

LCQ22: Low-floor wheelchair accessible public light bus

Following is a question by the Hon Stanley Li and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Liu Chun-san, in the Legislative Council today (December 6):

Question:

The Transport Department launched the Low-floor wheelchair accessible public light bus trial scheme (the Scheme) in January 2018. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) since the launch of the Scheme, of the total number of low-floor wheelchair accessible public light buses (low-floor PLBs) introduced and, among them, the number of those still in service, together with a breakdown by public light bus (PLB) route;

(2) as some green minibus (GMB) operators have pointed out that the operating costs of low-floor PLBs (e.g. the costs for buying new vehicles and repair) are high, whether the Government has put in place policies or measures to create a sustainable business environment, so as to promote the popularisation of low-floor PLBs; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) since the launch of the Scheme, whether new PLB operators have joined the Scheme; whether existing participating PLB operators in the Scheme have reflected their operating difficulties; whether the Government has formulated a review proposal for the Scheme; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) whether it has studied the introduction of across-the-board requirements for GMBs to provide services with low-floor PLBs and for each route to provide services by at least one low-floor PLB, so as to improve the "Transport for All" policy; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) as it has been reported that while there are a number of social welfare organizations providing services primarily to the elderly, as well as underprivileged groups with impaired mobility and care service needs at A Kung Kok Shan Road in Shatin, no low-floor PLB has been put in service for the only GMB route operating in the road section, whether the Government will consider introducing low-floor PLBs for that route to ensure the effective implementation of the "Transport for All" policy; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Stanley Li is as follows:

(1) and (3) To promote the concept of "Transport for All", the Government introduced the Low-floor Wheelchair Accessible Public Light Bus Trial Scheme (the Trial Scheme) in January 2018, and has since reviewed the effectiveness of the Trial Scheme and performance of the low-floor wheelchair accessible public light buses (PLBs). Under the Trial Scheme, two green minibus (GMB) hospital routes (i.e. Hong Kong Island Route No. 54M (Kennedy Town – Queen Mary Hospital) and New Territories Route No. 808 (Kam Ying Court – Prince of Wales Hospital)) have each put one low-floor wheelchair accessible PLB into service. The operators concerned also provided phone reservation service to allow easier access to such PLBs for those in need.

The result of the review showed that the participating GMB operators encountered various operational issues, including increase in operating expenditure, higher repair and maintenance cost, as well as longer waiting time for maintenance parts for the new PLB models. Also, the services of such GMB routes often became less stable due to longer and uncertain journey time spent on accommodating wheelchair-bound passengers compared with other GMBs operating along similar routes. Nonetheless, from August 2018, the Transport Department (TD) has required the operators of new hospital routes to deploy at least one low-floor wheelchair accessible PLB, including the followings:

Route Number	Origin – Destination	Date of Service Commencement
New Territories Route No. 413	Tsing Yi Ferry Terminus – Princess Margaret Hospital	February 2021
Kowloon Route No. 90A	Yau Tong (Yau Lai Estate) – Hong Kong Children's Hospital	April 2023
New Territories Route No. 503	Queens Hill Estate – North District Hospital	May 2023

At present, except for the low-floor wheelchair accessible PLB deployed to New Territories Route No. 413, those deployed to the other four routes are under maintenance.

(2) and (4) The TD has been in discussion with GMB operators and vehicle manufacturers to explore other more suitable vehicle models to operate as low-floor wheelchair accessible PLB, and continue to encourage operators to adopt low-floor PLBs. To promote the adoption of low-floor PLBs, applications of operators who undertake to use low-floor PLB (Note 1) will be given higher marks in GMB Operators Selection Exercises for new GMB route packages.

In addition to the five hospital routes with low-floor wheelchair accessible PLBs in service, low-floor PLBs will also be deployed gradually to

the following ten GMB routes:

Route Number	Origin – Destination
Kowloon Route No. CX1 (Note 2)	Austin Station – Hong Kong Palace Museum (Circular route)
New Territories Route No. 505	Sheung Shui (San Fat Street) – Sha Tin (Yuen Chau Kok)
Kowloon Route No. 2/ 2A	Whampoa Garden – Festival Walk Public Transport Interchange
New Territories Route No. 116	Pak Shing Kok – Tsueng Kwan O Station (Circular route)
New Territories Route No. 506/507	Chi Fuk Circuit – Luen Wo Hui (Circular route) Ma Sik Road – Fanling Station (Circular route)
New Territories Route No. 117A/ 117B (Note 3)	Anderson Road Quarry Development Area – Sheung Tak Public Transport Interchange/ Anderson Road Quarry Road Development Area – Yau Tong (Circular route)
New Territories Route No. 24 (Note 3)	Tai Po (Fu Tip Estate) – Tai Po (Kwong Fuk Road) (Circular route)

Note 1: In the GMB Operators Selection Exercise conducted between 2020 and 2022, operators generally undertook to provide low-floor PLB services (using either low-floor wheelchair accessible PLBs or low-floor PLBs) within one to three years of operating the new routes concerned.

Note 2: Kowloon Route No. CX1 began providing low-floor wheelchair accessible PLB services in October 2023.

Note 3: New Territories Routes No. 117A, 117B and 24 have yet to commence operation.

The TD will continue to monitor the operation of new low-floor PLBs, and maintain close communication with the PLB trade. If a GMB operator applies for fare adjustment due to increase in operating cost, the TD will consider such application taking into account the operational and financial conditions of the specific route.

Having regard to the current operating situation of GMBs, the TD has no plan to impose across-the-board requirement on GMBs to adopt low-floor PLBs or arrange at least one low-floor PLB for every route. Aside from GMB services, wheelchair-bound passengers who need to commute to hospitals and clinics could also consider using other modes of public transport equipped with barrier-free facilities or the Rehabus.

(5) At present, GMB operators purchase low-floor wheelchair accessible PLBs at their own cost. The operator of GMB Route No. 67K (A Kung Kok – Sha Tin Station) indicated that it did not have additional resources available for adopting low-floor wheelchair accessible PLB after considering its operational and financial conditions.

Passengers with mobility impairments who need to commute to and from the A Kung Kok Shan Road area in Sha Tin may use the Rehabus Scheduled Route Service or Dial-a-Ride Service provided by the Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation, of which four scheduled routes pass through the said area. In addition, Rehabus services (Sha Tin and Tai Wai routes) provided by Kwoon Chung Inclusive and Accessible Transport Services Company Limited also pass through A Kung Kok Shan Road. The said Rehabus services are generally sufficient for meeting the needs of the passengers. The TD will continue to monitor the demand for the said Rehabus services and review the arrangement as appropriate.