

LCQ10: Seat belts to passenger seats of public light buses  
\*\*\*\*\*

Following is a question by the Hon Ronny Tong Ka-wah and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (July 14):

Question:

In a serious traffic accident which occurred in Sha Tin on May 17 this year, a public light bus (PLB) collided with a taxi, resulting in one death and six injuries, and the deceased and two of the injured persons were passengers of the PLB. It was reported that as the passenger seats of the PLB concerned were not fitted with seat belts, the three passengers were either killed or seriously injured, while the PLB driver who wore a seat belt had only sustained a minor injury. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the number of PLBs not fitted with seat belts on their passenger seats in Hong Kong at present, and the percentage of such number in the total number of PLBs;

(b) given that it is stipulated under the Road Traffic (Safety Equipment) Regulations (Cap. 374F) that all rear seats of PLBs registered on or after August 1, 2004 are required to be fitted with seat belts, and passengers must wear the seat belts fitted on their seats, failing which they are liable to prosecution, of the respective numbers of prosecution instituted, since the legislation has come into operation, against PLB owners who failed to have their vehicles fitted with seat belts as required and passengers who failed to wear seat belts as required;

(c) whether the Government will make it a mandatory requirement for all seats of PLBs to be retrofitted with seat

belts, and whether financial assistance will be provided to owners of PLBs registered before August 1, 2004 and not yet fitted with seat belts; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(d) whether the authorities will step up law enforcement against PLB passengers' failure to wear a seat belt and increase the penalty for the offence, so as to alert them of the requirement of wearing a seat belt?

Reply:

President,

(a) Under regulation 6(C) of the Road Traffic (Safety Equipment) Regulations (Cap. 374F), every public light bus (PLB) registered on or after August 1, 2004 shall be provided with a seat belt for each of its passenger seats. As at June 30, 2010, there were 2,382 PLBs (55% of all PLBs) fitted with passenger seat belts in Hong Kong. There were 1,967 PLBs which were first registered before August 1, 2004 (45% of all PLBs) and were not fitted with passenger seat belts.

(b) Between August 2004 and June 2010, the Police instituted a total of 11,090 prosecutions against PLB drivers and passengers for failing to wear seat belts (the Police do not have a breakdown on the number of prosecutions against drivers and passengers). The number of prosecutions by year is at Annex.

No PLB owners have been prosecuted for non-compliance with the requirement of fitting seat belts in their vehicles.

(c) We do not intend to make it a mandatory requirement for all PLBs first registered before August 1, 2004 to be retrofitted with passenger seat belts or provide financial assistance for such purpose. Retrofitting passenger seat belts in a PLB affects its body structure, and PLBs of older

age or models cannot cope with the reinforcement work required for retrofitting of passenger seat belts. Therefore, when considering the relevant legislative amendments in 2000, we proposed to require only newly registered PLBs to be fitted with passenger seat belts. Such an arrangement took into account the practicality of retrofitting work and struck a balance between the views of the PLB trade and the views of the different quarters of the community. Subsequently, the legislative amendments requiring newly registered PLBs to be fitted with passenger seat belts were enacted in November 2002 and implemented on August 1, 2004.

The Government's policy is that PLB owners should be responsible for any equipment, including retrofitting passenger seat belts, in their vehicles. To encourage more PLBs to be retrofitted with passenger seat belts, the Transport Department (TD) issued in September 2006 the relevant specifications and drawings as guidelines for retrofitting approved passenger seat belts in PLBs first registered before August 1, 2004.

In addition, since August 1, 2004, the Government has introduced two incentive schemes to provide the PLB trade with financial assistance for encouraging PLB owners to replace their old PLBs with greener and newer models. A third incentive scheme will be introduced later this year. With old PLBs being gradually replaced with new models, the percentage of PLBs fitted with passenger seat belts will continue to rise.

(d) Under the Road Traffic (Safety Equipment) Regulations (Cap. 374F), passengers failing to wear seat belts are liable to a fine of \$5,000 and imprisonment for three months. We consider the existing penalty appropriate and will review the relevant legislation when necessary.

Apart from routine enforcement patrols, the Police will stage territory-wide operations regularly on education,

publicity and enforcement fronts to raise the awareness of wearing seat belts among passengers and drivers. Furthermore, the Road Safety Council, TD and Police will remind passengers and drivers of the requirement of wearing seat belts and the penalty of non-compliance by such means as announcements in the public interest on television and radio, publicity leaflets and posters.

Ends/Wednesday, July 14, 2010

Issued at HKT 11:40