franchise negotiation and the Administration's request for service enhancement for the current franchises. One good example would be the implementation of the recommendations made by IRC by all FB operators in the current franchised period. If new franchise terms had been incorporated in the franchises of the three franchisees upon the expiry of their existing ones in 2023, the remaining franchisees would normally be willing to agree to similar terms during subsequent franchise negotiations.

30. Mr YIU Si-wing noted that the lost trip rate of the three franchisees were relatively high in 2020. He asked for the reasons and whether TD had set any performance indicator in this respect for FB operators to follow. Also, he asked about details of the installation of closed-circuit television ("CCTV") inside bus compartment.

31. C for T explained that the relatively high lost trip rate in the first half of 2020 was attributable to the significant drop in patronage during the early outbreak of COVID-19 when most people stayed home for work or study. Bus service frequency was adjusted as a result. TD had then taken immediate

measures to require the three franchisees to rectify the situation, and the lost trip rate improved gradually in the second half of 2020. Bus lost trip rate remained steady in the first few months of 2021. As regards installation of CCTV in bus compartments for ensuring safety, the Safety Director and the dedicated FB safety team, if so established within TD, would take up the issue with FB operators to review the situation.

32. Mr CHAN Hak-kan asked if the Administration would require the three franchisees to replace all diesel vehicles with electric vehicles in the new franchises so as to improve roadside air quality. C for T replied that achieving carbon neutrality was one of the Administration's key policy objectives. The Administration would discuss with the three franchisees on adopting more environmentally friendly and low emission vehicles during franchise negotiation. In fact, FB operators were actively reviewing the use of clean energy vehicles such as electric or hydrogen buses, with a view to gradually replacing their fleet with clean energy vehicles.

Conclusion

33. The Chairman concluded that members raised no objection to the Administration's plan to commence discussion with the three franchisees for new ten-year franchises. He invited the Administration to prudently look into the mode of operation of public bus services in Hong Kong in face of high fuel cost and keen competition with the railway. He also pointed out that the problem of bus route duplication among different FB companies was serious, leading to low efficiency and problems of congestion and roadside pollution. In this regard, he urged the Administration to seriously consider bus route rationalization. Also, he suggested the Administration to review the possibility of providing fuel subsidy to public transport service providers having regard to the gradually increasing fuel cost.

IV. Upgrading of passenger ancillary facilities and application of technology on public light buses

LC Paper No. CB(4)1087/20-21(05) - Paper provided by the Administration

Briefing by the Administration

34. At the invitation of the Chairman, DS/T2 briefed members on the upgrading of passenger ancillary facilities and application of technology on

public light buses ("PLBs"). Details of the briefing were set out in the Administration's paper. To promote the installation of real-time arrival information, the Administration would fund a data collection system and install location detection devices on all green minibus ("GMBs") to enable passengers to access the real-time arrival information of GMBs through TD's mobile application "HKeMobility". TD aimed to implement the real-time arrival information system on all GMB routes by 2022. On the deployment of low-floor wheelchair, the Administration introduced a trial scheme on two GMB hospital routes in 2018. In taking forward the trial scheme further, TD had required GMB operators running new hospital routes to undertake to deploy one low-floor wheelchair accessible GMB within one year of operating the relevant routes. TD would work with vehicle manufacturers to identify appropriate vehicle models which could suit the operational needs of relevant routes.

35. To enhance passengers' awareness to wear seat belts, TD had launched a technical on-site study in 2020 on seat occupancy and seat-belt fastening detection for GMBs to test the effectiveness of various technical solutions. TD would also explore different ways of reminding passengers to wear their seat belts. In addition, according to the 2019 PLB Market Usage Survey, more than 82% of PLBs in Hong Kong offered Octopus payment method. Some GMB operators also offered QR-mode payment. The Administration would continue to encourage PLB operators to introduce new electronic payment systems to offer convenience to the public.

Discussion

Deployment of low-floor wheelchair accessible PLBs on hospital routes

36. Mr POON Siu-ping expressed concern about the slow progress of deploying low-floor wheelchair accessible PLBs on hospital routes. He also asked about the progress of TD in identifying appropriate vehicle models to be deployed and consulting stakeholders on the implementation of "Transport for All" in PLBs.

37. DS/T2 responded that TD had been conducting trial on a European model of low-floor wheelchair accessible PLBs, which was used the first time in Hong Kong. Assistant Commissioner/Management and Paratransit of Transport Department ("AC/MP") supplemented that given the hilly topography of some of the hospital routes and taking into account the boarding and alighting of wheelchair passengers, the operational expenditure and repair and maintenance cost was found to be higher for the new light bus model. TD was therefore identifying other suitable PLB models that could

accommodate the operational characteristics of the hospital routes. On Mr POON's enquiry of the introduction of electric PLBs manufactured on the Mainland, DS/T2 said that PLB models that were suitable for operation in Hong Kong would be considered.

38. The Chairman and Mr YIU Si-wing pointed out that the cost of a low-floor wheelchair accessible PLB was double that of an ordinary PLB. Given the difficult operating environment of PLB at present, it would be hard to request PLB operators to procure new PLB model. They urged the Administration to provide subsidy to operators for the procurement of suitable low-floor wheelchair accessible PLB. DS/T2 took note of the suggestion and responded that in taking forward "Transport for All" concept in PLBs, the Administration would consider all relevant factors holistically.

Safety of PLBs

39. Mr Michael TIEN said that given the high frequency of fatal accidents involving PLBs, it was of paramount importance to ensure the wearing of seat belts by drivers and passengers. In order to ensure that passengers would wear seat belts, he opined that TD should require operators to install audio devices such that when passenger seat belt was not fastened, the device would alert the passenger concerned through emitting sounds or broadcasting reminder. Noting that TD was conducting on-site trial on different ways of reminding passengers to buckle up, he asked about the progress and implementation timetable. Mr POON Siu-ping said that the Administration should explore ways to encourage passengers to wear seat belts.

40. DS/T2 replied that TD would explore and review the effectiveness of different ways of reminding passengers to buckle up, including the installation of light signals above passenger seats and display screen adjacent to the driver's seat showing seats where passengers had not buckled up. Audio devices giving out beeping sounds or broadcasting reminder would also be tested. The technical study launched in 2020 was expected to be completed by the third quarter of 2021. AC/MP supplemented that it was necessary to conduct on-site trial of different solutions to find out the applicability of different devices on PLBs, and to collect drivers and passengers' feedback. It was envisaged that passenger seats would need to be retrofitted for the installation of relevant devices, and information collected during on-site trials would be important to help TD decide on the way forward.

41. Mr YIU Si-wing noted that many PLB drivers had not fastened their seat beats properly because the seat belts were too tight which made them feel uncomfortable when driving. He asked how TD could step up enforcement

actions against drivers not wearing seat belts properly when driving. Mr Tony TSE also enquired about measures to ensure PLB safety, such as installation of in-vehicle safety devices and driving monitoring system.

42. DS/T2 replied that under the Road Traffic (Safety Equipment) Regulations (Cap. 374F), passengers were required to wear a seat belt if it was provided for his/her seat. The Administration reckoned the importance of ensuring that drivers and passengers had worn their seat belts properly on PLBs. In this regard, the Hong Kong Police ("HKP") had been conducting routine and surprise checks on drivers' and passengers' compliance with relevant regulations. In the past five years, HKP had issued 288 and 361 fixed penalty tickets to drivers and passengers respectively on average each year. TD would convey the message to HKP for stepping up enforcement efforts to ensure that drivers and passengers would wear seat belts. On safety of PLBs, the Administration had imposed various measures including the imposition of the maximum speed limit of 80 kilometers per hour for PLBs when travelling on roads and requiring each PLB to install speed limiter and electronic data recording device and so forth. AC/MP supplemented that PLBs were required to pass mandatory examination of their vehicles annually for the renewal of vehicle licence. In conducting the relevant examination, TD would check driver and passenger seat belts to ensure that they were working properly.

43. In reply to Mr Tony TSE's enquiry on the effectiveness of different technology in detecting seat belt fastening, DS/T2 said that preliminary finding of the technical study had shown that reed switch detection, which was to be fixed on seat belt buckle to detect whether seat belt had been fastened was a more effective device. The relevant study would be completed by third quarter of 2021.

44. The Deputy Chairman concurred with the need to step up enforcement actions against drivers and passengers not wearing seat belts on PLBs. He urged the Administration to enhance publicity efforts to educate the public the importance of wearing seat belts. Regarding the suggestion of installing beeping device on PLBs to remind passengers to wear seat belts, he invited the Administration to gauge the views of passengers and the trade on relevant issues to avoid causing distractions to drivers or annoyance to passengers concerned.

Installation of real-time arrival information

45. Mr YIU Si-wing noted that TD planned to implement real-time arrival information system on all GMB routes by 2022. He asked whether

TD would fund the installation of real-time arrival information for red minibus ("RMB") routes which were run on regular schedule.

46. AC/MP replied that as GMB operated scheduled services with fixed routes and timetable, it was easier to manage and monitor relevant arrival information for dissemination to the public. That said, the Administration was open-minded about helping RMBs on the installation of relevant technology, provided that their routes, timetable and vehicle allocation were regularly scheduled. Having noted the Administration's comment that TD might review the effectiveness of real-time arrival information system implemented on all GMB routes by 2022 before deciding on the way forward for RMB routes, Mr YIU called on the Administration to implement the system on GMB and RMB routes concurrently.

Ways to help PLBs to overcome operating difficulties

47. The Deputy Chairman pointed out that the PLB trade was facing an acute operating environment at present. With a gradual shrink in patronage arising from increasing competition from other public transport services such as railway, coupled with the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, many operators were barely surviving. In this regard, he called on the Administration to extend the provision of fuel subsidy and one-off subsidy for one year to help the trade cope with the rise in fuel cost and operating pressure. He also urged the Administration to open up more routes in new development areas for the operation of PLBs having regard to the transport needs of residents living in remote areas and the operating difficulties faced by RMB trade.

48. DS/T2 replied that more than \$300 million had been released to subsidize the actual fuel costs of public transport sector as of May 2021. In addition, the Administration had provided wage subsidy to GMB operators in respect of their hiring of each employee aged 65 or above. In deciding whether to extend the provision of fuel subsidy for one year, the Administration would need to take into account all relevant factors holistically, including the development of the pandemic and extent of revival. As regards measures to help the operation of PLBs, the Administration would suitably review the need to open up new routes for the operation of GMBs in new towns and housing developments. In addition, TD had relaxed the restrictions at certain districts as pick-up/drop off points for RMBs and allowed them to park their vehicles at designated minibus stops with a view to improving their operating conditions. TD had also encouraged RMB operators to develop other sources of revenue to improve their financial situations.

49. As some \$3.2 billion had been earmarked to provide the fuel subsidy and one-off subsidy to the public transport trade, the Deputy Chairman called on the Administration to use the residual of the ear-marked fund to continue the provision of subsidy to the transport trade as many of them had yet to recover from the worsened economic environment.

Conclusion

50. The Chairman concluded that PLB trade was facing an increasingly difficult operating environment. It would be hard to request PLB operators to spare extra resources to upgrade passenger facilities or apply technology to improve services. He called upon the Administration to provide subsidy to the trade on the procurement of low-floor wheelchair accessible light bus and installation of in-vehicle safety devices. In addition, taking into account the rise in fuel cost recently and that the economy had not fully recovered, it was necessary to continue the provision of fuel subsidy to the public transport services to help them cope with the rising operating cost. On PLB safety, he invited the Administration to devise effective ways to encourage both drivers and passengers to wear seat belt, including stepping up publicity and enforcement efforts.

V. Any other business

51. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:37 pm.