

Section 8 - Concern Over Environment

In recent years, there is increasing public concern on the quality of our environment. Further to the Chief Executive's policy address in 1999 on environmental improvements, he has also stressed the priority in improving air quality in the policy address in 2000. To this end, Transport Department continues to take active measures to improve the air quality, which include the replacement of diesel by liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) taxis, exploring the use of alternative fuels for Public Light Buses (PLBs), controlling the growth of the franchised bus fleet, enhancing the annual commercial vehicle inspection programme and introducing pedestrian schemes.

LPG Taxis

At the end of 2000, about 4,100 LPG taxis have been licensed to operate on the roads. The pace of replacement of diesel by LPG taxis started to pick up when the five dedicated LPG filling stations commenced operation in two batches in October and November 2000.

A total of 12 LPG filling stations have been operating in various parts of Hong Kong capable of serving a minimum of 8,000 LPG taxis. Additionally, the Administration will continue to approach the oil companies to retrofit LPG facilities at existing petrol filling stations. On top of this, four additional dedicated stations are scheduled to commence operation by the end of 2001. The Administration will continue to work towards providing more LPG facilities. Our target is to provide adequate refilling facilities for the entire fleet of 18,138 taxis by the end of 2001.

As the replacement programme has been progressing smoothly, the Administration intends to terminate the importation of diesel taxis by amending the law to specify that all newly registered taxis must use LPG as fuel. The consent of the Legislative Council will be sought in the middle of 2001.

LPG/Electric PLB Trial

The objective of the trial was to collect local operational data of LPG and electric light buses and to ascertain the suitability of these vehicles in meeting the local commercial operating conditions.

The trial was launched in phases starting from 5 June 2000 and completed on 31 January 2001. 11 LPG PLBs (8 Toyota, 2 Ford and 1 Nissan) and 4 electric PLBs were deployed to operate on 7 green minibus/red minibus (GMB/RMB) routes.

A Monitoring Committee comprising members from the PLB/GMB trades, experts from universities, vehicle manufacturers and representatives from relevant government departments was set up to oversee the trial.

The findings of the trial are being analyzed. Transport Department continues to assist the Environmental Protection Department in finalizing the final report, consulting the PLB trade and working out the way forward on the replacement of diesel light buses by LPG/electric light buses.

Feasibility Study on Introducing Trolley Bus System in Hong Kong

A feasibility study for introducing trolley buses in Hong Kong has been commissioned. The study is expected to be completed in the latter half of 2001.

Controlling the Growth of the Franchised Bus Fleet

To ensure efficient use of the existing franchised bus fleet, we are scrutinizing the companies' five-year development plans very carefully. Buses have been diverted from the urban busy areas to new towns in the New Territories to meet the population growth and transport demand.

Bus-bus Interchange Schemes

To reduce demand for more direct bus service, relieve congestion and minimize environmental impact on busy corridors, bus-bus interchange schemes with fare discounts offered to the interchanged passengers are being promoted. Six Bus-bus interchange schemes were introduced in 2000.

Improving Vehicle Emission

By the end of 2000, about 64% of the 6,200 franchised buses were running on engines in compliance with the Euro emission standards. All new buses to be purchased by the franchised bus companies will comply with the latest Euro emission standards.

For pre-Euro buses, the franchised bus companies are either upgrading them to meet Euro standards, scrapping and replacing them by new buses of the latest Euro emission standards or retrofitting them with diesel catalysts. In 2000, 40 pre-Euro engine buses had been upgraded into Euro I engine buses; over 100 buses were scrapped and about 1,200 pre-Euro buses were fitted with diesel catalysts.

It is planned to retrofit 1,900 pre-Euro buses with diesel catalysts before the end of 2001, while the remaining 300 pre-Euro buses not fitted with such devices are to be scrapped by the end of 2002.

Since 28 December 2000, the whole fleet of New World First Bus has been using Ultra Low Sulphur Diesel (ULSD). Other franchised bus companies would switch to the use of ULSD in early 2001.

Enhancing the Annual Commercial Vehicle Inspection Programme

From October 2000, more stringent and comprehensive smoke tests to all diesel vehicles were conducted during their annual roadworthiness inspection. A chassis dynamometer has been installed and put into operation in the Kowloon Bay Vehicle Examination Centre since December 2000. The installation of another two chassis dynamometers is under planning to further strengthen the inspection programme.

Pedestrian Schemes

In order to enhance road safety for pedestrians and to improve the overall environment for pedestrians, we have introduced pedestrian schemes in Causeway Bay, Mong Kok, Tsim Sha Tsui and Stanley. In 2000, a total of 18 pedestrian streets* were implemented.

With the success of the initial phase of these pedestrian schemes, we have commissioned a further pedestrianisation study in mid 2001 to identify the possible pedestrianisation in Central, Wan Chai, Jordan and Sham Shui Po.

Note: * -

Full-time pedestrian Streets: Russell Street, Paterson Street; Jardine's Crescent

Part-time pedestrian Streets: Lee Garden Road, Lockhart Road; East Point Road; Great George Street; Sai Yeung Choi Street South; Stanley Main Street and Market Road

Traffic Calming Streets: Kai Chiu Road; Sai Yeung Choi Street South; Nelson Street; Haiphong Road; Lock Road; Hankow Road; sections of Canton Road and Peking Road.