

TD meets non-franchised bus trade on enhancing operational safety

The Transport Department (TD) held a special meeting today (December 5) with public bus operators to discuss ways to enhance operational safety of non-franchised buses (NFBs). Both the TD and participants agreed that operational safety of NFBs is of vital importance. The discussion at the meeting mainly focused on installation and provision of safety devices, the use of technologies to enhance operational safety of NFBs as well as drawing up guidelines on working hours and rest time for NFB drivers.

Regarding the installation of seatbelts on NFBs, the trade supported enacting legislation to compulsorily require newly registered NFBs to be equipped with seatbelts. In fact, NFB operators have been purchasing new buses equipped with seatbelts in recent years. As for whether passengers should be compulsorily required to fasten seatbelts, the trade in principle supported but suggested that the Government should exempt drivers from taking responsibilities and should also take into account the issue of safety escape concerning certain types of passengers such as children. The TD also pointed out in the meeting that the department will review the suggestions on installation of seatbelts on NFBs and requiring passengers to fasten seatbelts.

Regarding the installation of safety devices on vehicles and the use of technology to enhance safety, the NFB trade supported and responded proactively. The participants noted that at present, there are various models of NFBs in operation and they are produced by different manufacturers of different countries. Even the same manufacturer has a number of bus models. Therefore, there is a need to study the feasibility of installing different safety devices on an individual bus model. However, the trade is in support of the installation of various types of safety devices on newly purchased buses, particularly the TD's suggestion of installing speed limiters and tachograph (commonly known as "blackbox"). Moreover, in view of the installation of electronic stability control system by some vehicle manufacturers on existing buses already, the trade will proactively consider installing relevant devices when purchasing new buses. Concerning the installation of bus driver monitoring system (for example, collision prevention alert system), the trade indicated that they would have to study according to the actual operational condition but they agreed to test the system on some NFBs first. Meanwhile, some of the operators in the meeting agreed to search and introduce relevant devices for testing while the TD will offer assistance and advice.

Moreover, the TD is very concerned about the occupational health of NFB drivers and has all along urged the NFB operators, as responsible organisations, to ensure not only operational safety of NFBs, but also the rest time of their drivers to avoid fatigue driving. The NFB trade has agreed in principle to draw up guidelines on working hours and rest time for their drivers but held that the relevant details should take into account their

mode of operation. They have committed to working together with the TD continuously to work on the guidelines.

"The meeting receives positive response from the NFB operators with effectiveness. We are glad to know that the NFB trade supports the installation and testing of relevant technologies on a trial basis to enhance operational safety, installation of seatbelts on newly registered NFBs as well as formulating guidelines on working hours and rest time for NFB drivers. The TD will set up a special working group under regular meetings with the public bus operators to further discuss and follow up on the aforementioned safety enhancement measures, hoping that consensus can be reached on some concrete measures as soon as possible so that the measures can be formally implemented," a TD spokesman said.