

TD's response to media enquiries on Guidelines on Bus Captain Working Hours, Rest Times and Meal Breaks

In response to media enquiries on Guidelines on Bus Captain Working Hours, Rest Times and Meal Breaks, a spokesman for the Transport Department (TD) today (May 21) gave the following reply:

The TD announced on February 23 the revisions of the Guidelines on Bus Captain Working Hours, Rest Times and Meal Breaks (guidelines) in which the arrangements for special shifts have, as far as practicable, struck a balance among the provision of proper bus services for passengers, the rest times of bus captains and the operational needs of bus companies.

Currently, bus companies need to arrange special shift duties to cater for the passenger demands during morning and evening peak periods. The bus services in Hong Kong is characterised by long service hours and concentrated patronage in the morning and evening peak periods. For routes with longer journey distance, the bus companies need to arrange special shift duties with longer duty time to cope with passenger demand. The bus companies would also need to recruit a large number of additional bus captains (about 1 600 additional bus captains) if all the special shifts are cancelled. Under the tight manpower situation in the transport trade, it is impossible to recruit a large number of bus captains in a short period of time to maintain the service level. On the other hand, the income of some bus captains will be affected if the special shift is shortened by adopting a one-size-fits-all approach, or even shortened to a short shift of five to seven hours.

The TD, when proposing the regulation of rest times for special shifts in the revised guidelines, has also stipulated that the upper limit of driving hours should not exceed 10 hours, which tally with all bus captains in other duty shifts. To ensure sufficient rest times for bus captains, the revised guidelines stated that the rest times should not be less than three consecutive hours for bus captains in a special shift. In addition, the bus companies have also pledged to improve the environment and facilities of the rest rooms for bus captains.

The revised Guidelines only set out the upper and lower limits of the working hours and rest times respectively. The TD will continue to encourage the franchised bus companies to make effective arrangements on the shift duties of their bus captains proactively and shorten the working and driving hours of the bus captains to less than the relevant upper limit stipulated when possible. In fact, the bus companies have expressed that they will reduce the maximum working hours of special shifts gradually from 14 hours to 13 hours according to the recruitment progress of bus captains.

The TD will closely monitor the implementation of special shifts by all the bus companies, including the proportion and pattern of special shift

arrangements of bus companies to ensure that the special shifts are arranged based on genuine operational needs.

Meanwhile, the TD is very concerned about the remuneration packages of bus captains and noted that all the bus companies have introduced enhanced remuneration of bus captains and also started discussions on the annual pay adjustment. The TD hopes the bus captains and bus companies will continue to communicate and reach a consensus as early as possible.

The TD appeals to the bus captains to remain rational and exercise restraint in the course of striving for their labour rights, and maintain proper bus services for the well-being of Hong Kong people as far as possible.