

TAC discusses Government's proposals to combat drug driving

The Transport Advisory Committee (TAC) discussed the Government's initial proposals to combat drug driving today (July 27).

"Drug driving has become an increasing concern of the community as the number of such cases rose recently. TAC members fully support the Government's efforts to combat drug driving," TAC Chairman, Ms Teresa Cheng said.

"TAC members backed the proposed 'zero tolerance' control on six common drugs of abuse, namely heroin, ketamine, ice, cannabis, cocaine and ecstasy. Under the proposal, a driver commits an offence when driving if his body has any concentration of these specified drugs."

"The 'zero tolerance' approach should help send a clear message of no drug driving to the community, achieving maximum deterrent effect for the sake of road safety," Ms Cheng said.

The TAC noted the Administration's proposal to introduce objective tests such as an impairment test to help the police officers establish reasonable suspicion in drug driving cases. If a driver fails the preliminary test, he will be required to provide body fluid specimens for laboratory testing with regard to presence and amount of drugs. The results of the impairment test and laboratory test will form the basis for determination of prosecution.

The TAC also noted the impairment test has been widely adopted by overseas countries, including UK and Australia, and its accuracy as reported by these two countries is about 95%. "If the police could make reference to the experiences of other places, put in proper procedures and adequate training for its police officers, TAC members considered that the impairment test should be a suitable test for use in Hong

Kong," Ms Cheng said.

"The rapid oral fluid test would be useful in detecting motorists who have taken the drugs of abuse. However, it should be sufficiently accurate, and be able to test ketamine, which is the drug suspected to have been taken in some 90% of the police arrest cases, before it may be adopted in Hong Kong. It is a relatively new technology and we want it to be well tested before adoption to protect the rights of the motorists," she said.

"The Government proposed that a defence be provided for a person charged with drug driving offence to prove that he does not know and could not reasonably have known that the drugs, so found in his body would impair driving if consumed or used according to medical advice. We welcome the Government to work with the medical and pharmaceutical professionals to think of ways to enhance the public's awareness on the effects of drugs on driving."

"Overall, the initial proposals to combat drug driving put forward by the Government are in the right direction. We hope that the Administration will widely consult the community, the relevant trades and professional bodies and work together to come up with the most desirable and balanced ways to combat drug driving."

Members of the TAC were also briefed on the performance of franchised bus operation in 2009 and noted that the performance was generally satisfactory.

"The franchised bus operators have made improvements in a number of service areas, including the continuous enhancement of their fleet with more environmentally-friendly, air-conditioned and wheelchair accessible buses, and installing Diesel Particulate Filters on Euro II and III buses to reduce emission," Ms Cheng said.

"They have also implemented a number of measures to enhance the safety of bus operation. These include continuous retrofitting of black boxes on buses, enhancing fire protection features on buses, and strengthening bus captains' driving skills. The franchised bus companies are also pursuing improvement measures to enhance the working hour and rest time arrangements of bus captains."

"To meet future challenges, we urge operators to further enhance their operational efficiency, service quality and competitiveness," Ms Cheng said.

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