

TD convenes first meeting of Committee on Enhancement of Franchised Bus Safety (with photos)

The Transport Department (TD) convened the first meeting of the Committee on Enhancement of Franchised Bus Safety today (April 3) and discussed with the representatives of all franchised bus operators and academic experts how to improve franchised bus safety and take forward measures to enhance franchised bus safety.

In mid-March last year, the TD set up the Working Group on the Enhancement of Safety of Franchised Buses, which has since considered and studied possible measures to further enhance bus safety with all franchised bus operators. Having taken into account the recommendations made by the Independent Review Committee on Hong Kong's Franchised Bus Service, the Working Group has been turned into a permanent setup, upgraded and revamped as the Committee on Enhancement of Franchised Bus Safety to further strengthen the interaction with franchised bus operators and other stakeholders, and facilitate discussion, study, implementation and promotion of various strategies and measures for enhancing franchised bus safety among different stakeholders.

The Committee has renewed its membership and terms of reference (Annex). Apart from the representatives from all franchised bus companies, the Committee has invited two local academic experts to join as members. They are Associate Dean (Development and External Relations) of the Faculty of Engineering and Chair of the Department of Civil Engineering at the University of Hong Kong, Professor Wong Sze-chun, and Associate Vice President (Learning and Teaching), Chair Professor of the Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, and Director of the University Research Facility in Behavioral and Systems Neuroscience at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Professor Chetwyn Chan. The Committee will hold a meeting around every four months.

Moreover, there are two sub-committees under the Committee, namely the Sub-Committee on In-vehicle Safety Devices and Technologies and the Sub-Committee on Training, Fatigue and Working Hour Management of Bus Captains, to focus on the discussion of relevant topics and the monitoring of follow-up actions.

During the meeting, members discussed the mission and values of franchised bus safety. All members agreed to foster a safety-first culture among the Government and franchised bus operators and will work together to adopt an active, proactive and integrated approach to enhance franchised bus safety through adoption of technology, effective management and good institutions.

In addition, the Committee committed to take forward the 45 recommendations by the Independent Review Committee on Hong Kong's Franchised Bus Service as well as other measures under four major areas, comprising:

- (1) installation and enhancement of in-vehicle devices/technologies to assist safe driving;
- (2) enhancing the training and working environment of bus captains;
- (3) strengthening bus accident analyses and safety performance management; and
- (4) enhancing general road and infrastructure safety as well as introducing more bus-friendly measures.

At the same time, all members endorsed the work plan in the coming two years, which encompasses the following priority tasks:

- (1) to discuss with franchised bus operators and determine a new set of safety performance indicators in Q2 2019;
- (2) to complete a review on setting common thresholds in respect of speeding, harsh acceleration and deceleration in Q4 2019;
- (3) to complete cost-benefit analyses of retrofitting seat belts, electronic stability controls and speed limiting retarders on existing franchised buses in mid-2019;
- (4) to consolidate the trial findings of the other safety devices (including the advance driving assistance system, etc.) in Q2 2019;
- (5) to explore and study fatigue identification and management in franchised bus operations in Q4 2019;
- (6) to commence a review on the Guidelines on Bus Captain Working Hours, Rest Times and Meal Break in Q2 2020;
- (7) to commence reviews on the implementation of the Practice Note of Bus Captain Training and for identifying key indicators of effectiveness of the Practice Note in Q4 2019; and
- (8) to launch trial schemes on give way signage and road markings for buses to leave bus stops and low speed zones in Q4 2019.

Members noted the progress of the cost-benefit analyses of the retrofitting of seat belts being conducted currently and will consider the study findings with a view to deciding on how to take forward the retrofitting of seat belts on the upper decks of existing franchised buses. Moreover, the two academic experts also provided the Committee with comments and views on enhancement of franchised bus safety and fatigue identification and management respectively.

Prior to the meeting of the Committee, the TD organised a workshop with representatives of franchised bus operators and the two academic experts on March 25. They exchanged views on the mission and values, and ideas and thoughts on how to address longer-term issues such as review of working hour guidelines, fatigue identification and management, bus captain training and image-building, and passenger education. Participants agreed that the workshop was useful in enhancing collaboration and consensus-building among the parties concerned and that similar exchanges should be held in future.

