

Comments on the Scope of the Public Transport Strategy Study (PTSS) - Minibuses for Legco's Panel for Transport

by Julian TH Kwong 2015 4 30

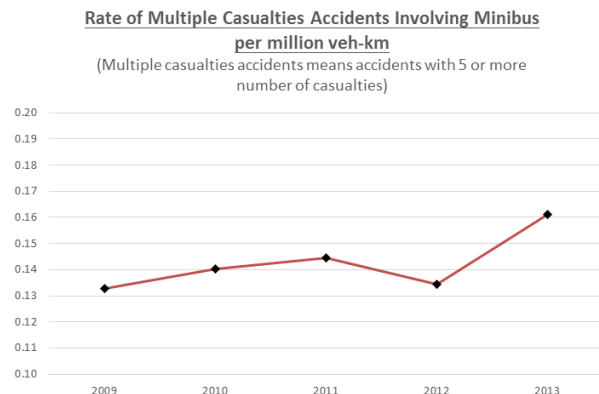
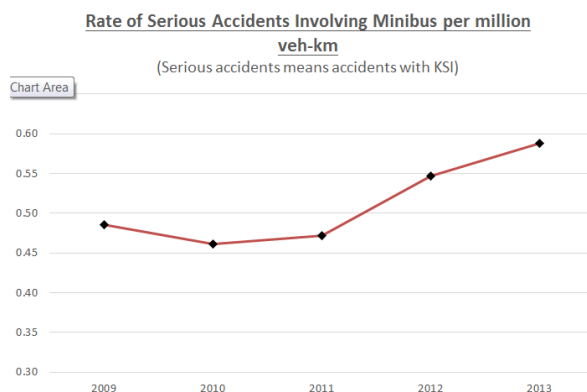
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The safety of public light bus (PLB) operation is a pressing issue and not separable from the long term prospect of minibus service. Although PLB safety involves many underlying factors, there are ample opportunities for improvements. Elevating safety is in the interest of all stakeholders, yet Road Safety does not form part of the Public Transport Strategy Study (PTSS). **The Legco should advise Government to include the topic of Road Safety for PLB, as well as other public transports, within the PTSS**, or else a separate study should be commissioned in the near future. PLB on-street facilities are also unsatisfactory and should be addressed.

Rationale

Safety Performance of PLB

Based on accident statistics (1), roughly one quarter of the fleet of PLB are involved in injury accidents every year and the rate has been rising in the five years. There is also an increasing trend of serious accidents and multi-casualty accidents involving minibuses. Safety concerns not only passengers inside the vehicle, but also waiting passengers and third parties including pedestrians. It is likely that, for the same distance travelled, PLB have an alarmingly higher rate of involvement in fatal or severe pedestrian collisions, in comparison with other modes of road transport. The picture of the safety performance of PLB is of primary public interest which the PTSS should not avoid.



Rear-front Collisions

The lack of rear crumple zone i.e. room for deformation in an impact, is a major concern for existing PLB fleet and any future proposed larger PLB. On high speed roads, the risk is unacceptable where a following vehicle collides into a PLB. Rear seat passengers are at risk of severe injuries because they are susceptible to a direct impact by large vehicles and they are not able to foreseen such happenings.

Risky Routes for passengers

Many major roads in Hong Kong alongside steep hillside or cliffs are not equipped with safety barriers, resulting in a very high risk of catastrophic accident if a PLB runs off the road and rolls over. Yet there is little regulation on the speed and driving standard around these critical locations.

Adequacy of Safety Measures in Place

Seat belts: These are beneficial but their full potential for PLB is compromised by inadequacies of existing systems, lack of compliance by passengers and not all PLB are equipped.

Speed limit displays: Despite the good intention, reliance on passengers to help monitoring drivers is not practical for their own benefits of saving time and to avoid direct confrontation with drivers.

Amendments of the Road Traffic Ordinance, Cap 374 and its subsidiary legislation since 13 April 2012. These cover:

- Maximum speed limit of 80km/h
- Speed limiter
- Display of driver identity (ID) plate
- Newly registered PLB to be fitted with an Electronic Data Recording Device (EDRD)
- Applicants for a PLB driving licence to complete a pre-service course

As there is no evidence of improvement in PLB safety in 2013, the effectiveness of these measures should be reviewed in the PTSS. It may be noted that limiting speeds at 80km/h and speed limiter will benefit PLB safety on high speed roads, but not the majority of urban routes where safety is critical at much lower speeds.

Quality Public Transport Facilities

PLB stands vary in standard and often are poor in aesthetic design. Individual operators have their own shacks with a diversity of “furniture” occupying valuable space at public transport termini. Waiting passengers exposed to high speed traffic are also at risk. Without Government’s intervention, operators will continue to invest little into passenger facilities and services.

References

(1) Transport Department Road Traffic Accident Statistics

http://www.td.gov.hk/en/road_safety/road_traffic_accident_statistics/index.html